

MEMORANDUM

To: Martha Poyatos
Executive Officer, LAFCo

From: Kellyx Nelson
Executive Director, San Mateo Resource Conservation District

Date: January 13, 2021

Re: Information for Adoption of Sphere of Influence

Overview

This memorandum provides information for LAFCo as it considers adopting a revised Sphere of Influence for the San Mateo Resource Conservation District on **January 20, 2021**. It includes the following sections:

- What is a Resource Conservation District?
- What does the RCD do in San Mateo County?
- What is the RCD's unique role in environmental conservation?
- What priorities are addressed by the RCD?
- How are these services funded?
 - Figure 1: Property Tax Leverage
 - Figure 2: Funding for Services
 - Figure 3: Direct Services vs. Administration & Operations
- Why does the RCD proposed expanding its Sphere of Influence?
- What areas does the RCD propose for inclusion?
 - Map 1: Current vs. Proposed Boundary
 - Map 2: Work Outside Boundary
 - Map 3: Forest Health and Fire Program
 - Map 4: Wildland Urban Interface- Fire Threatened Communities
 - Map 5: Critical Linkages: Bay Area and Beyond
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What is a Resource Conservation District?

The RCD in San Mateo County is one of nearly 100 conservation districts in California, and about 3,000 across the United States- almost one in every county nationwide. These districts serve as local hubs for conservation, connecting people with the technical, financial, and educational assistance they need to conserve and manage natural resources. RCDs work directly with landowners and other interests to ensure the resilience and health of water resources, soils, wildlife habitat, and beyond. Conservation districts coordinate assistance from all available sources—public and private, local, state, and federal—to develop locally-driven solutions to natural resource concerns.

What does the RCD do in San Mateo County?

In San Mateo County, the RCD is a boots-on-the-ground agency using very diverse tools. The District's work takes many forms:

- Technical assistance from experts on staff, partners, or consultants as needed. Examples: hydrologists, engineers, biologists, foresters, soil scientists.
- Project implementation on public and private lands. Examples: chipping and hauling services to help private landowners reduce risk of wildfire; modifying a County road to restore migration for endangered salmon; dredging a creek through State, County, and private properties to implement a wildlife-friendly flood control project; helping farmers upgrade water infrastructure to maximize conservation.
- Trusted broker coordinating across jurisdictions and land ownerships, leveraging local, state, federal, and private funding. Example: securing State and federal grants to repair a failing access road on County Parks property, coordinating project design and permitting, managing construction contracts, and overseeing construction—all in partnership with Parks staff.
- Outreach and education in various formats on a wide range of issues of concern to the community. Examples: on-farm tailgate workshops in Spanish for farmworkers about irrigation water conservation; workshops for equipment operators to learn best practices to protect forests, including operators from County and State Parks as well as local private construction businesses; outreach to pet owners regarding water quality pollution from pet waste; workshops for equestrians about how to compost manure; and assisting the County with outreach regarding sea level rise.
- Financial assistance via grants, cost-share programs, and other resources for RCD staff, partner organizations, and contractors to directly benefit the community.

What is the RCD's unique role in environmental conservation?

The RCD is uniquely positioned as an extremely nimble form of local government that has the benefits of government accountability and focus on service, while also retaining some of the flexibility and function of nonprofit organizations.

- The RCD is the only entity¹ in the county, public or private, that exists for the purpose of *helping people* help the land. RCDs work as a neutral party with constituents on a voluntary basis aiming for win-win solutions—a key reason they are trusted resources in the communities they serve.
- RCDs were designed to evolve with the changing needs of people and the land to support thriving communities, landscapes, and economies. In recent years this has enabled San Mateo RCD to bring resources and solutions for flooding, drought, fire, and climate change.
- The District partners closely with other environmental agencies and organizations, while not duplicating any of their work. The District often serves as a liaison across environmental

¹ The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service co-exists in a Local Partnership Office with the RCD to deliver this shared mission, hosted by the RCD as codified in a longstanding Memorandum of Understanding.

agencies and organizations that have a regulatory function, develop and implement policy, acquire and protect land as open space preserves, do environmental advocacy, or were formed for a specific environmental interest. The District is also able to integrate other community or landowner goals and values, such as agricultural production, public safety, economic security, business plans, equity and social justice, and more.

- As a governmental entity that is a subdivision of the State of California (Division 9 of the California Public Resources Code), the RCD is (1) subject to laws ensuring accountability and transparency; (2) reliable and enduring because it exists in statute; and (3) able enter into interagency agreements at all levels of government.
- Able to provide diverse services across jurisdictions and public and private lands, the RCD accomplishes on-the-ground environmental protection at landscape and regional scales.

