UPPER SALINAS - LAS TABLAS
RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

# Annual Report

## *Celebrating 75 Years*

## 2026



UPPER SALINAS-LAS TABLAS
RESOURCE
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

*Your partners in local, productive, and sustainable land management since 1951*

# Celebrating 75 Years

## *A Message from our Executive Director*

This past year has been an incredible year of significant accomplishments across our region and new opportunities to expand our conservation impact. After completing my first full year as the Executive Director, I couldn't be prouder of the excellent team we have at the RCD, from the leadership of our Board members to the partnerships that continue to be at the heart of our success, and the incredible staff working day to day on the land and with the community to get conservation on the ground.

As I reflect on all the accomplishments we achieved this year, I am amazed at the impact a small RCD can make for the communities within our district. This year we continued to invest in the future of native habitat restoration through the expansion of our native plant nursery and ongoing restoration efforts at Willow Creek Conservancy. Our efforts to continue to improve wildlife habitat for all species have taken off with multiple pollinator and monarch planting projects. Education and community outreach efforts expanded by holding quarterly workshops at Willow Creek Conservancy as well as representing the USLTRCD at various workshops and community functions.

Our forest health and fire resiliency projects are advancing the important work of reducing wildfire risk, improving forest health, and building more resilient landscapes and communities. Across the Salinas River Watershed, we continued our commitment to stream restoration and riparian enhancement, recognizing the essential role healthy waterways play in supporting wildlife, improving water quality, and sustaining the ecological health of our region.

With all these recent accomplishments, I am overwhelmed thinking about the multitude of success the Upper Salinas-Las Tablas RCD has achieved over the last 75 years since its founding in 1951. While much has changed since then, one thing remains constant: providing services and education to landowners, supporting their management and stewardship of soil, water, and natural resources.

While this anniversary offers an opportunity to look back with pride, it also reminds us that conservation is never finished. The challenges facing our region continue to evolve, from floods, drought, and wildfire to changing agricultural needs and the protection of our watersheds and biodiversity. We remain committed to listening, adapting, and building the partnerships and programs necessary to meet these challenges.

On behalf of the US-LT RCD team, thank you for being part of our journey. Whether you have partnered with us for decades or are just beginning to connect with the District, you are an important part of our story.

**Here's to 75 years of local conservation leadership, the partnerships that make our work possible, and the next generation of stewardship across the Upper Salinas-Las Tablas region.**

