



STEWARDS OF THE LAND

PHOTO BY ADRIANA STAGNARO

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In a year of hard things, we have had some sparkling lights here at the Gold Ridge RCD to brighten our days. We opened up several early career positions and employed four talented interns and AmeriCorps Fellows. While our seasoned staff provided these young professionals mentorship and training, the newcomers brought hope, vision, inspiration, and a revived energy to do good. As someone who started my own career at the RCD as an intern, I am joyful to offer opportunities like this again.

This past year we had four early career positions: two interns from Sonoma State University, a CivicSpark AmeriCorps Fellow and a summer CA Climate Action Corps Fellow. These talented individuals drafted hazard mitigation plans, outreach plans for forest health, translated youth education materials into Spanish, developed watershed specific drought resources, improved our social media, and so much more. We even hired one of the Sonoma State interns, Sophia Tsue, to continue as our part-time Outreach and Education Coordinator.

I'm so proud to see these newcomers grow and learn through their time at the RCD, and I'm grateful for

their passion and valuable contributions to our agency and the community at large.

We were able to make these early-career positions possible through the generous 2020-21 donations made by you all, our partners and neighbors. We will be hosting three GrizzlyCorps Fellows in the 2021-22 year, and we hope to have more opportunities like these as funding becomes available. We have so much work to do to leave this place we love in better condition than when we got here. I feel it is the partnership between the experienced and the hopeful that will make this possible.

If you'd like to support more early-career opportunities at the RCD, please consider making a donation. Donations are tax-deductible and 100% of your donation goes to support programs like these.

For the youth and the future,

Brittany Jensen,
Executive Director

FINANCIAL REPORT: HOW FUNDING MEETS OUR RCD STRATEGIC GOALS

What are Gold Ridge RCD's strategic goals to enhance the community, and how are they funded?

LAST YEAR'S BUDGET WAS JUST OVER \$1.5 MILLION.

OUR WORK IS FUNDED THROUGH:

- 36.3% Federal grants
- 34.5% State grants
- 12.0% Local grants
- 8.5% Fee-for-service
- 6.0% Foundations
- 2.2% Parcel tax
- 0.5% Donations from our community

TOTAL EXPENSES 2020-21 FISCAL YEAR: \$1,540,563

- 19.9% Wildlife Habitat Enhancement
- 4.3% Community Fire Fuels Management
- 21.0% Climate Resiliency
- 15.3% Streamflow Enhancement and Water Conservation
- 8.5% LandSmart Planning
- 1.5% Clean Water
- 6.1% Community Outreach & Education
- 4.1% Science, Monitoring and Planning
- 11.1% Environmental Regulation Compliance Assistance
- 8.2% Organizational Sustainability

OUR PROGRAMS

In collaboration with our partners and community, we aim to accomplish the following:

Climate Resiliency and Carbon Farming: Develop and fund programs which reduce greenhouse gases, increase carbon sequestration, improve agricultural and residential water security, and enhance wildlife habitat.

Environmental Regulation Compliance Assistance: Assist landowners in understanding and voluntarily complying with or exceeding federal, state and local regulations.

Streamflow Enhancement and Water Conservation: Support landowners and land managers in ensuring that streams in district watersheds have sufficient flow to support aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

Clean Water: Enhance water quality, prevent nonpoint source pollution, and protect aquatic ecosystems.

Science, Monitoring and Planning: Assess and document environmental conditions and trends, and use this information to guide activities and evaluate proposed management projects and strategies.

Wildlife Habitat Enhancement: Restore and enhance habitat for native wildlife everywhere including in

riparian, wetland, forest, grassland, and agricultural settings.

Agricultural and Environmental Education: Create educational experiences for our community, which inspire and encourage a connection to and an appreciation for the conservation of land and its agricultural and natural resources.

Community Fire Fuels Management: Support the active management of forestland and fire fuels to restore ecological balance with fire while protecting communities.

