



DRAFT Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors

Thursday, April 16, 2026

4:00 – 6:00 pm

Location: 80 Stone Pine Road, Suite 100, Half Moon Bay, CA 94019 and via Zoom

Directors: Barbara Kossy, Michelle Weil, Troy Guy (On leave: Adrienne Etherton; Absent: Steve Stielstra)

Associate Directors: Denise Phillips (virtual), Zahra Kassam (virtual), John Wade

RCD staff: Kellyx Nelson, Timothy Federal, Amy Kaeser, Caileen Viehweg, Lindsay Edelman, Kati McHugh

NRCS staff: Drew Mather

Guests: David Cosgrave (County Supervisor Mueller's office)

1. Call to Order

Weil called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

2. Approval of Agenda

ACTION: Kossy motioned to approve agenda, Guy seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Introduction of Guests and Staff

All in attendance introduced themselves.

4. Public Comment

Cosgrave was welcomed to his new role and thanked for attending. Nelson and Weil noted prior work with him through the Department of Emergency Management, and Coastside Fire.

5. Consent Agenda

ACTION: Guy moved to approve the consent agenda. Kossy seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

6. Regular Agenda

6.1. Updates about the Recently Released Santa Cruz Mountains Regional Priority Plan for Forest Health and Wildfire Resiliency by Timothy Federal, Senior Conservation Program Manager for Forest Health and Fire

- Federal presented the attached PowerPoint about the plan that was published on March 23 after multiple years of development with regional stakeholders.

- The Santa Cruz Mountains region includes highly fragmented land ownership, with approximately two-thirds of the land privately owned, dense and highly engaged wildland-urban interface communities, and fire-adapted forest ecosystems that are currently out of balance.
- Although numerous planning documents already exist, including community wildfire protection plans, projects across the region continue to compete for limited funding, resources, and implementation capacity.
- No cross-boundary system to determine which projects matter most, including decisions about when, where, why, what, and how projects should be implemented.
- The RPP addresses this gap through a transparent, regionally developed prioritization framework created over many years with extensive stakeholder participation and expert evaluation.
- RPP covers San Mateo, Santa Cruz, and part of Santa Clara counties
- Designed as a living, adaptive, and iterative process that is not ranked and does not serve as a CEQA compliance document beyond identifying possible permitting pathways.
- Originated within the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network, trust-based collaboration is a foundational principle of the plan.
- CZU Fire in 2020 marked a significant shift from project-by-project forest management to a regional, landscape-scale approach, underscoring the need for strategies that transcend jurisdictional boundaries.
- Current portfolio includes 106 prioritized projects that will cost approximately \$89 million for community protection, ecological restoration, and capacity building.
- Discussion included what is included in costs estimates; how landscape-scale collaboration advances highest priority projects; funding pathways, including block grant opportunities; and how an RPP positions the region to compete effectively for large-scale funding consistent with the state's vision for regional planning investments.
- Federal demonstrated the project website and interactive map.
- Further discussion included how private landowners may opt out of having spatial data publicly displayed while still being included in the plan; how wildfire events and other changing conditions might alter priorities in the plan; long-term monitoring included in the plan; how the plan is adaptive; how fire history since 1950 has been incorporated; general appreciation for the mapping tools; the high level of collaboration and regional integration in the Santa Cruz Mountains; and appreciation for RCD staff for advancing an innovative, collaborative regional approach to forest health, wildfire resiliency, and biodiversity protection.

6.2. Executive Director's Report

- Recent developments regarding Cesar Chavez have had a profound impact on staff and on communities we serve. We are taking time to process these developments

internally and consulting with community partners, particularly Puente. Directors asked to be invited to the day of service when it is planned.

- Staff are deeply engaged in FY'27 budget development. Funding projections for the agricultural stewardship team are currently low, driven by reduced availability of cap and trade climate funds, delays in Proposition 4, restrictions in County Measure K and loss to the County of vehicle license fee revenues, and a general contraction in federal funding. Discussion included County support through contracts for services and a general services agreement, the working lands chapter of the County Climate Action Plan, and the Agricultural Ombudsman position.
- A proposed federal General Services Administration rule may require federal grantees to certify alignment with executive orders and Department of Justice guidance related to diversity, equity, inclusion, immigration, and terrorism, potentially limiting eligibility for future federal funding. Discussion affirmed support for maintaining organizational values; that the RCD's current financial position and operating reserve allow for that stance unlike some RCDs that are heavily dependent on federal support; that the rule is thus far only proposed, would apply only to new agreements; NRCS cooperative agreements continue to reference federal civil rights compliance; and the distinction between civil rights laws and DEI under the proposed framework.
- Staff continues to look into software for enabling a report on all active District projects. Challenge is finding a solution that supports project management, summary reporting, and staff workflows without requiring duplicative tracking across multiple systems. Kossy offered to consult with a family member experienced in programming, and Federal suggested exploring Notion.
- SCMSN completed a regional woody biomass utilization study addressing challenges related to handling forest management byproducts, including limitations of landfilling and on-site chipping. Discussion included the market for biochar.
- Congressman Liccardo recommended the RCD for a federal earmark to support water security projects in Middleton Tract, Redwood Terrace, and Community Service Area 7, serving small rural communities with aging infrastructure. Jarrad Fisher, our Director of Water Resources, has led these efforts. Senator Becker, Assemblymember Berman, and staff from Liccardo's visited sites with us and supported the application. Discussion included whether new federal funding requirements could jeopardize the earmark.
- On April 9 Nelson participated in Senator Becker's 30x30 webinar and was invited to co-author an op-ed for the San Mateo Daily Journal.
- April 29 is the first webinar in a series coordinated with the California Council of Land Trusts and the California Association of RCDs to address nature-based climate solutions and collaboration between land trusts and RCDs.
- May 7 the RCD and Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District will present on watershed enhancement at a community event at the Loma Mar Store.
- May 8 Spotlight Stewardship will be in Pescadero, Weil and Guy will participate. Spotlight is a Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network program that brings community leaders into the field to see stewardship and meet experts.
- May 20 site visit with Secretary Crowfoot, Senator Becker, and others to highlight local successes in regulatory streamlining, including first-in-the-state permitting and vegetation treatment milestones.