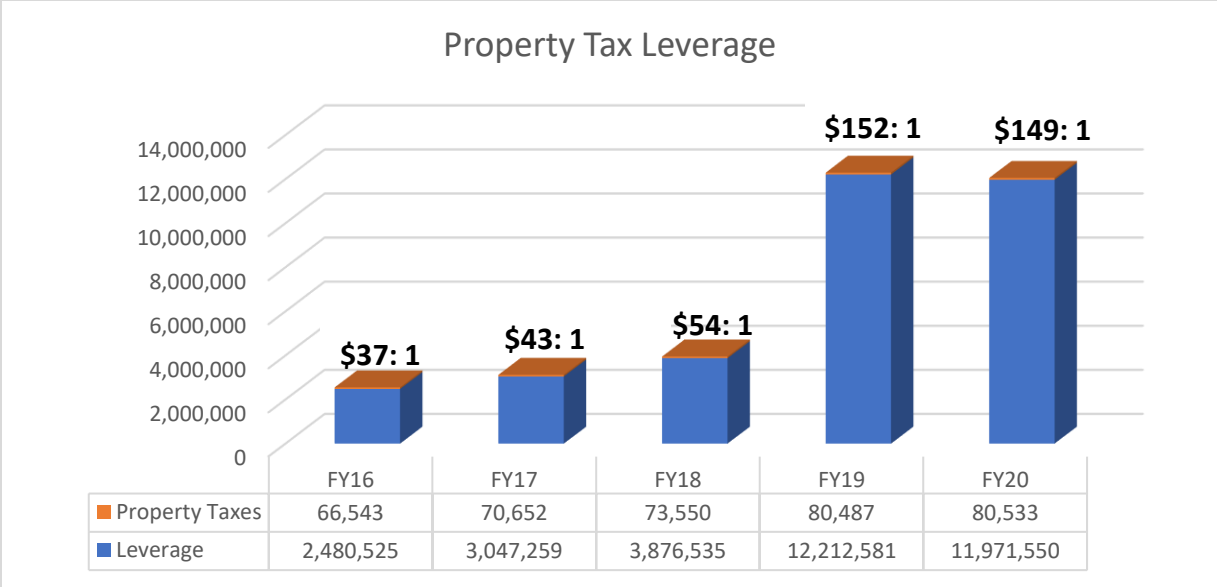
What priorities are addressed by the RCD?

The RCD currently provides comprehensive, integrated services addressing community needs and priorities regarding wildlife, water, climate, agriculture, and wildfire.

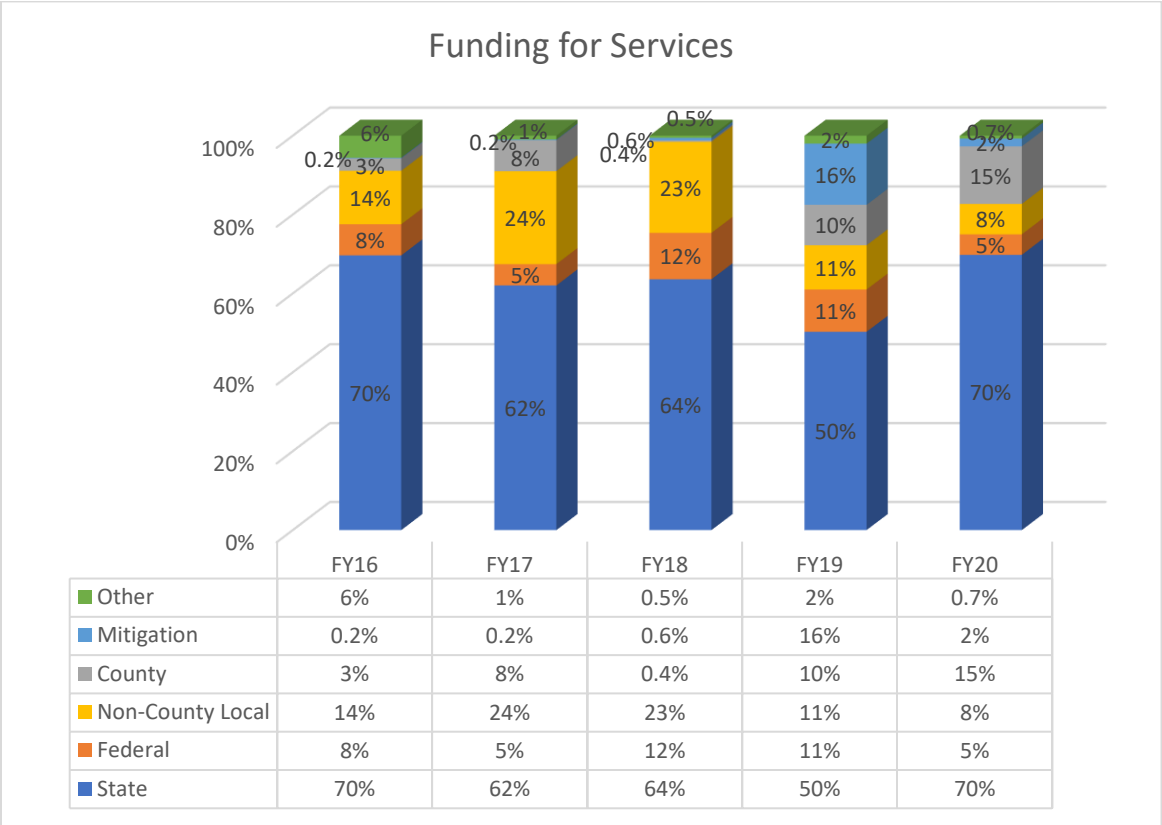
- Wildlife: restoring ecosystems and habitat with a focus on species at risk of becoming extinct
- Water: improving water conservation, water resource management, and water quality to help ensure clean and reliable water for people, wildlife, and agriculture
- Climate: removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, reducing emissions, and building critically needed resilience to extreme weather conditions for wildlife and the community
- Agriculture: helping ensure viable local agriculture while also helping agriculture be environmentally beneficial
- Wildfire: reducing the risk of catastrophic fire, improving forest health, and healing the land after fire does occur