Organizational Sustainability: With 77 years of experience, we strive to be relevant, excellent and visible as an organization, so that we can provide the best service to our community for decades to come.



For information on our mission, vision, priorities, major strategies and objectives [view our Strategic Plan.](#)



RCD EXPANDS FOREST AND FIRE RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICES

PREPARING FOR A RISKIER FUTURE

Gold Ridge RCD prepared an annex (or chapter) for the Sonoma County Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP). The Sonoma County Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan is a countywide plan that identifies risks and ways to minimize damage by natural disasters. The plan increases public awareness, helps comply with state and federal program requirements, and enhances local policies and coordination. What does this mean? It means we have a plan for reducing impacts of natural hazards like flood, drought and fire that allows us to be eligible for federal disaster funding. In the past, the RCD wasn't eligible to apply for federal funds such as FEMA, as we weren't included in the LHMP. [Read the annex here.](#)

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR LOCAL FIRE SAFE COUNCILS

Gold Ridge with Sonoma RCD have worked to strengthen the capacity and impact of both the RCDs and Fire Safe Sonoma through regular partner meetings as well as hosting a joint AmeriCorps Fellow, Cailin Notch. One of Cailin's accomplishments was creating a forum for local fire safe councils to meet and learn together. Cailin was the first dedicated staff to assist in outreach, education, and partnership facilitation for Fire Safe Sonoma in a few years. In addition to partnering on several grant proposals and lifting up one another's work, the RCDs and Fire Safe Sonoma are hosting another Fellow for 2021-22, Mason Innumerable. Learn about Fire Safe Sonoma at firesafesonoma.org.

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLANNING ALONG BOHEMIAN HIGHWAY

Initiated in fall 2019 with the receipt of a CALFIRE Fire Prevention grant, the Camp Meeker Community Wildfire Protection Planning process wrapped in spring 2021. Meekerites and Bohemian Highway neighbors participated in multiple Zoom meetings hosted by the RCD during the pandemic year, discussing the wooded community's fire risk and envisioning projects to make their home safer. Discussions had the support of local fire chiefs, foresters, Sonoma County Emergency Management Department, Sonoma County Sheriff's Office, Fire Safe Sonoma, Supervisor Hopkins' Office, and CA Department of Fish and Wildlife, who each brought their expertise in land management, fire prevention and community safety. Read the plan here: firesafecampmeeker.org.

In spring 2021, large-parcel landowners within the greater Bohemian Highway corridor, from Monte Rio to Freestone, met to strategize a fuels management plan and draft a funding proposal for CAL FIRE's 2021 Fire Prevention grant program. Their proposal included defensible space improvement, roadside fuels treatment and firebreak work across approximately 2,600 acres and fourteen properties.

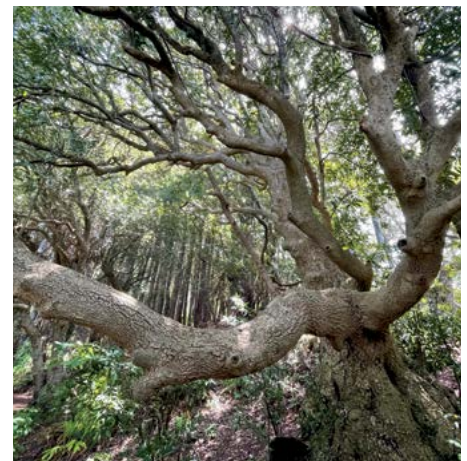
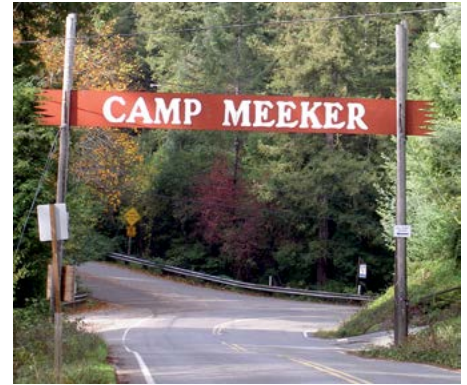
NEW FOREST IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM FOR THE NORTH BAY

