



Annual Report

2015



11769 Waterhill Road
Lakeside, CA 92040
619.562.0096
www.rcdsandiego.org

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Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County

The Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County (RCD) is a non-enterprise Special District organized under Division 9 of the California State Public Resources code. We are tasked with voluntary natural resources conservation on public and private lands.

The RCD's boundaries encompass a service area of approximately 2,886 square miles or 1,847,300 acres. The District's northern boundary extends into the Bonsal community, the southern boundary extends to the United States-Mexico border, the western boundary extends to the Pacific Ocean and the eastern boundary extends to the Imperial County line.

The highly varied topography of this service area consists of more than thirty types of vegetative communities and encompasses mountains, deserts, forest, and coastal resources, including ten varied and distinct watersheds with streams, rivers, sloughs, lakes, beaches, and bays, as well as urban, agricultural, and suburban areas.

The population of San Diego County is dense with 3.18 million people and includes the largest amount of small farms (6,687) in America. It is also the 5th highest populated county and the 19th largest agricultural economy in the U.S.

All RCD programs, as well as other valuable natural resource information, are promoted on our website and our Facebook page.

OUR MISSION:
TO HELP PEOPLE PROTECT,
CONSERVE, AND RESTORE
NATURAL RESOURCES
THROUGH EDUCATION,
INFORMATION, AND TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

Executive Summary

2015 was a great year for the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County and the San Diego County community. Our natural resources management, fire safety and prevention, nutrition education, tree nursery, Monarch butterfly, school and community gardening, and storm water education programs are thriving and expanding. The RCD is again developing, expanding, and enjoying new partnerships and collaborations, which have led to expanded programming and financial opportunities.

We are also proud to say that this year we submitted paperwork to the IRS and the State of California to form a non-profit arm of the RCD, the Resource Conservation Foundation of Greater San Diego. Once the application process is complete, this should enable us to generate more sources of funding for our programs.

This year we added a new Director, Fire Chief Don Butz, to our Board of Directors. Chief Butz is also the President of the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County and our new CARCD Southern California Baja representative as well. We had some staffing changes as well. In 2015, we added a Forester, Sean Kluesner, to our staff, as well as an Educational Assistant, Kaylie Caires, and a Program Assistant, Britney Munoz.

Our Executive Director, Sheryl Landrum, was awarded the Special District's Administrators Certification by the California Special Districts Association and has enjoyed a busy year working with the State Board of Forestry, the RMAC Committee, Conservation Strategies Group, and the CARCD up in Sacramento, and with all our local partners and collaborators here in San Diego as well.

Here are some of our activities in 2015....

Watershed Education Program

Funded by the Port of San Diego, this classroom program teaches students about watersheds – how they become polluted, and what we as individuals can do to make a difference. This year, the program reached 1,985 second, fifth, and sixth grade students through eighty-one presentations at twenty-eight schools within the San Diego Bay Watershed.

This is what the teachers are saying about our watershed education:

"It (the program) is hands on. Students are able to see how storm water and irrigation runoff carry pollution into the storm drain."
– Educator at Olivewood Elementary 8/28/15

"I love that students see the effects of pollution on the ocean. I liked the experiment and the visuals." – Educator at Palmer Way 10/19/15



Participating students complete pre- and post-tests to enable us to assess their learning. On their post-test, 5th and 6th grade students are asked to report one new thing they learned. Here are some of their responses:

"Even though you live far away, the water goes down and to the same place in your watershed." – Isabella

"I learned that a storm drain is something that takes water to the ocean." – Carlos

"Lots of things we leave lying around will go to the bay and harm animals, even though we think they aren't." – Maya

"That everybody can do something to help the pollution by picking up waste and throwing it away."
– Malith

School Gardens

Training:

This year, we trialed a new approach to school garden training: we offered a short series of afterschool training and networking sessions in partnership with local organizations such as the Master Gardeners, City of Chula Vista Environmental Services, and Butterfly Farms. The topics included: 'Engaging Volunteers in Your School Garden,' 'Composting at School,' and 'Creating a Pollinator Garden.' Each workshop was hosted by a different school, and garden educators from the hosting school also gave a short presentation on their garden program. The workshops were successful and we will be building on this model in 2016.



Plant Giveaway:

Our annual plant giveaway, generously supported by Altman Plants in Vista, was held on March 12, 2015. About 1,450 vegetable and herb seedlings were given to one hundred twenty schools. The plants were distributed from four sites across the County.

Tijuana River Valley Community Garden

2015 was a great year for participation at the TRVCG. We held two community clean-up days: one in May as a part of the County-wide Creek to Bay Clean-up, and the other in September as a part of International Coastal Cleanup Day; with one hundred eleven and one hundred thirty-eight participants respectively. We had large groups of community volunteers helping at each event. A team from News 8 participated in our spring clean-up and a team from SDG&E participated in the fall. They also funded the development of two new garden plots and a pollinator garden, which were built and installed that day. We are grateful for the support of the San Diego County Parks Department, I Love a Clean San Diego, SDG&E, and our gardeners!

The RCD was offered the opportunity to participate in Week of Hope volunteer program again this year. In 2015, San Diego was one of sixteen cities participating in the program, and volunteers come from all over the county to participate. The mission of Week of Hope is: "Teenagers learn Christ-like empathy and compassion as they meet the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of disadvantaged children, youth, and adults."



This year we worked with two groups from Week of Hope. The first included six volunteers – five high school juniors and seniors, and their youth leader. They spent a week working in the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park, where they split their week between the Bird and Butterfly Garden and the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden, contributing a total of one hundred twenty hours. A second group spent three days at the RCD's office, where they built

a small greenhouse we will use to grow native plants and vegetable starts to share with the community.