- Recent release of the Bay Area Regional Climate Action Plan includes a natural and working lands chapter that explicitly recognizes active forest management as a climate mitigation strategy.
- Nelson was asked to reflect on her 20th anniversary with the RCD. She appreciated being able to do mission-driven work and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to continue serving the organization and community.

6.3. USDA NRCS (National Resources Conservation Service) report

- Pollinator biologist assigned to the area remains based in Salinas, NRCS staff have been heavily engaged over the past two months assessing and ranking applications received by the January 15 deadline.
- NRCS received 11 EQIP applications and four CSP applications in the Half Moon Bay area, totaling nearly \$340,000 for EQIP and approximately \$100,000 for CSP, with the possibility of an additional round if late applications are eligible.
- EQIP, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, supports short-term conservation practices over one to three years, while CSP, the Conservation Stewardship Program, supports longer-term stewardship commitments of five years or more.
- Ongoing staffing transitions within NRCS, including the temporary support of a volunteer forester based in Petaluma and continued impacts from a federal hiring freeze, an intern from CSU Monterey Bay will join the office over the summer.
- NRCS and the RCD have been coordinating on cooperative agreement needs
- An NRCS engineer based in Livermore is assisting with a large stock water, cross-fencing, and virtual fencing project in San Mateo County.
- Annual inspections of government vehicles have been completed- a Ford F-250 and Ford Maverick are expected to be available soon for RCD staff use.
- Mather shared a field photo from a recent site visit showing a dense vetch, rye, and pea cover crop on a hillside with approximately a 5 to 10 percent slope and noted that visible erosion was minimal despite the long slope length.
- Discussion included the benefits of cover crops (reduce erosion, improve water holding capacity, sequester carbon, and build soil health); the significant investment by growers who forego short-term crop income; how vetch and peas fix nitrogen through symbiotic relationships in root nodules involving soil bacteria and fungi; that cover cropping is a priority practice identified in multiple policy frameworks; that NRCS and RCDs were formed together in response to the Dust Bowl and NRCS programs delivered in San Mateo County operate locally through the office hosted by the RCD and authorized through the federal Farm Bill; how nutrients cycle in cover crops and soil; what roller crimpers do to accelerate breakdown; how plants function as biological systems that transform nutrients and create new compounds rather than simply removing and replacing inputs; how cover cropping is a long-term investment with crop yield benefits typically realized over 10 to 15 years; whether rising costs of fossil-fuel-based commercial fertilizers increase the value of cover crops as an alternative nutrient source; how decisions to use cover crops depend on farm business

models, land tenure, and the ability to implement practices over multiple years; and the findings from the RCD's biochar field study.