With gratitude,

*Drew Loganbill*

Drew Loganbill, Executive Director

# USLTRCD Staff



**Drew Loganbill**
Executive Director



**Spencer Gordon**
Forestry Project Manager



**Hailey Morello**
Conservation Project Manager



**Brian Keeley**
Conservancy Steward



**Amy Ormiston**
Conservation Technician

# Board of Directors

**Tom Mora, Board President**

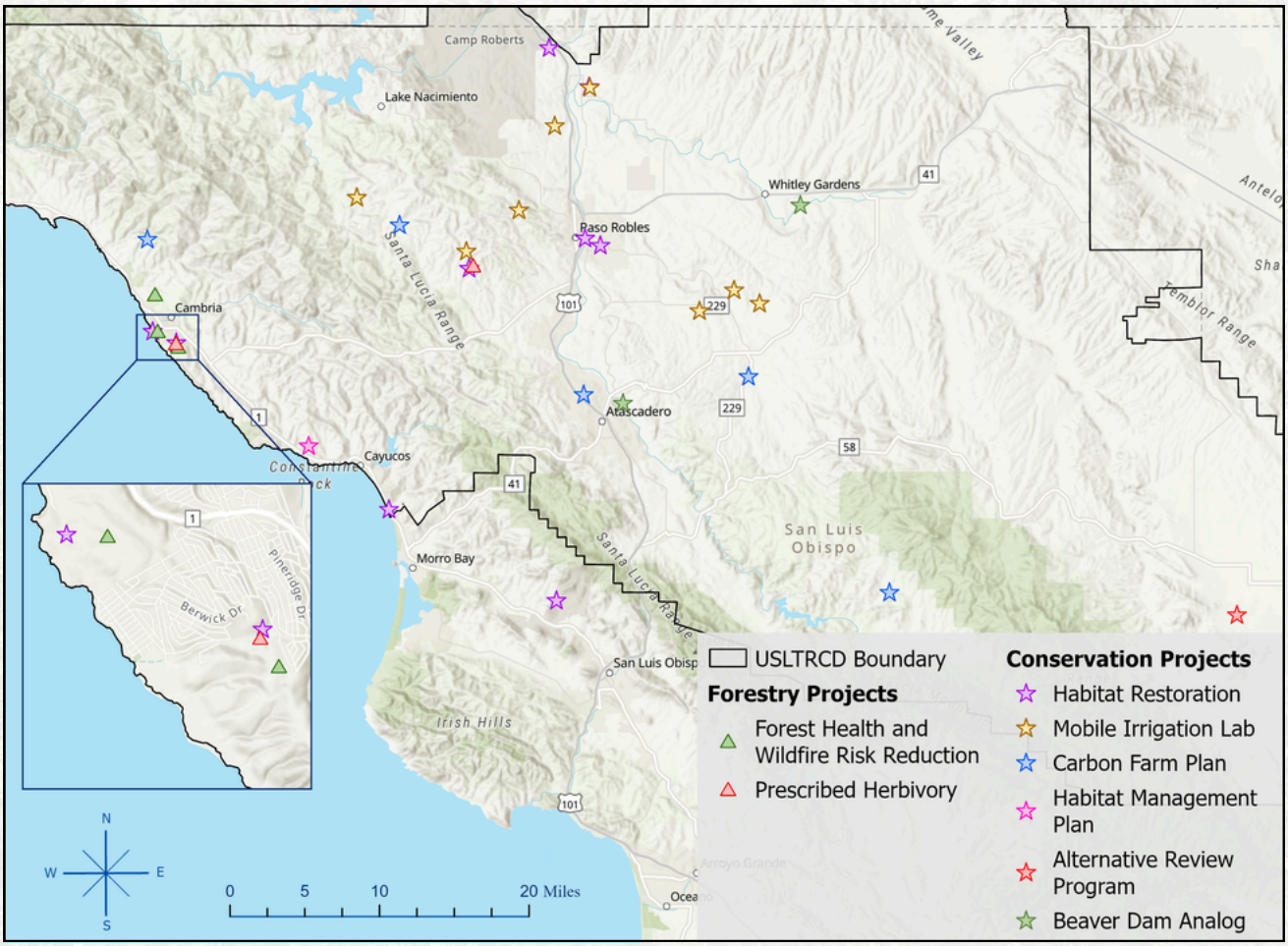
**Steve Carter, Board Treasurer**

**Mike Bonnheim, Director**

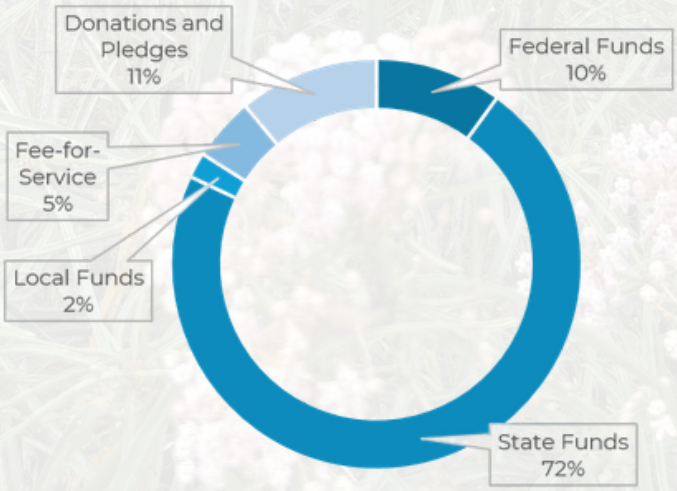
**Chris Smith, Director**

**Eric Michielssen, Director**

# Implementing Stewardship Across the Region




# Funding Sources




**2025-2026 Total Expenses: $2,466,071**
**2025-2026 Total Revenue: $3,090,939**

# Recognizing Emerging Conservationists



## Chloe Castillo

Cal Poly



## Solana Herold

Cal Poly

This year, USLTRCD welcomed our first College Corps fellows to the team. College Corps is a service program that allows students to gain hands-on experience and leadership skills both on campus and at local nonprofits. Chloe and Solana started in September and have already been busy assisting with restoration events, supporting social media outreach, connecting with partners, and helping our Project Managers meet important deliverables. Their can-do attitudes and curious minds have created a lasting impact on our organization, and they are just getting started!