How are these services funded?

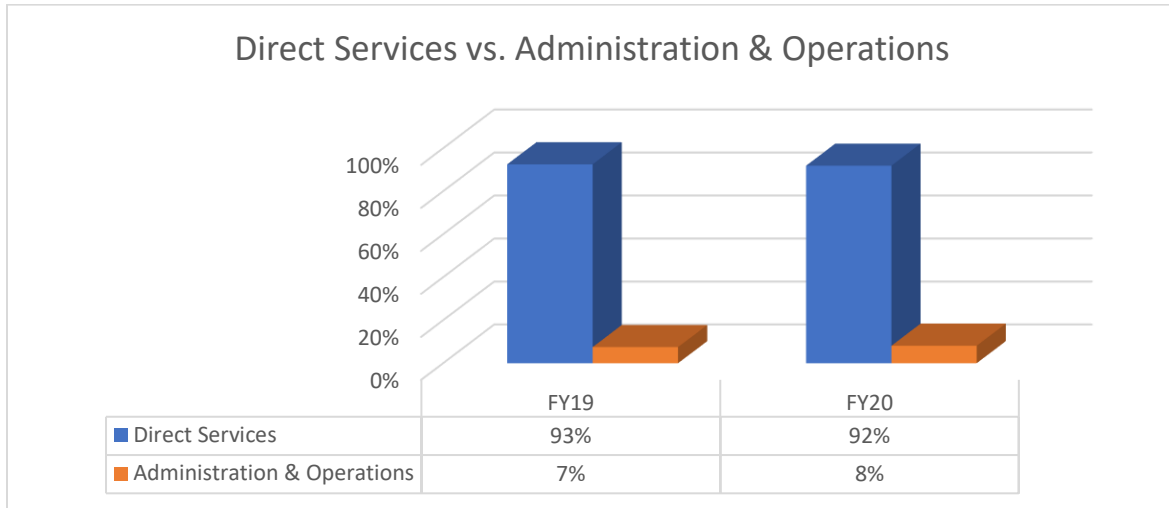
The San Mateo RCD leverages a small property tax base to bring diverse public and private funds via grants, interagency agreements, contracts for services, donations, etc. Per the table below, each dollar of property taxes paid by constituents over the last five fiscal years leveraged between \$37 and \$152. This amount does not include the extensive contributions of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, which provides in-kind services and grant programs in the county at the RCD's invitation.



The following figure shows the sources of funding over the same time period. It highlights the substantial resources that the RCD brings into the county from outside sources, primarily State and federal.



As highlighted in the figure below, the vast majority of these funds go to direct services, with less than 10% of annual expenses typically going to District administration.



Why does the RCD propose expanding its Sphere of Influence?