6.4. Directors' connection and reports

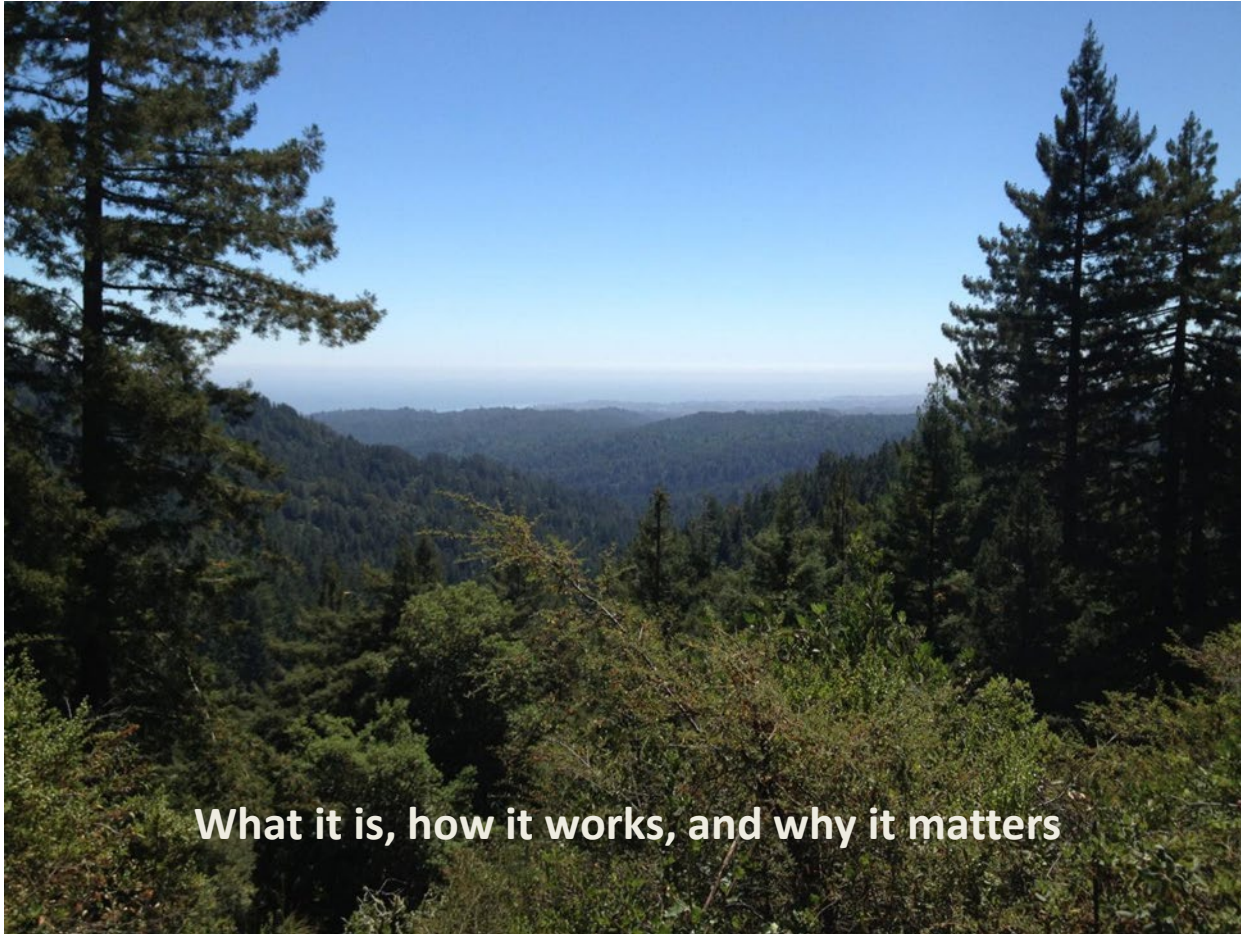
- Kossy reported that she serves as the sole administrator of the California Invasive Plants Facebook page, which has been active for eight to nine years and currently has more than 27,000 members. The page is a space where a core group of active members contribute knowledge, assist with plant identification, and engage in stewardship discussions. Others commented on the rapid growth of the page and the generally positive, engaged tone of discussions among members.
- Guy reported on his work counting seabirds and marine mammals for the Farallones, noting that surveys had been suspended due to avian influenza impacts that resulted in mass mortalities and the temporary closure of Año Nuevo. He shared that he was recently notified that some monitoring activities have resumed, which he viewed as a positive sign, although bird strandings have occurred and up-to-date status information is best tracked through UC Davis. He also reported plans to participate in the reopened recreational Chinook salmon fishery and noted observations of thin fish, possibly related to warm ocean conditions associated with an El Niño year.
- Wade reported no major updates and noted a personal focus on simplifying commitments to allow more time for RCD-related work, and also shared about a Farallones supply run at the beginning of the year. He shared that a grant had been secured to continue program operations into spring 2027.
- Weil shared that she recently returned from a family trip to Yosemite, where she and her children spent several days hiking and visiting waterfalls, including a five-mile hike to the Hetch Hetchy area with many wildlife sightings.
- Phillips shared a medical issue that will require her to attend meetings remotely for a period of time.
- Kassam reported that CAL FIRE plans to conduct a controlled burn on her property later in April as part of an invasive species biomass treatment experiment conducted with the RCD. She noted that preliminary results from the experiment are informative for identifying effective invasive species management strategies, and that the site will host the San Mateo County Weed Management Area's upcoming Picnic in the Weeds event in late May, although she will be traveling at that time.

7. Adjourn Meeting

- Meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m.
- The next Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors will be May 21, 2026.

Santa Cruz Mountains Regional Priority Plan (SCMRPP)

A collaborative initiative advancing resilient landscapes & fire-adapted communities by increasing the pace and scale of beneficial forest and fire stewardship





Why do we need another plan?

- Highly fragmented ownership: public, private, commercial, special districts
- Dense, dispersed, high value, and highly engaged **WUI** with limited access and evacuation routes
- Fire-adapted ecosystems out of balance under **altered fire regimes**
- Dozens of plans exist — but projects still compete, overlap, or stall

Core problem

- No shared, **cross-boundary system** for deciding what matters most, where, and why *at a landscape scale*

What Is the SCMRPP?