The California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) holds an Annual Speak-Off Competition for high school students to speak on issues affecting California's natural resources. This year's topic, "*What is the difference between a native plant and an invasive plant, and why does it matter to the work that Resource Conservation Districts do?*" brought four finalists from across the state to Sacramento to speak in front of over 200 RCD staff, professional conservationists, and state and federal officials. This year, local high school student Lidia Cannoles represented USLTRCD and Coast Union High School (Cambria, CA) in the speak-off competition, where she focused on the non-native plant species French broom (*Genista monspessulana*) and the importance of local RCDs to support healthy ecosystems. **Congratulations, Lidia, on your award, and thank you for representing the Central Coast!**



## Lidia Cannoles

Coast Union High School

# Field Report from Willow Creek Conservancy

For the progress achieved at Willow Creek Conservancy over the past year, we really need to say thanks to the energy of our volunteers, partners, and donors; it has been a productive year for restoration, education, and community fellowship. This year we hosted events that brought people to the land, created partnerships that expanded our reach, and advanced our progress on sustainable and regenerative agriculture and the ecosystem restoration work that remains at the heart of our mission.

This past year, we generated community interest through a diverse set of events. Volunteers planted native trees and plants from our shadehouse at an Earth Day planting event. A popular home-gardening workshop taught participants to grow edible mushrooms in time for the rains. At a meteor-watching night, guests lay on blankets in the parking lot, laughing and cheering as meteors streaked across the sky. Collaborations with Cal Poly professors and students produced facility designs, builds, maps, and a business course evaluation of potential income sources, while Cal Poly honors students helped with restoration work and learned new techniques. We partnered with Creek Lands Conservation to host a hands-on outdoor event where students and families explored plant propagation, learned about ecosystems and why we know they are important to our health and could use a little help. They also learned about the value of oak trees as they collected and planted acorns.

These outdoor programs are not typically offered in traditional schooling and may have a strong impact on the development of their future decision-making. Several local scout troops also supported our restoration work, collectively as a troop or when scouts moving through the ranks need a project to earn their Eagle Scout awards by planting trees and building seating for events or to be staged along our planned nature trails. We are also grateful to our regular volunteers, who consistently give their time to more advanced tasks. Not only do they spread the word about the fun work we offer, but they actually make it get accomplished! All told, volunteers contributed 1,150 hours; a dollar value of more than $48,000.

Our work helping landowners to adopt sustainable and regenerative agriculture continues to gain momentum. We planted a new 1,000-foot hedgerow around a parcel of agriculturally productive soil, where we hope to launch a leasing program that gives organic growers the start-up acreage they need. What we learn from our hedgerow trials to inform a program we are describing as Hedgerow SLO, a concept aimed at boosting biodiversity within our county by increasing the number of landowners who install native-plant hedgerows across the county to support native pollinator species, establish populations of native food plant species, and reinvigorate the ecological services provided by native predators of insect pest species.



## *Field Report from Willow Creek Conservancy Continued*

By providing a meeting place for education and an avenue for community members to gather, we continue to strengthen the Conservancy's ecosystems. Volunteers alone planted over 1,000 trees this year, and the planting season has only just begun. With last year's plantings, we have now planted well over 2,500 trees. Following a consensus from global conservation organizations promoting biodiversity, we are striving to increase species diversity in an effort to buffer the ecosystem's resilience against annual climate fluctuations. Thanks to several generous locally grown native tree donors, the shadehouse still holds plenty of trees, most already claimed for upcoming planting events. Because trees don't thrive in isolation, every planting also includes a wide variety of shrubs, flowering perennials, and grasses to strengthen the whole ecosystem.



We also reflect on a significant milestone: a controlled burn conducted in December 2025 across five acres of Conservancy property. The burn grew out of USLTRCD's efforts to reintroduce beneficial fire to the landscape and provided a valuable training opportunity for RCD staff and tribal partners, with CAL FIRE providing technical instruction and support. Generations of fire suppression have shaped the land around us, yielding in un-natural accumulation of vegetation that have resulted in devestating wildfires in recent years. However, under controlled conditions, fire can be highly beneficial. By partnering with CAL FIRE and local tribal members, the event provided an opportunity to share knowledge, build capacity, and strengthen collaborative efforts to reintroduce beneficial fire to the landscape.