An updated Sphere of Influence would:

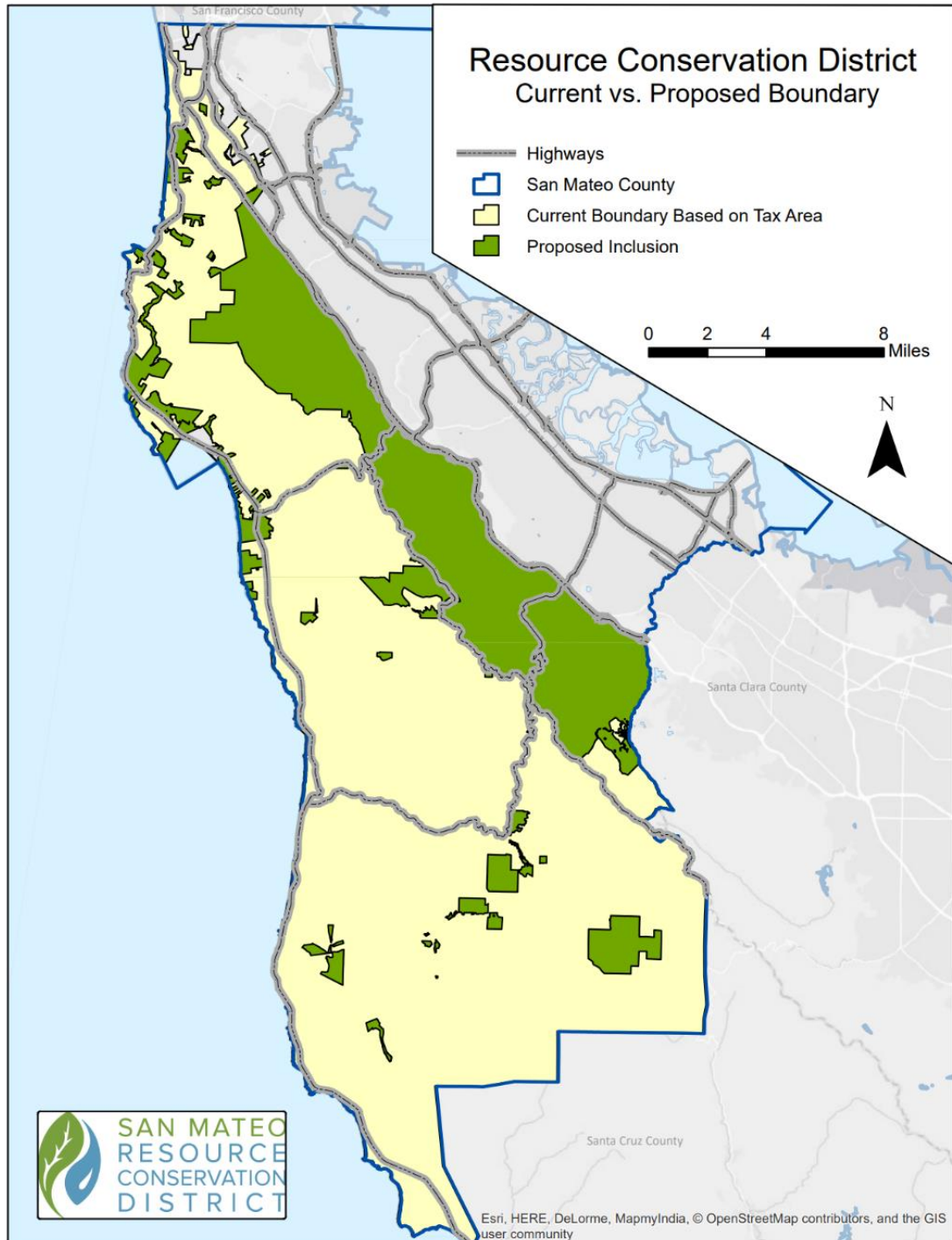
- more accurately represent what the District is, where it provides services, whom it benefits, and where benefits accrue;
- help the District prioritize and include additional areas for services, funding, and other resources;
- better enable the District to address threats and provide services at an appropriate scale (e.g. climate change, wildfire, species extinction, water pollution);
- provide a deeper bench from which to recruit board members;
- enable the District to access additional funding sources to serve constituents and the lands in the areas proposed for inclusion; and
- enable the District to pursue an expanded stable funding base, reducing dependence on uncertain grants and increasing the financial security of the District to continue its services.

What areas does the RCD propose for inclusion?