A LIVING, REGIONAL
PRIORITIZATION
FRAMEWORK



BUILT BY AND FOR
LAND MANAGERS
AND PRACTITIONERS



COVERS THE SANTA
CRUZ MOUNTAINS
BIOREGION



ADAPTIVE, ITERATIVE,
WILL EVOLVE AS
CONDITIONS AND
FUNDING CHANGE



NOT A RANKED "TOP
10 PROJECTS" LIST

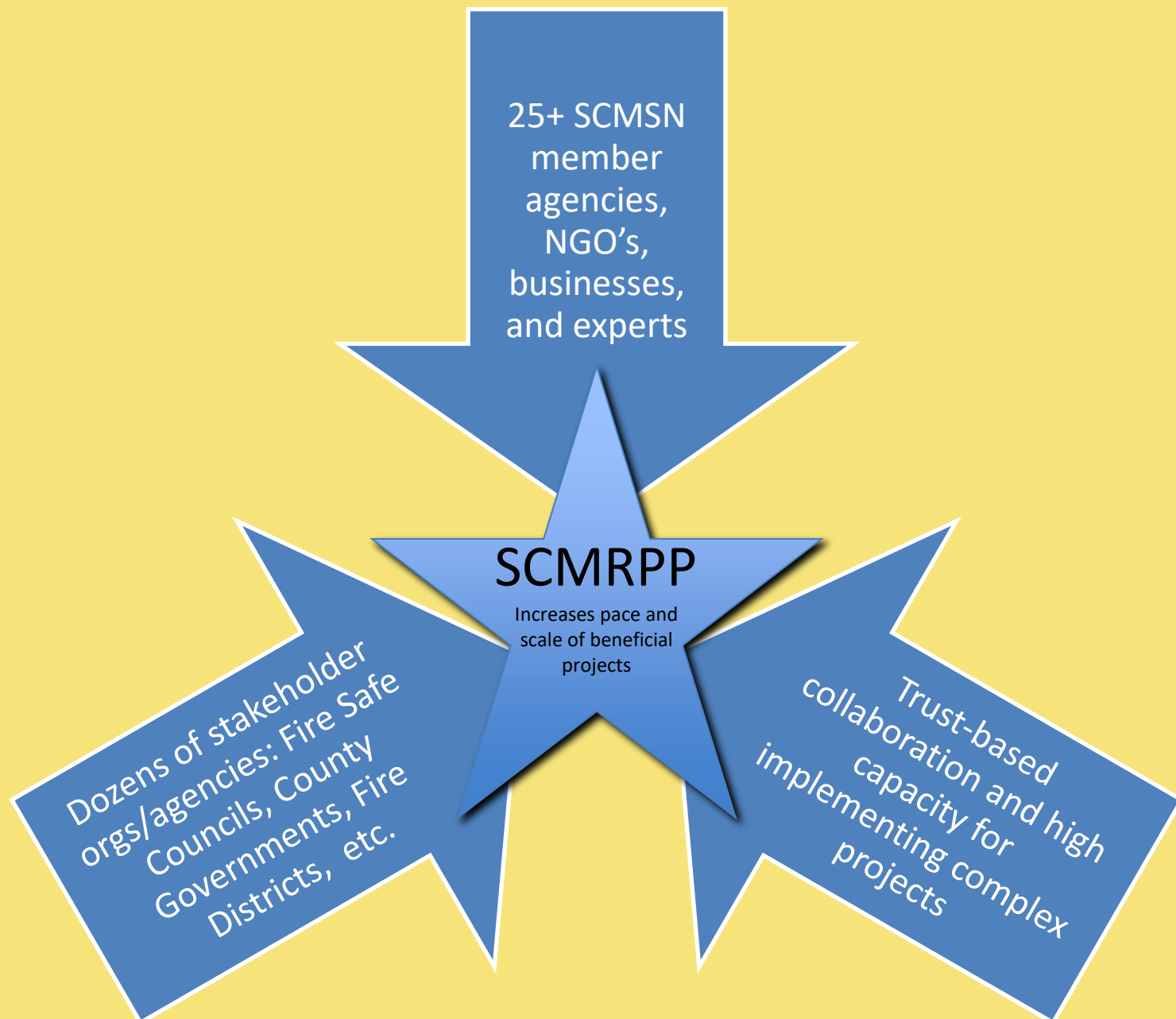


NOT A CEQA
DOCUMENT



NO ONE-TIME
PLANNING EXERCISE

Roots in the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network



Trust-Based Collaboration

Nourishing Growth,
Accelerating Landscape Resilience

Santa Cruz Mountains RPP

- Conservation Groups
- Private Landowners
- Government Agencies
- Tribal Groups
- Businesses
- Universities
- Fire Agencies
- Fire Safe Councils