The past year showed what a committed community can accomplish. Across this year and last, volunteers have planted more than 2,500 trees. Partnerships with Cal Poly, Creek Lands Conservation, and local scout troops brought new skills and energy to our restoration work. Our hedgerow trials are laying the groundwork for Hedgerow SLO and for a future land-leasing program for organic growers. With the planting season only just beginning and the shadehouse well stocked, we enter the coming planting season and the new year with momentum. We thank every volunteer, partner, and donor who made this progress possible, and we invite you to join us in the year ahead. We offer a special thank you to our Technical Advisory Committee, which meets to discuss current activities and assist with decision-making to guide our future efforts. Of course, there are more accomplishments than we have room to list, but we invite you to visit the Willow Creek Conservancy web page and follow our social media pages, where we announce upcoming events and share updates.

# Restoration Across the Upper Salinas Watershed

USLTRCD has established and supported several restoration projects to improve native wildlife habitats, enhance riparian corridors and support system-wide watershed health across the Salinas Watershed.

Centennial Creek is a watercourse that flows along a popular community walking trail in Paso Robles. USLTRCD began working at Centennial Creek in 2015. Due to early successes, the RCD has partnered with Caltrans to implement long-term, large-scale restoration at Centennial. The restoration efforts focus on improving watercourse functions, restoring natural channel features, and planting native riparian and wetland habitat across more than four acres of the creek corridor. This restoration project will be monitored through 2035 to ensure project success.

Nearby, at the Salinas River Walk, USLTRCD has been working with the City of Paso Robles to replace riparian trees along the Salinas River. Focal planting species include cottonwood, southern black walnut, box elder, western sycamore, and willows. The goal is to establish trees to promote riparian and overall watershed health.

Additionally, the construction of beaver dam analogs along the Salinas River helps to slow stream flow velocity, improve channel structure, reduce erosion, reconnect floodplains, and recharge groundwater.

USLTRCD is committed to the continuous restoration and protection of the Salinas Watershed. Potential future projects include invasive species management throughout the watershed and continued construction of beaver dam analogs. We continue to develop local partnerships to enhance capacity for restoration, including with Beaver Brigade and Nature's Engineers.



# Putting Wet Wastes to Work

## *Central Coast samples hit the road for Department of Energy research*

While resource conservation districts are typically known for work on soil, water, forests, and habitat, USLTRCD is also serving as principal investigator and project lead on a U.S. Department of Energy research effort to tackle a problem nearly every community shares: what to do with the material left over from treating wastewater.

Over the last three years, USLTRCD has been partnering with local municipalities to collect treated sewage solids from Central Coast wastewater plants. Those samples then head to Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) in Richland, Washington, where researchers put them through their paces. San Luis Obispo-based MicroBio Engineering is part of the research team too, helping study how well two technologies, hydrothermal liquefaction (HTL) and high-temperature pyrolysis (HTP), can transform the material into something useful.




Why go to all this trouble? Wet wastes like sludge are heavy, bulky, and expensive to manage, and disposal costs are expected to keep climbing. Hauling this material out of the county also means burning diesel. Depending on the technology, this "waste" could become renewable biofuel, biochar, or fertilizer, all made locally from a material communities already pay to get rid of. Testing real Central Coast samples shows how these technologies could work for a small community like ours, not just in theory. In that sense, the research is a way to prepare for future costs and regulations before they arrive, with solutions that balance environmental, social, and fiscal responsibility.

This equipment would have a small footprint compared to existing wastewater treatment plants. If any of it were ever used on the Central Coast, it would be located at existing waste management sites.

USLTRCD is also collecting input from community members on what matters most to them and how these technologies might affect them. That input will help shape recommendations on where processing could be located.

Depending on research results and funding, one of these methods might become a way to turn this waste into an easily transportable, sustainable product.