The District proposes closing the “doughnut holes,” areas within the District geographically that are not included within its boundaries, and generally extending the eastern boundary to Highway 280. This proposal is denoted on the following map, “Current vs. Proposed Boundary.” The District made this determination based on the following criteria:

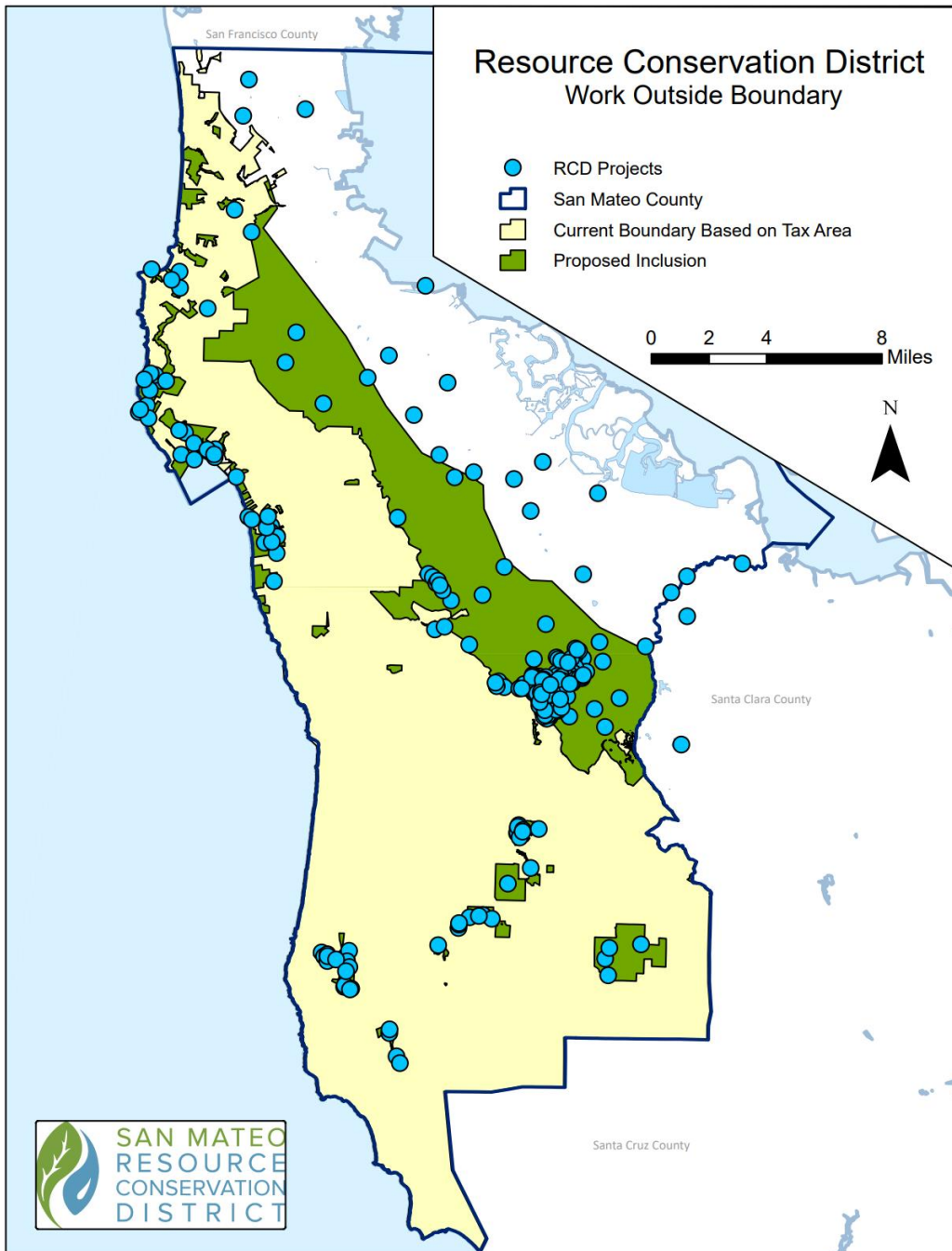
1. Need and opportunity. The proposed area has significant needs for District programs and services (e.g., risk of wildfire, risk of species extinction) and there are high priority opportunities to meet the need (e.g., potential for fuel load reduction, high value habitat for endangered species).

2. Accuracy. The District has been providing services to the area proposed for inclusion. Revised boundaries would more accurately represent the District's influence and make it easier to bring consistent services to those areas.
3. Appropriate scale. Inclusion of the proposed area would enable the District to work at the appropriate scale to meet a high priority need, e.g., including headwaters of watersheds to help protect downstream water resources as well as upstream habitat.