Coordination Joint Projects

Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network

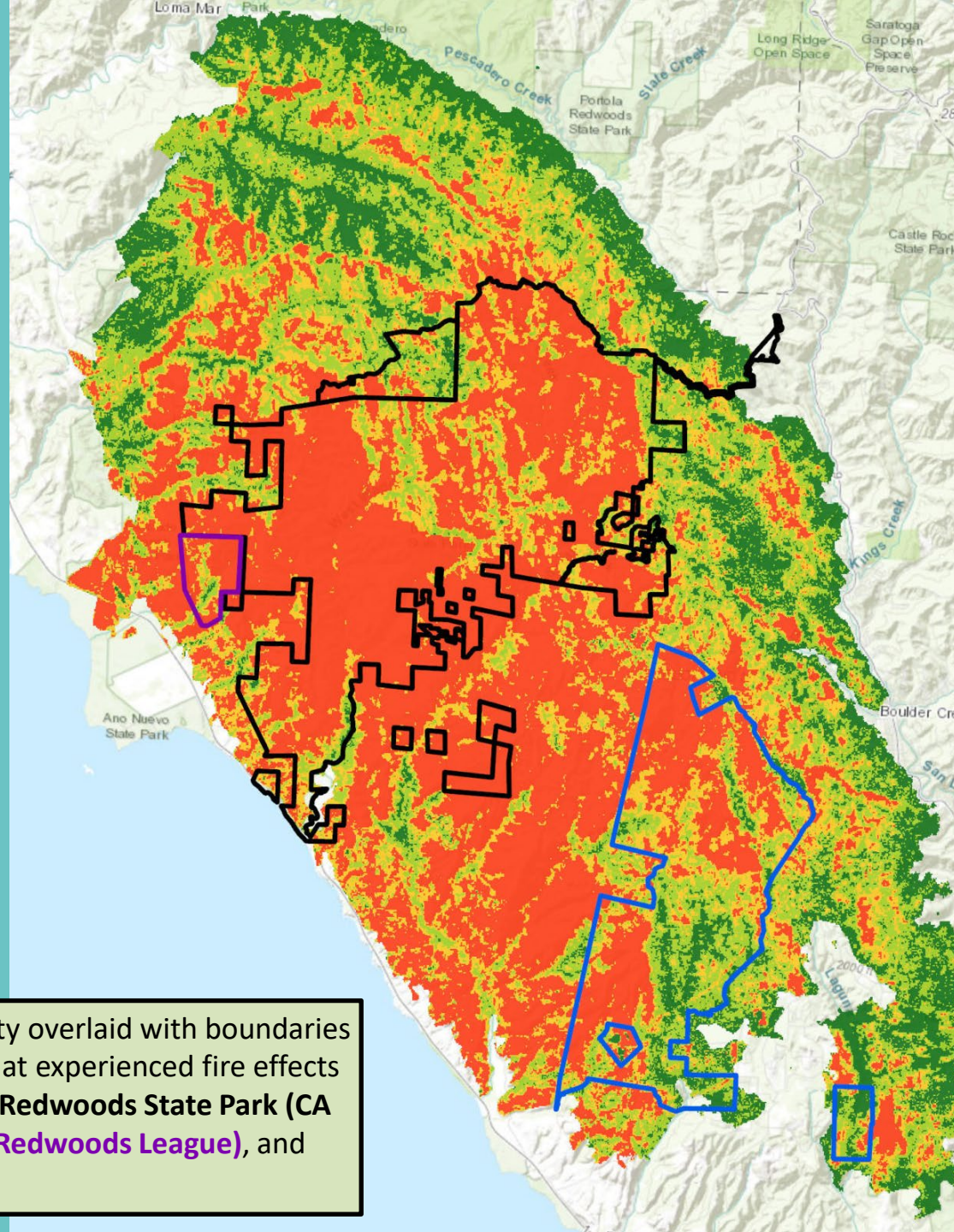
Resource Sharing Knowledge Exchange

Capacity Building

2020 CZU Lightning Complex

- Underlined the need to coordinate across county lines
- Shattered assumptions about redwood systems vulnerability to high-severity fire
- Shifted from project-by-project thinking → **landscape-scale resilience**
- Accelerated the need for a regional prioritization system
- Directly shaped current partnership, projects, and permit strategies

*Map shows CZU Lightning Complex burn severity overlaid with boundaries of three SCMSN member-managed properties that experienced fire effects across nearly 100% of their boundary: **Big Basin Redwoods State Park (CA State Parks)**, **Cascade Creek Property (Save the Redwoods League)**, and **San Vicente Redwoods (multiple owners)**.



How the SCMRPP Works



Periodic project solicitation



Standardized submission form emphasizing multi-benefits



Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) review



Portfolio of priority projects



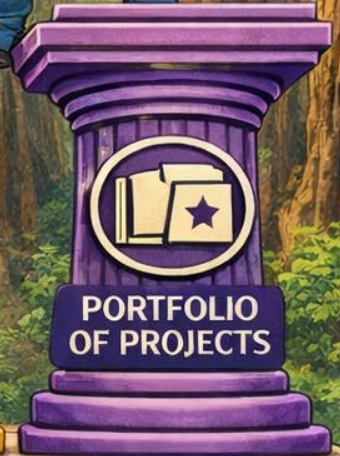
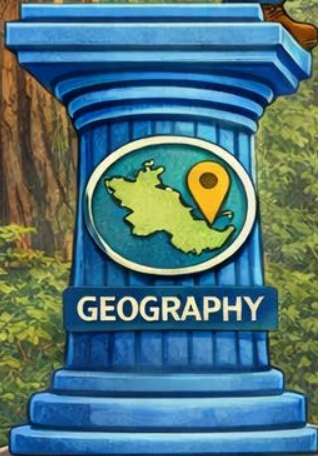
Iteration and refinement



Seek funding



·PILLARS OF THE SCMRPP.