*Want to weigh in? Visit our website to take a short survey on how you use and think about products made from treated waste.*

# Giving Western Monarchs Room to Roam









Every fall, western monarchs travel to the California coast to overwinter, but habitat loss, prolonged drought, and widespread insecticide use have driven their population into steep decline. Recovery depends on places where monarchs can feed, breed, and rest without being crowded out.

Some of the best opportunities for these unique places are on military land. Camp Roberts and Camp San Luis Obispo together offer 48,000 acres of largely undeveloped ground with controlled access and long-term stewardship plans. The Xerces Society has named these habitats priority action zones for western monarch recovery, calling for pesticide-free native nectar plants at overwintering and breeding sites.

With funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USLTRCD is answering that call through a five-year effort that began in April 2024. Project partners have worked together to clear invasive weeds, conduct prescribed burns, lay deep mulch patties, and plant thousands of native plants, including milkweed and other species chosen to bloom in step with monarch migration and breeding. Removing invasive plants also lowers fuel loads, making these landscapes more resilient to wildfire and drought.

The California Conservation Corps grows the plants at its native nursery and helps install and maintain them. Environment for the Americas supports monitoring and reporting, Monarch Joint Venture advises on surveys, and the California Military Department guides compliance on the installations.

Beyond the military installations, USLTRCD is working with private landowners to expand monarch habitat throughout the district and build a broader network of conservation efforts across the Central Coast. Several additional grant applications are also pending that could help bring more restoration projects to the region. Together, these efforts reflect a long-term commitment to creating and maintaining the habitat monarchs need throughout their migration and breeding cycles, while supporting healthier, more resilient landscapes for years to come.

# Landowners Thrive With RCD Support

Over the past several years, US-LT RCD has focused on helping local landowners identify opportunities to improve soil health, conserve water, build climate resilience, and steward natural resources through conservation planning. With support from grant-funded programs, we have worked alongside producers throughout the district to develop 20 Carbon Farm Plans, providing landowners with site-specific recommendations and a roadmap for implementing conservation practices on their properties.

These plans represent an important first step in the conservation process. They help identify opportunities to improve soil carbon storage, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase water-use efficiency, enhance wildlife habitat, and strengthen the long-term sustainability of agricultural operations. But planning is only the beginning. Now, we're shifting our focus toward helping landowners turn those plans into action.

Through a new round of funding opportunities, US-LT RCD will be able to provide more direct support for conservation practice implementation. Programs including the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Advancing Markets for Producers (AMP) Program, the Healthy Soils Program (HSP), and the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEEP) will help connect local producers with financial and technical resources to put conservation practices on the ground.

Each program offers different opportunities to address resource concerns on agricultural lands. This may include practices that build soil health and increase carbon sequestration, improve irrigation efficiency and reduce water use, or support broader improvements to farm and ranch management.



For landowners who have already completed conservation planning, these programs offer an opportunity to begin implementing some of the recommendations identified in their plans. For others, they provide an entry point to explore conservation opportunities and work with our team to identify practices that make sense for their operation.

As we move into this next phase, our goal remains the same: to provide local landowners with the resources, technical assistance, and partnerships they need to make meaningful, lasting improvements to their land.

Have a conservation project in mind? Reach out to US-LT RCD to learn more about current funding opportunities and how we can help you take the next step.

# Stewarding Cambria's Rare Monterey Pine Forest

The Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District continues to lead and coordinate collaborative efforts to steward Cambria's rare Monterey pine forest. Working alongside the SLO County Fire Safe Council, CAL FIRE, Greenspace – The Cambria Land Trust, Cambria Community Services District, Friends of Fiscalini Ranch Preserve, and other local partners, the RCD is advancing a coordinated, multi-year approach to forest health and fire resiliency throughout the Cambria and San Simeon region. By connecting individual property-level treatments with broader landscape-scale restoration objectives, these efforts are improving forest conditions, reducing wildfire risk, and building a foundation for long-term forest stewardship.



## Expanding Landscape-Scale Forest Health Treatments



In 2026, the RCD completed forest health treatments on two strategically located parcels that contribute to a larger, multi-year landscape-scale restoration effort. One 16-acre parcel is located adjacent to areas treated in 2025 along Cambria Pines Road, while a second 17-acre parcel builds upon treatments completed in 2024 and 2025 in the Lodge Hill neighborhood. By prioritizing properties that connect with previously treated areas, the RCD and its partners are steadily expanding the footprint of forest restoration while creating more continuous, strategic fuel reduction across the landscape.