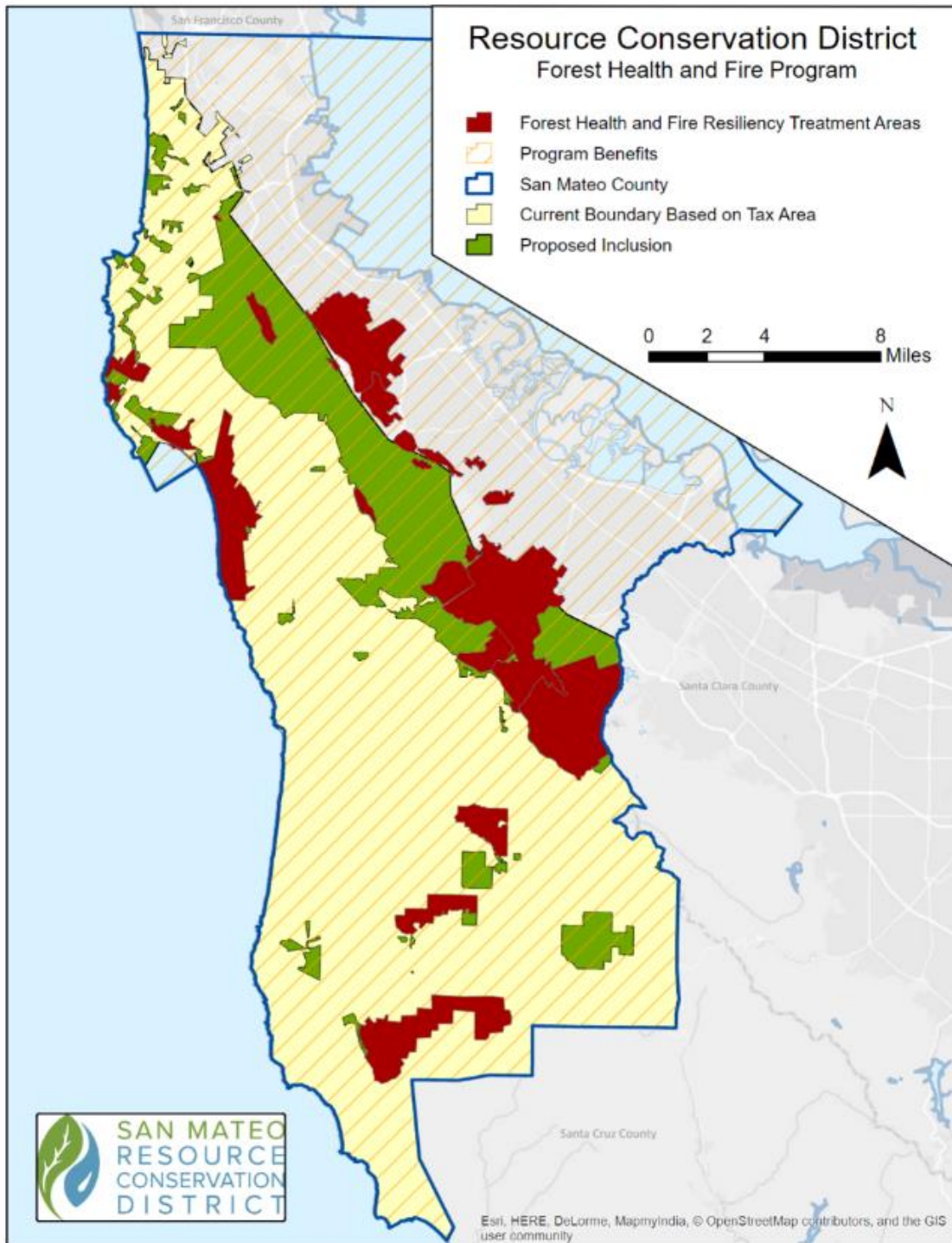


The map below, “Work Outside Boundary,” denotes locations where the District has been providing services outside its current boundaries. Each dot represents a distinct project or effort. The dots represent work done at different time scales (one-time, recurring, or ongoing), different geographic scales (one property or watershed-wide), different types of work (technical assistance or project implementation, etc.), and involving various partners in different ways.