GEOGRAPHY

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

PRIORITIZATION FRAMEWORK

GOVERNANCE

PORTFOLIO OF PROJECTS

Where?

What?

Why?

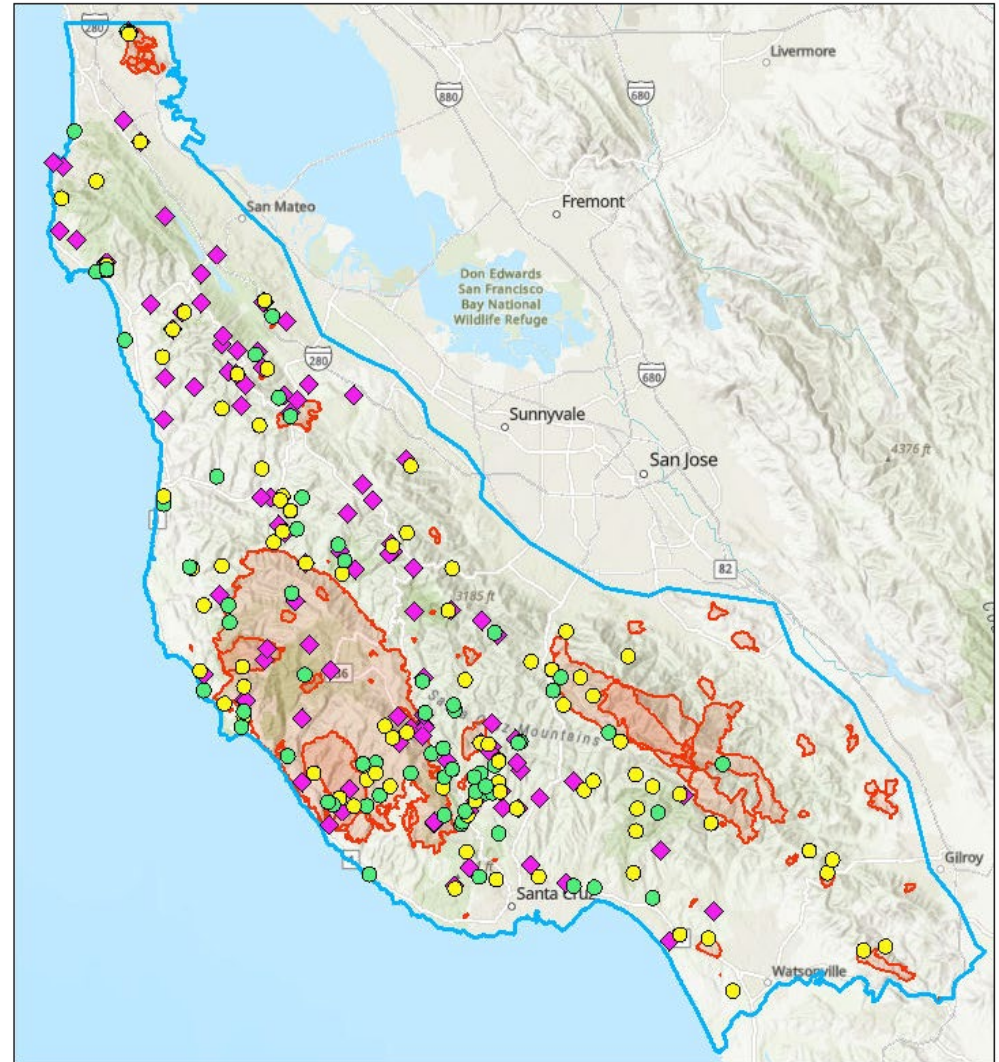
How?

Who? When?

RPP Pillar 1: Geography

- Defined bioregional boundary: the Santa Cruz Mountains
- Crosses portions of three counties and multiple jurisdictions
- Based on ecological and fire-relevant conditions, not administrative boundaries
- Map shows SCMRPP boundary, recent wildfire boundaries, pre-existing SCMSN-member projects, and SCMRPP projects