This year the Gold Ridge RCD — with partners After the Fire (formerly Rebuild North Bay Foundation), Sonoma RCD, Napa RCD, Lake County RCD and the Clear Lake Environmental Research Center — launched the North Bay Forest Improvement Program to support forest landowners across the four-county north bay region. This three-year pilot program is made possible thanks to \$1.5M in Proposition 68 funding awarded via a CAL FIRE Wildfire Resilience and Forestry Assistance grant. This program brings critical resources to treat hazardous fire fuels and improve forest health on private properties throughout the region, with a focus on serving disadvantaged communities. The program provides financial incentives to landowners to conduct this critical work.

[Learn more on the program's website.](#)

LANDSMART GRAZING FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

In fall of 2021, the Gold Ridge RCD launched the two-year LandSmart Grazing program in partnership with the Sonoma RCD. This program aims to connect local land managers and contract grazers to reduce fire fuels and enrich the soil, ultimately making our community safer in the face of wildfires. Targeted grazing offers a carbon-friendly form of vegetation management that not only reduces the land's fuel load but also increases biodiversity, removes invasive weeds, and improves the soil. To make this program even better, the RCD covers 50-80% of the grazing costs! [Learn more on the program's website.](#)





HOW THE RCD IS SUPPORTING WATER CONSERVATION EFFORTS THIS YEAR

RAINWATER CATCHMENT REBATE AND STREAMFLOW ENHANCEMENT PILOT PROJECT

Sonoma Water, the Gold Ridge and Sonoma RCDs, Sonoma-Marin Saving Water Partnership, and the non-profit Daily Acts will work together to develop and implement a pilot rebate and training program to promote household-level water storage through rainwater catchment. Partners will assist rebate applicants with onsite project scoping, system design, implementation oversight, and system verification and monitoring. The program will also train local landscapers in water-efficient landscaping. Funding is provided by a grant from the CA Department of Water Resources. For more information, contact Noelle Johnson, Programs Manager, Noelle@goldridgercd.org

SUPPORTING NEW AND ESTABLISHED CREEK OR WATERSHED COUNCILS

Residents who are interested in actively monitoring and improving their creek or watershed might form a creek or watershed council. These groups, created for and by locals, have a major impact in conserving water and raising public awareness of water issues. Common activities include creek clean-ups, planting projects, water quality monitoring, and education campaigns around drought, water use and wildlife. If you and your neighbors are interested in forming a watershed council for your local creek, get in touch. Contact: Sierra Cantor, Ecologist, Sierra@goldridgercd.org



STREAMFLOW ENHANCEMENT IN DUTCH BILL, SALMON, AND GREEN VALLEY CREEKS

The RCD is working with landowners in Dutch Bill, Salmon, and Green Valley Creeks to conserve water and reduce demand on water sources affecting summer flows in these streams. All three creeks are critical habitat for coho salmon, and all suffer from critically low streamflows during the summer/fall dry season, when juvenile salmon are present. Three projects — at Alliance Redwoods Conference Grounds, Salmon Creek School, and Mt. Gilead Camp and Conference Center — all involve variations on the themes of water conservation and alternative water sources. At each site, the demand for irrigation water for athletic fields is being reduced through a combination of shrinking the irrigated area, improving the soil, planting drought-tolerant grass, and installing more efficient irrigation systems.

Project construction is underway at Alliance Redwoods Conference Grounds (ARCG), in Dutch Bill Creek. In addition to reducing water demand through the conservation measures outlined above, the project will end the diversion of irrigation water from Redwood Gulch, a tributary of Dutch Bill Creek, switching it to a series of sidehill wells adjacent to ARCG property. At the same time, the source of ARCG's drinking water will be changed from the sidehill wells to a well at the confluence of Dutch Bill Creek and the Russian River in Monte Rio. The project will eliminate ARCG's diversion of surface water altogether, and reduce dry season well water extraction at the camp by nearly 90%, from 2.3 million gallons to approximately 300,000 gallons. The project is expected to increase dry

season flows in Dutch Bill Creek by up to 0.05 cubic feet per second.