In addition to the Week of Hope volunteers, we also had a small team from CLEAResult at the garden. They spent a total of twelve hours in the hot October sunshine mulching the garden roads – an important task to help subdue weeds and minimize dust.

Our Master Composter volunteer, who helps to manage the communal composting areas at the garden, clocked over one hundred hours of work at the garden. We are so grateful for his continued support.

2015 was designated the International Year of Soils by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. We collaborated with our farming neighbors, Suzie’s Farm and Wild Willow Farm, to hold a series of public events to celebrate this precious resource and raise awareness of its many benefits. In the spring, we held a Soil Celebration which included activities at each site. The community garden hosted City College students, who brought their mobile soil testing lab to the garden to conduct soil tests for plot holders and local residents. We also hosted a workshop on how to build a static compost pile. In the fall, we held a second, larger community event, the Soil Shindig, to promote healthy soil and to encourage more people to discover the amenities of the Tijuana River Valley. The event’s activities were spread across our three sites and included workshops, talks, a keynote speaker, information booths, horse and cart rides, farm tours, and more. Approximately three hundred people participated in the event; twenty local businesses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies were involved.

Milkweed for Monarchs

Our Milkweed for Monarchs program aims to increase habitat for Monarch butterflies and other pollinators by planting milkweed and other native wildflowers. We are encouraging schools, community sites, and home gardeners to plant milkweed, the host plant for Monarch butterflies, in their gardens.

This program is focusing on narrowleaf milkweed, a CA native variety which is adapted to our climate and is drought tolerant. We are also encouraging participants to provide a food source for adult butterflies and other pollinators by planting flowers that bloom throughout the growing season.

This year, we have distributed over 2,450 narrowleaf milkweed plants to about one hundred and fifty school and community sites and provided over three hundred thirty-five packs of milkweed seed and two hundred thirty-five packs of a CA native wildflower seed mix to support pollinators.



We have also developed a citizen science program so that participants can provide feedback about the impacts their milkweed plantings are having on the local Monarch population. We are also asking participants to track the first and last dates they see Monarchs in the garden so that we can all learn more about Monarchs’ migration habits here in San Diego County.

This year we developed new partnerships through our pollinator program. We worked with Butterfly Farms, US Fish & Wildlife Service, NRCS, Groundwork Chollas Creek, and Sky Mountain Permaculture to build a demonstration pollinator garden at the San Diego County Fair. The garden will be a permanent exhibition to encourage citizens to grow native plants in their own gardens to attract and support pollinators.

Scholarships

The RCD's annual Conservation Scholarship program offers scholarships of \$1,000 to graduating high school seniors in San Diego County who are going on to college to study an environmental or conservation related field. This year the RCD received twenty-five applications and awarded six scholarships.

Fire Safe Council of San Diego County

The RCD manages the programs and grants of the Fire Safe Council (FSC) of San Diego County. 2015 was a very production year for our fire prevention and education services.

Chipping Program:

Our Fuel Reduction Grant successfully cleared approximately 1,400 acres of dried brush from private property and high fire risk areas in San Diego County. We assisted nearly 200 homes and properties valued at over \$84,000,000. Additionally, we held one community chipping day within the county.



Defensible Space Assistance Program (DSAP):

DSAP offers low income seniors and disabled residents of San Diego County a service to create 100' of defensible space around their homes to reduce fire danger. With funding from SDG&E, DSAP serviced twenty properties across the County in 2015. We contract with the East County Transition Living Center, a non-profit organization that provides hope and a hand-up to homeless and other individuals/families in need, by assisting them into independent, self-sustained living through case-managed transitional programs. Their Brush Management Program provides a crew trained and experienced in creating and maintaining defensible space.

Education Program:

This year, the FSCSDC facilitated six day-long fire behavior workshops for Fire Safe Council members and local residents. The class is called Fire Operations in the Wildland Urban Interface. The workshops were hosted by partner community FSCs in Ramona, Valley Center, Jamul, Rancho

Penasquitos, Cuyamaca Woods, and the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) in Chula Vista and attended by one hundred fifty-six community members. The workshops are led by JP Harris (retired LA County battalion chief) and Chief Clay Howe (BLM).

Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs):

The FSCSDC approved six Community Wildfire Protection Plans in 2015. CWPPs were required through the healthy Forests Restoration Act 9HFRA) in 2003 and are mandatory for acquiring USFS grant funding.

Looking Toward the Future

As you can see, 2015 was a very productive year for the RCD of Greater San Diego County. We look forward to doing even more in 2016.

The RCD has reached out to other like-minded agencies this past year to develop community recognition and assist with programs that help support our long range goals and to assist San Diegans. We continue to build on these relationships, and we will become more engaged with our County Supervisors, legislatures, and other state, local, federal and tribal governmental agencies in 2016 to further our sphere of influence and to promote conservation practices.

We will continue to update our informational website and Facebook page to stay connected with our community and we encourage you to visit us online <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Resource-Conservation-District-of-Greater-San-Diego-County> to keep in touch with what the RCD is doing.

As always, we would love to hear your thoughts and opinions on how we can improve our programs and goals. Thank you for taking the time to learn about our accomplishments in 2015 — we look forward to engaging and sharing with you again in 2016.

Remember, your tax deductible donations help with all of these great programs as well. Please give us a call if you would like to make a donation to the RCD.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Board and our dedicated staff,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheryl Landrum". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Sheryl Landrum, Executive Director