Forest Health and Fire Resiliency Projects in the Santa Cruz Mountains



10/10/2025

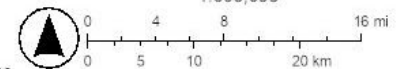
Forest and Fire Projects

- ◆ Included in Regional Priority Plan
- Complete
- In Progress

RPP Boundary

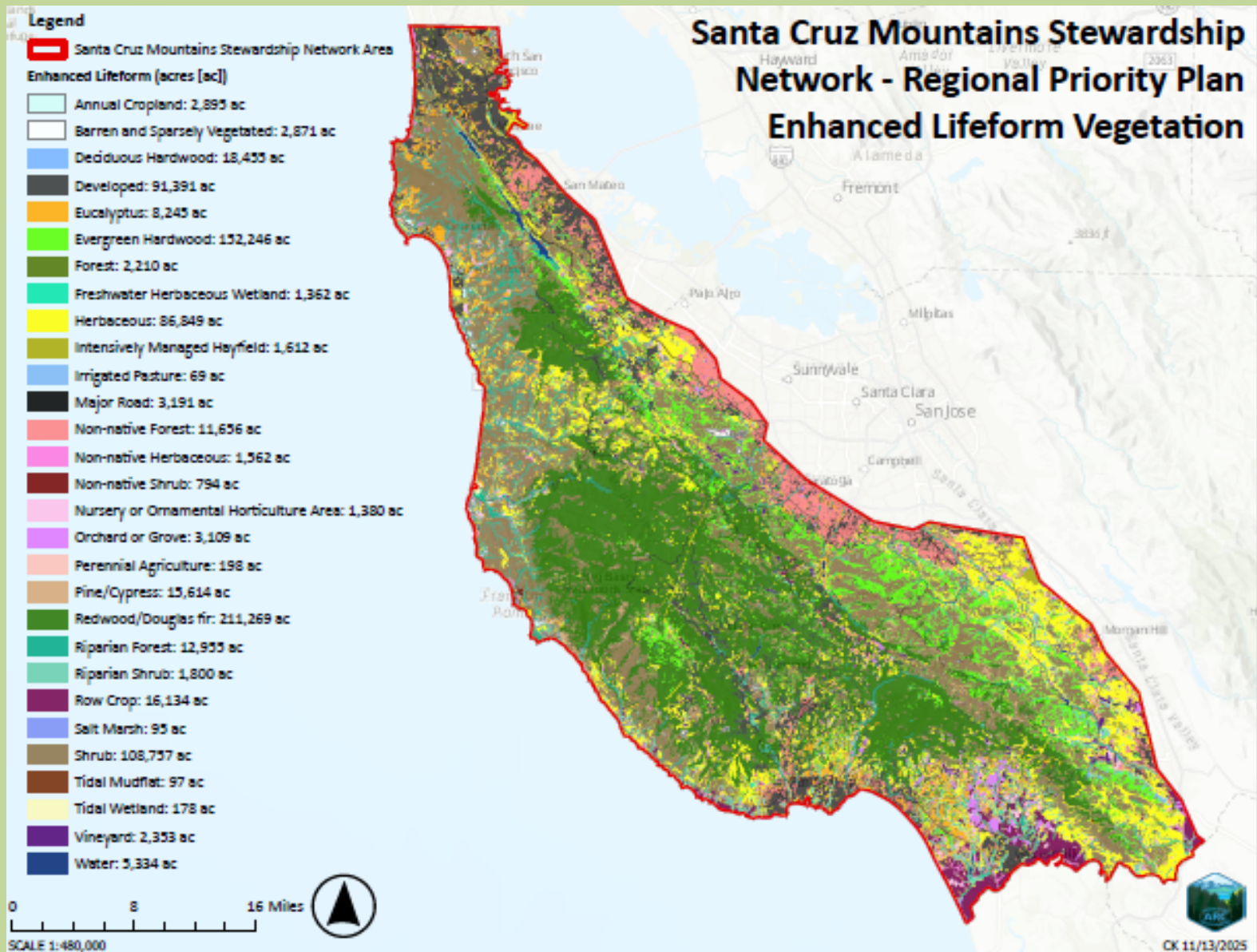
Wildfires since 1950

World_Hillshade



Esri, CGIAR, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

RPP Pillar 2: Landscape Assessment



RPP Pillar 3: Prioritization Framework



Standardized form + TAC evaluates each project using these collaboratively developed criteria

RPP Pillar 4: Governance

Role of the TAC

Identify synergies
and gaps

Validates priorities
using shared
criteria

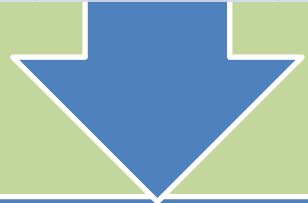
Help align projects
with funding and
permitting
pathways