Salmon Creek School currently sources all of its water from a shallow well adjacent to Salmon Creek. The Salmon Creek School project, scheduled for construction in 2022, will institute an array of water conservation measures, with the remaining water demand satisfied by captured rainwater. A 517,000-gallon rainwater catchment system will be constructed, capturing water from several roofs on the school campus. The project will increase summer streamflow through the upper and middle reaches of Salmon Creek.

Similar to the Salmon Creek School project, the Mt. Gilead Water Conservation and Streamflow Improvement Project will improve flows in upper Green Valley Creek. The project, which is currently in design, includes water conservation measures and the construction of a 400,000-gallon rainwater catchment system as an alternative water supply at the Mt. Gilead Camp and Conference Center. The project will reduce dry season water extraction from a series of shallow wells adjacent to the creek by approximately 90%, from 3.5 million gallons to only 350,000-400,000 gallons each summer.

All three projects are being developed and implemented in partnership with the non-profit Conservation Works and the landowners. Funding for these projects has been secured through grants from California Wildlife Conservation Board, as well as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for the Alliance project, and local school bond funding for the Salmon Creek School project.





CLIMATE SOLUTIONS GO FROM FARM TO TABLE WITH ZERO FOOTPRINT

There's a new way for Californians to support carbon-beneficial farming: by eating at a Zero Foodprint participating restaurant. Zero Foodprint (ZFP) is a nonprofit organization focused on mobilizing food producers around agricultural climate solutions. Members, including restaurants, diners, food brands, etc. contribute 1% of their profits to ZFP's Restore California Fund. The money from the Restore California Fund is then disbursed by ZFP to farms and ranches through a competitive grant application process that is modeled on the CDFA's Healthy Soils Program. This money is used to fund on-farm practices that are good for the climate and soil health. Things like integrating compost into rangeland, grazing animals on prescribed schedules, planting woody trees and shrubs, reduced tillage, and multispecies cover-cropping.

These practices enrich soil's microbial communities, which draw carbon down from the atmosphere and lock it into a stable form in the ground. According to the Carbon Cycle Institute, a healthy soil ecosystem in turn supplies living roots with the nutrients, water, and other ecosystem services necessary for plants to grow and survive. Increased plant growth means more photosynthetic carbon capture — the process of photosynthesis feeds both the plant and the soil ecosystem. ZFP has supported a plethora of different farms in California in practicing regenerative agriculture methods on their land and has removed a total of almost 18,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere!

Anthony Myint, founder and Executive Director of Zero Foodprint, began his humanitarian journey in the food industry. He was the restaurateur behind the Perennial, a farm-to-table restaurant in San Francisco focused on sourcing sustainable ingredients. Through his work, he realized that, "the overall food economy is extractive of human and natural resources," and that, "the current regulations and subsidies and crop insurance frameworks literally incentivize unhealthy soil with many billions of dollars of incentives. These are large structural issues continuing to deplete soil on a daily basis, and exacerbated by extreme weather and the climate crisis." Myint concluded that investments in carbon-beneficial farming practices could return larger benefits to the climate than many other sustainability efforts.