Each project is designed to balance ecological health with community wildfire safety, recognizing the importance of protecting both the unique characteristics of the Monterey pine forest and the communities that live within it.

# Developing a Long-Term Maintenance Grazing Program at Strawberry Canyon

The RCD partnered with Greenspace, The Cambria Land Trust to develop a maintenance grazing program at Strawberry Canyon Reserve. Following initial selective thinning and chipping treatments across the preserve's 34 acres in 2025, the partners worked to establish a long-term approach to maintaining treatment conditions and improving ecological health.

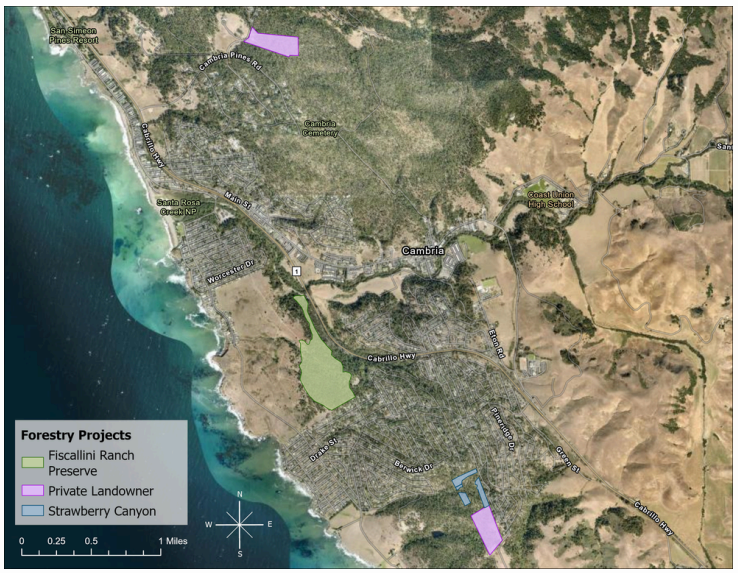
The grazing program is among the first of its kind in the region, developed through close coordination with the California Coastal Commission, a qualified biologist, and a CEQA permitting specialist. In 2026, approximately 10 acres were grazed in strategically selected portions of the reserve to accomplish two primary objectives: reduce the non-native plant seedbank and improve wildfire safety near adjacent residential neighborhoods.

The RCD also secured funding through the SLO County Fire Safe Council to support two additional years of maintenance treatments, helping ensure the long-term success of this collaborative effort.





***2026 Forestry Treatments***




# Advancing Forest Restoration at Fiscalini Ranch Preserve

The RCD served as project lead for a SLO County Fire Safe Council-funded forest health and fire resiliency project at Fiscalini Ranch Preserve. Working closely with Friends of Fiscalini Ranch Preserve, the RCD helped develop treatment specifications that balanced ecological objectives, land management priorities, and community interests.

Approximately 62 acres were treated over the course of four weeks, representing a significant investment in the long-term health and resiliency of this important community resource. The project also demonstrates the value of strong local partnerships in implementing forest management strategies that are both ecologically informed and responsive to community priorities.

The restoration effort is continuing beyond the initial treatments. With funding from the Fire Safe Council, Friends of Fiscalini Ranch Preserve is planning to plant approximately 15 acres with new Monterey pine seedlings, helping support the regeneration and long-term sustainability of the forest.

## *Looking Ahead*

The RCD looks forward to continuing its work with local partners in 2027. Throughout 2026, staff pursued additional grant opportunities, developed project proposals, and coordinated with landowners and partner organizations to identify funding for future forest health and fire resiliency projects. These efforts will help build upon the progress made this year and sustain the collaborative, landscape-scale approach needed to protect Cambria's unique Monterey pine forest for future generations.

UPPER SALINAS-LAS TABLAS
RESOURCE
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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USLTRCD provides services and education to stakeholders supporting *their* management and stewardship of soils, water, and natural resources.

# Support Our Mission

Our work is powered by grants, fee-for-service projects, and the generosity of our community.

Make a tax-deductible donation by scanning the QR code below or by visiting
**us-ltrcd.org/support-our-mission**

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