Does not replace
local decision
making

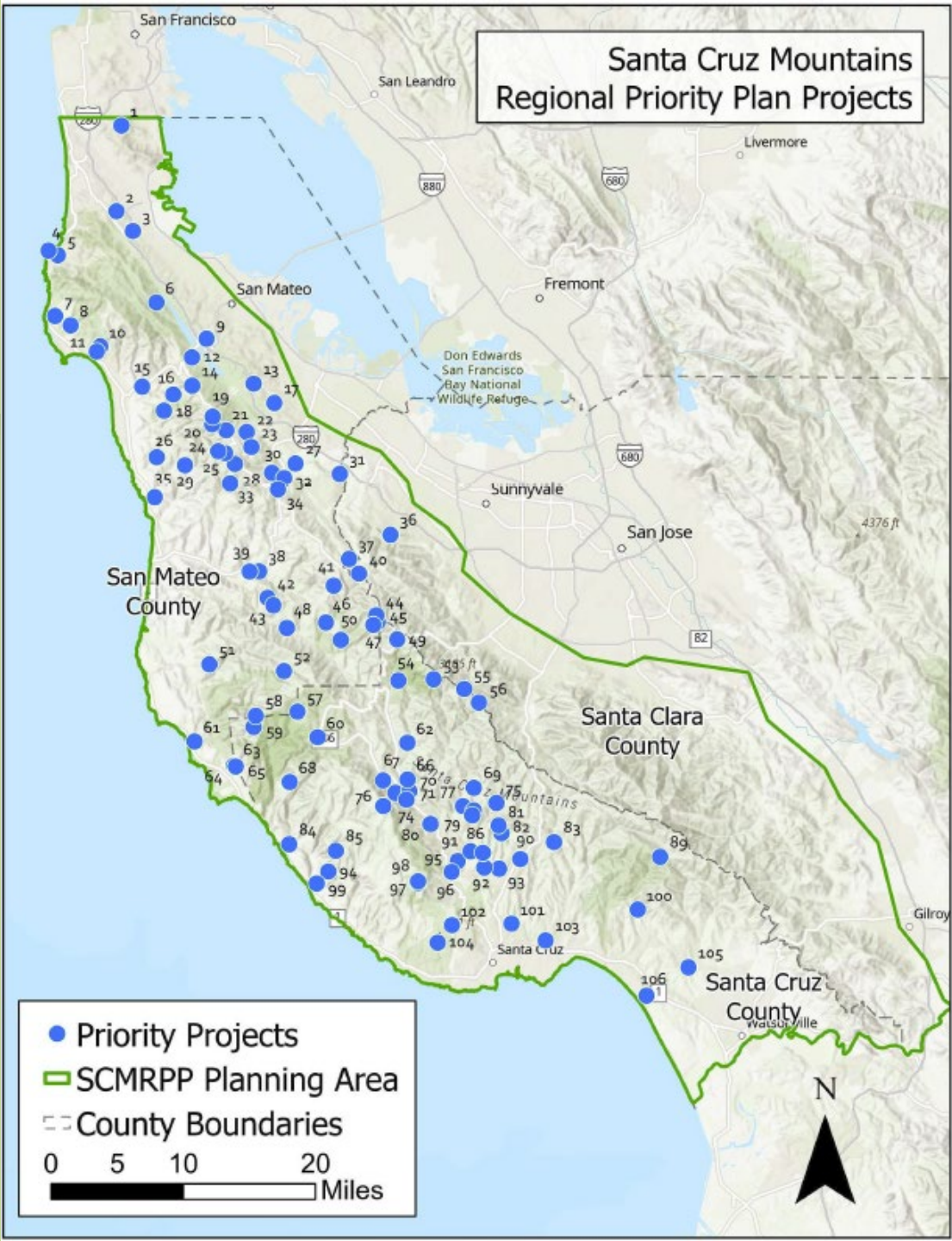
RPP Pillar 5: Portfolio of Projects

This portfolio is modular, and can be sorted by funding source, benefit type, geography, or readiness.

- A suite of complementary projects
- Reflects geographic spread and benefit diversity
- Supports funding, permitting, and implementation readiness



[Explore the portfolio!](#)



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Estimated cost of projects included in SCMRPP*

Project Category	Estimated Cost	Notes
Community Protection	\$56,385,229.00	Community Protection projects are designed with the primary goal of reducing vegetative fuels in the WUI to protect infrastructure, homes, evacuation routes, and improve access for firefighting. Many of these projects also have ecological benefits by way of reducing overly dense vegetation in ecosystems that have deviated from their historic fire regimes.
Ecological Restoration	\$24,117,090.00	Ecological Restoration projects have the primary objective of improving forest health, restoring habitat, promoting biodiversity, and enhancing climate resilience and carbon storage potential. Many of these projects also benefit community protection goals by reducing the chance of catastrophic fire behavior across the landscape.
Capacity Building	\$7,880,000.00	Capacity Building projects consist of the development or the sustaining of programs and services that lead to the implementation of Community Protection or Ecological Restoration projects. Activities include workforce development, program and project planning, and continued collaboration within our region to address issues such as biomass management, pathogen response, and resource sharing.
Total		\$88,382,319.00

*

- Costs based on projects submitted to SCMRPP during initial solicitation (2025)
- Costs based on estimated budgets submitted per project, by project proponent
- Estimated costs do not include SCMRPP projects that were already funded at time of submittal
- Project category indicates “primary” purpose, most projects benefit community protection and ecological restoration

Funding pathways

- [CAL FIRE](#)
 - [Fire Prevention Grants](#)
 - [Forest Health Grants](#)
 - [Regional Wildfire and Landscape Resilience Grants](#)
 - **accepting applications soon!**
 - [Tribal Wildfire Resilience Grants](#)
 - [Business and Workforce Development Grants](#)
 - **applications open!**
 - [Forest Health Research Grants](#)
 - [California Forest Improvement Program \(CFIP\)](#)
- [Natural Resource Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#)
 - [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#)
- [Dept of Conservation](#)
 - [RFFC “Classic”](#)
 - [RFFC “Implementation”](#) (coming soon!)
- [State Coastal Conservancy Wildfire Resiliency Program](#)
 - **applications open!**
- [California Fire Safe Council State Fire Capacity Grant](#)
 - **applications open!**
- [Wildlife Conservation Board Grant Programs](#)
 - **applications open!**
 - [Forest Conservation](#)
 - [Habitat Enhancement and Restoration](#)
 - [Oak Woodlands Conservation](#)

[More opportunities found here](#)