In 2014, Myint and his wife Karen Leibowitz began Zero Foodprint in collaboration with CDFA and the California RCDs to establish a framework for direct climate action. Any citizen could send \$10/month, or a business could



send a few cents per purchase, to directly operationalize this change on farmland. Since its inception, Zero Foodprint has awarded over \$500,000 to farmers for carbon farming, and \$219,000 of it has gone to Sonoma County farmers. Programs like Zero Foodprint are removing the barriers by establishing this kind of circular, regenerative economy to enable change in the way food is grown — not in a generation or two, but now. Myint also feels strongly about the large role consumers and businesses play in the food systems in California. “If the CA restaurant industry was sending 1% to carbon farming, that would be \$970 million per year [based on 2019 numbers]. That could get regenerative practices underway on at least 1 million acres per year. ... Anyone eating at a restaurant or buying a bottle of wine could afford for 1% to go toward restoring our soil and climate.” With the proper amount of funding, Myint has faith in the fact that regenerative agriculture will become common practice. He referenced the high interest among farmers in carbon farming incentives evidenced by more than 500 applicants to the state’s Healthy Soils Program last year. “Farmers can’t afford to make this change for us, and governments don’t have the budgets or political will to make [carbon farming] happen on hundreds of millions of acres. Consumers actually want seamless and very affordable ways to make legitimate local impacts. So it will happen! But it takes each individual and each business simply deciding they want to be part of the solution.” Zero Foodprint enables this seamless support system between customers and carbon farmers.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR SONOMA COUNTY FARMERS

One example of regenerative agriculture in practice in Sonoma County is Bodega Pastures. Bodega Pastures participates in multiple carbon farming programs including Zero Foodprint, Fibershed’s Climate Beneficial Fiber Verification program, and the RCD’s Carbon Farm Planning program, funded by the USDA’s NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program. By spreading a thin layer of compost on the range and rotating sheep strategically across the landscape, it’s estimated that Bodega Pastures has sequestered an additional 478 tons of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. This is the equivalent of removing the emissions from 104 passenger vehicles in one year. With support from ZFP’s Restore California Fund, Bodega Pastures has funding to monitor their grazing, apply compost to an additional 16 acres of hayfields, and plant a 225-ft woody, perennial hedgerow.

Hazel Flett, long-time grazer at Bodega Pastures, developed a carbon farm plan with the Gold Ridge RCD in 2018 that is now being put into practice with the funds from ZFP. These activities would not have been within reach for Bodega Pastures if it were not for the technical and financial support provided by their partners in carbon farming. Hazel is already seeing a significant improvement in the rangeland thanks to the infusion of microbial activity from the compost application. Hazel found that in this drought year, the compost led to an increased hay crop, and the grazing kept her grass short, reducing fire risks. These practices not only help sequester carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, but also help conserve nutrients in the soil and increase moisture across the ranch.

Other participating ranches in the North Bay include Pozzi Ranch in Valley Ford, Watts Ranch in Bodega, and Perucchi Family Ranch in Bodega. Interested farmers can contact their local RCD for assistance developing a carbon farm plan or create their own to be ready for future rounds of funding through Zero Foodprint. Funding opportunities will be announced here: zerofoodprint.org/apply



ALL EYES ON MONARCHS

Not long ago, the iconic western monarch butterflies migrated along the west coast by the thousands and colored the sky with their brilliant orange wings. Today, the western monarch population is dwindling, and only a relative few individuals remain. The species is impacted by stressors like habitat loss, climate change, and pesticide exposure. If unabated, the precarious population will likely go extinct. Conservationists are calling for direct action to save the western monarch now, before it's too late.

You can take direct action on your property or in your community to support the remaining monarch butterflies, and the Gold Ridge and Sonoma RCDs are here to help.

1. Plant native milkweed, which is where monarchs lay their eggs and is food for monarch caterpillars. Note that milkweed should *not* be planted within 5 miles of the coastline.
2. Plant flowering plants that will provide nectar to monarchs, such as yarrow, coastal sand verbena, coyote mint, native sunflowers, blue dicks, and Pacific aster.
3. Avoid using pesticides, planting tropical milkweed, and rearing monarchs as a conservation strategy. Some strategies that may seem beneficial can actually cause more harm.

Learn more about what you can do to help the western monarch butterfly on [Xerces.org](https://www.xerces.org).