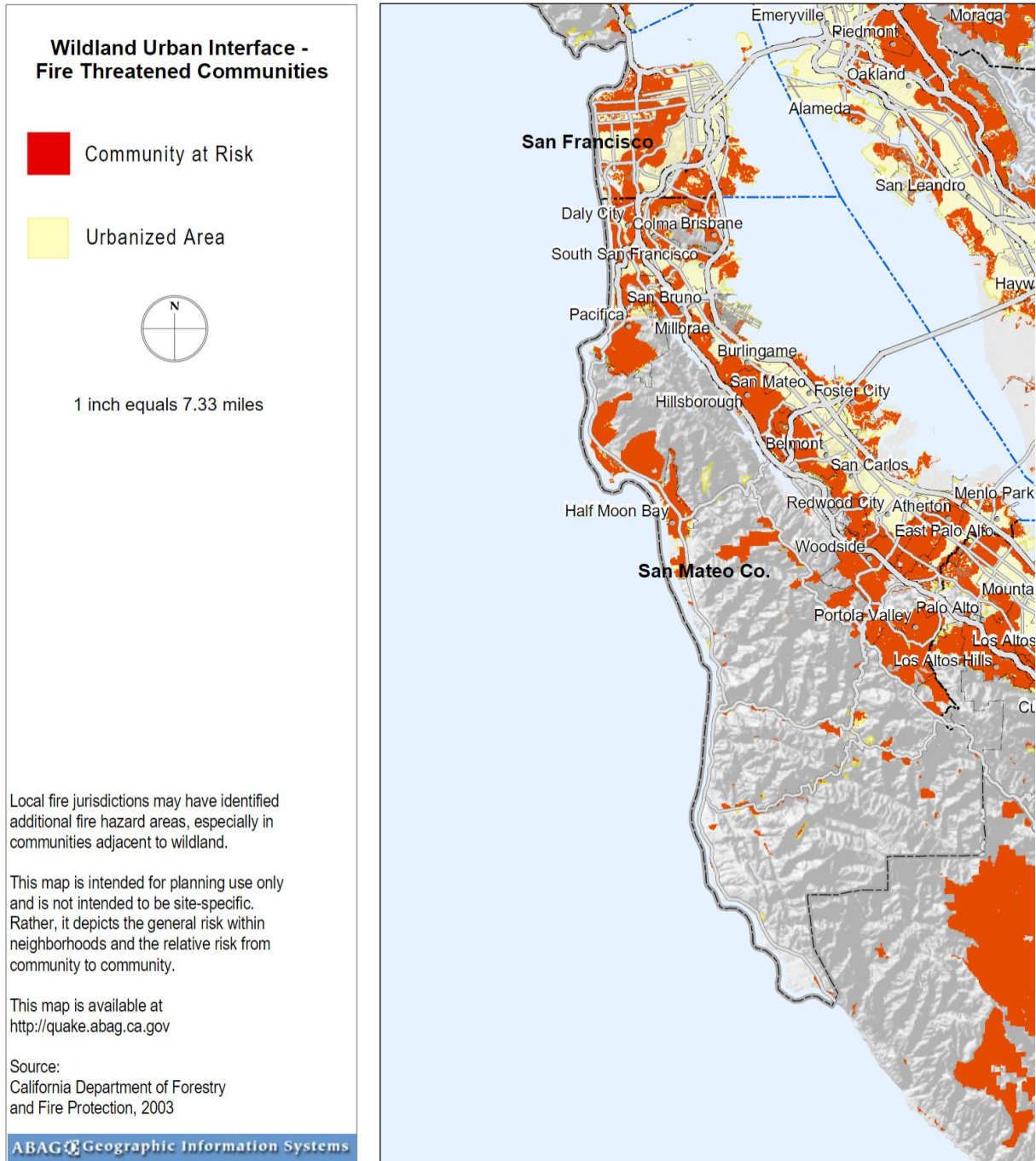
Revised boundaries would more accurately represent the District’s services and make it easier to prioritize and bring resources to the included areas.



The map below, "Forest Health and Fire Program," shows where there are recent activities or projects underway to improve forest health and fire resiliency. Much of this work, as well as future anticipated priorities that are not reflected on this map, is on lands the District proposes for inclusion. Benefits of preventing or minimizing the risks from a catastrophic wildfire are countywide and beyond.



The following map excerpt, from CalFire via Association of Bay Area Governments, highlights communities at risk of fire because of their location at the Wildland Urban Interface. The high-risk communities within and beyond the proposed inclusion area would benefit from fuel load reduction activities in the proposed included area.

