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# COASTSIDE / Asked + Answered

RCD prompts winning projects on coast — agency ‘helps people help the land’

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Resource Conservation Districts across California have served as local hubs for conservation for over 95 years and the San Mateo RCD is no exception. When we asked Adria Arko what her organization did, part of her answer was “helping people help the land.” She went on to note that RCDs connect people with the technical, financial and other assistance they need to best manage land and water. They help private and public landowners, community members, parks, farmers, ranchers and more find “win-

win solutions” to protect the environment, help ensure a viable local food system, and build resilience to natural disasters. Arko answered a few questions for Coastside Magazine contributor Greta Reich.

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**1. Why does the RCD's work on the coast matter?** People who live, work, or play in coastal San Mateo County know this is a special place. We are inspired by the abundance and beauty of its natural and working lands, from the tops of redwood-forested mountains to the majestic coastline and beaches of the Pacific Ocean. We depend on its healthy soils, clean air, water resources, and ecosystems to sustain our health, economy and way of life. How we steward these resources directly affects biodiversity, public safety, equity and justice, diverse industries, and our personal fulfillment. While there have been significant investments to preserve, restore and care for the lands and waters of coastal San Mateo County, our community, like many others in California, faces grave threats and significant challenges like climate change, species extinction, water pollution, catastrophic wildfire, drought, flooding, and sea level rise. Not surprisingly, the same forces that threaten plant and animal species also threaten human lives and livelihoods.

**2. What ongoing projects should the public be focusing on?** We have a lot of exciting sustainability efforts underway focused on thriving local agriculture, reversing climate change, improving water quality and conservation, protecting species at risk of extinction, and protecting communities from the extremes of wildfire, drought and significant storms. We're currently developing a project in Pacifica to remove a barrier to fish passage in San Pedro Creek, which when completed will provide improved fish habitat, stabilize the banks of the creek, and reduce flooding in the area. We're also helping the city of Half Moon Bay assess the potential for nature-based solutions to sequester carbon as part of its climate action plan. A few projects we have underway on the South Coast include a large-scale project at Butano State Parks to improve the health, biodiversity, fire resiliency, and carbon sequestration of 400 acres of forest. We are also completing a multiyear project for Loma Mar to develop water security for the community.

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**3. Is the RCD doing anything to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire on the coast?** We have a team of people working at the intersection of forest health and wildfire resiliency. We have also been helping people recover from the devastating fires of 2020 since then to the present day. We partner with the Fire Safe Council to help communities like Montara, La Honda and Loma Mar, create defensible space around their homes. We also work within forests to minimize wildfire threats, including those in the urban-wildland interface, such as the community of El Granada, where we have worked with community members and County Parks to remove hazardous and highly flammable eucalyptus trees along fire roads in Quarry Park. Most of our work improves the health of our forests while reducing fire risks.

**4. What is your relationship with local farms?** Since our establishment, we have remained dedicated to working alongside them, empowering and supporting farmers and ranchers as environmental stewards. Across our 80-plus-year history, we have done hundreds of projects that support the farmers in our area, whether they are commercial, educational, ranches, urban gardens, or greenhouses, or urban community gardens. We assist them in developing tailored conservation plans, help them implement conservation practices such as composting, improving habitat for pollinators, or reducing water use. One of our most successful programs helps farmers conserve, store, and strategically manage water for the mutual benefit of farm water security and protecting streamflow for endangered salmon and steelhead trout — a win-win.

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**5. How can the public help the RCD help the environment in the Bay Area?** There are a number of ways that the public can support RCD's vision to build a more thriving natural environment for all. We share a lot of useful information through our quarterly newsletter, where people can learn more about how to be a good land steward as well as learn more about our projects and events. We also have a few volunteer opportunities throughout the year for people who want to be more involved. If you're interested in volunteering, you can email [info@sanmateoRCD.org](mailto:info@sanmateoRCD.org). We also rely heavily on donations, and would welcome contributions from those that have the means to give. The donated funds are leveraged 200:1, meaning that every dollar donated helps

us access grant funding that goes directly to supporting the community. Lastly, if you are interested in doing conservation work on your property, let us know how we can help.