Since last year, the Gold Ridge RCD has expanded its western monarch butterfly conservation program to include more community involvement:

- The Legion of Bloom sponsored the RCD Plant Drive in June of 2021, providing 100 local residents with monarch butterfly habitat kits and empowering folks to establish pollinator gardens across the county.
- The California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) provided financial support for monarch-related technical assistance to ranchers and growers throughout Sonoma County.
- The National Association of Conservation Districts' Urban Agriculture Conservation Grant Initiative (NACD-UAC) awarded funds to support outreach and technical assistance to non-traditional, underserved urban and community agricultural entities interested in enhancing habitat for western monarchs and other pollinators.

Interested in supporting our monarch conservation programs? Make a donation!

These butterflies are an integral and iconic member of our California ecosystem. We can pull them back from the brink by providing quality food and nectar sources, reducing pesticide use, and conserving their migratory habitat, but we must do it soon, before it's too late.

MEET EMILIE WINFIELD:

NEW NORTH COAST SOIL HEALTH HUB COORDINATOR

I have always been a “soil nerd”. As the new Regional Coordinator for the North Coast Soil Hub, I have the opportunity to work with like-minded soil nerds all day, every day!

Many of you have followed the Soil Hub over the past five years, as it developed into a flourishing network of RCD staff, agricultural professionals at USDA NRCS and UC Cooperative Extension, innovators at Carbon Cycle Institute, local colleges like Santa Rosa Junior College, and many dedicated landowners and land managers in the region. Thanks to funding from CDEA and NRCS, the Soil Hub has provided critical services to winegrape growers including soil health assessments and carbon farm plans, created a platform for knowledge sharing about soils in the region, and hosted workshops, trainings, and webinars dedicated to learning about soil health practices.

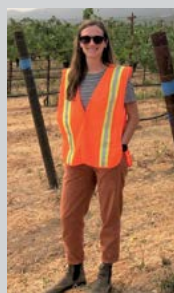
As of 2021, the Soil Hub is leveraging successes working with the vineyard community and expanding to include other production systems like range, dairy, and fruit and nut orchards. In addition to serving new land uses, the Soil Hub is growing geographically to include three other RCDs — Humboldt, Marin, and Lake. Districts in the North Coast region have been pioneers in the carbon farming world, working closely with partners like Carbon Cycle Institute to develop custom carbon farm plans for farms and ranches. We are now bringing that work together to create a collaborative Carbon Farming Network for the region.

In order to enter the next phase of growth, the Soil Hub applied for funding to hire a full time Regional Coordinator. Thanks to a grant from the National

Association of Conservation Districts, I came on board in March 2021 to serve as a backbone for the Soil Hub. As Regional Coordinator, I work to improve communication, build capacity for soil health and carbon farming work in the region, create educational resources, secure funding to continue our work, and advocate for farmers and ranchers in policy and planning. Currently, I am shepherding the Soil Hub through a strategic planning process to lay out our vision and goals for the next few years in order to continue serving the agricultural community.

In thinking about past successes and future directions, Frances Knapczyk, Program Director at Napa RCD, shared, “It’s hard to imagine a time when the Soil Hub didn’t exist! The Hub has helped our region focus on, invest in and nurture its most precious asset — the soil. RCD staff quickly innovated some key services to empower grape growers in building soil health. As a result, hundreds of grape growers have been supported and motivated by the work of the Hub so far. It’s really exciting to see the Hub scale up and out (thanks to the support of our new Coordinator), bringing climate resiliency solutions to more and more farmers in our community.”

Along with our strategic network of partners, the Soil Hub aims to continue serving the region by providing farmers and ranchers with the resources they need to build healthy soils, increase resiliency on agricultural lands, and steward the land for future generations. I look forward to connecting with more farmers and ranchers and serving our local agricultural communities. To learn more and engage, visit: soilhub.org.





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BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Third Thursday of every month
3:30-5:30PM (*unless otherwise posted*)
Gold Ridge RCD Office
2776 Sullivan Rd
Sebastopol, CA 95472
Meetings are open to the public

[Board meeting materials can be found online](#)

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