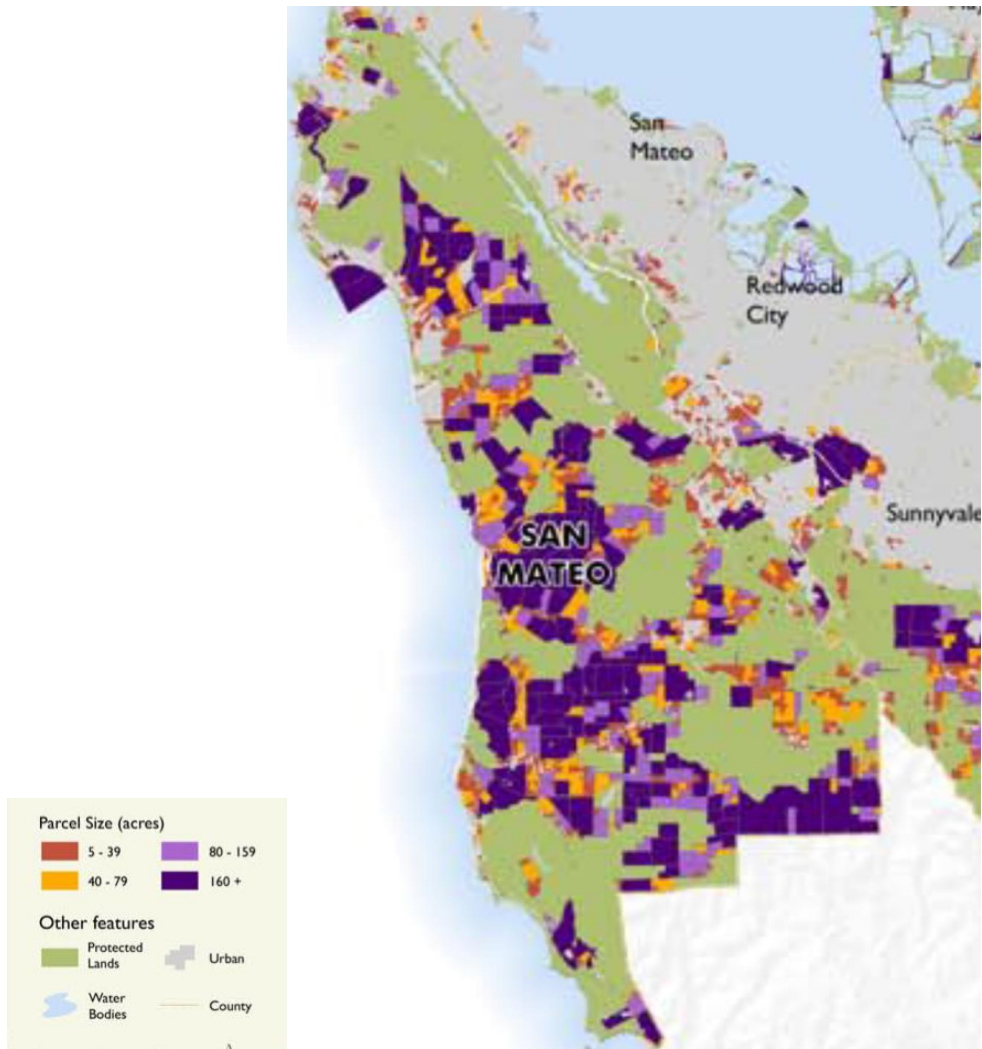


The following map is excerpted from “Critical Linkages: Bay Area and Beyond,” a science-based initiative that identified priority wildlife corridors essential to conserving ecosystems and wildlife. Strategically protecting and restoring these lands is considered an essential adaptation strategy for climate change, particularly as climate change forces many species to shift their geographic range, often northwards or to higher elevations. Much of the area proposed by the District for inclusion is within a priority wildlife corridor for the Santa Cruz Mountains region, which includes San Mateo County.



The following is excerpted from a map titled “Parcelization,” prepared by the San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Project. It is intended to support local jurisdictions and others in setting conservation priorities and directing resources to address the impacts to biodiversity from development.

The map shows the level of parcelization in the areas the District proposes to include, which is significant for two reasons: (1) RCDs are the entity created by the State of California to work across land ownerships to accomplish conservation priorities, and (2) the District was formed to offset the impacts of land use, which is exacerbated with higher rates of parcelization.



The following is excerpted from the Conservation Lands Network 2.0 “Stream Valleys & Headwater Source Areas” map. Upper watersheds, including headwaters, and stream valleys provide essential habitat for many species. Moreover, they provide complex ecosystem services that help upstream and downstream communities be resilient. When functioning well, they can attenuate both flooding and drought, minimize the risk of catastrophic erosion, protect water resources, and contribute to local economies. The converse is also true. When impaired, these lands contribute to localized flooding, drought, erosion, and compromised waters.

This map demonstrates the almost exact overlay between the proposed District boundaries and these areas in San Mateo County.



The following, and final, map highlights the areas designated as critical habitat for key wildlife species of at risk of extinction overlaying the areas proposed for inclusion in the District. Including these areas would better enable the District to provide services addressing the threat of extinction throughout the range of these species in San Mateo County.

