UPPER SALINAS-LAS TABLAS

RESOURCE

CONSERVATION DISTRICT



ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020

Our Mission

Provide services and education to landowners supporting their management and stewardship of soil, water and natural resources.



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Dear Friends,

Every year I take time to reflect upon the success and achievements of our local Resource Conservation District and the motivation of the community to manage natural resources for future generations. This year, I want to take time to acknowledge how much I appreciate Upper Salinas – Las Tablas RCD, the staff that work there, the board that supports the organization, and the community members. Although, like many, we have had to adapt to changes in operations due to COVID-19, we still continue to thrive to assist local landowners, be leaders in conservation, and work to restore our local watersheds.

What I am noticing most with our RCD is the shift from project-driven to program-driven organization, meaning instead of working to develop individual projects for a resource concern, we now have programs that address forest health, water conservation, species recovery, farm resilience, soil health, and species management, to name a few. For instance, our Healthy Soils Program has been successful at helping landowners connect with funding sources while also providing important information and analysis of healthy soil conservation practices on local agricultural lands. Similarly, the Santa Rosa Creek Streamflow Enhancement Project, which evaluates the feasibility of recharging groundwater during winter storm events, is moving along well and gaining interest. The program is a flagship of working with landowners, academia, consultants, and resource agencies to develop small, but significant, projects that accumulate to greater watershed health.

As an organization, we are continually evolving. This past year we applied and were awarded an Americorps/Grizzlycorps member to assist with regenerative agriculture, soil health, water conservation, and forest resilience. We were among a small handful of RCDs in California that took the initiative to work with Americorps, California Volunteers, and University of California –Berkely to kick start the program. As an Americorps alumnus, it is a privilege to be able to provide interested members an opportunity to gain insightful knowledge about the Central Coast, the natural resource issues our community faces, and demonstrate collaborations with the RCD result in opportunities to improve and enhance the resiliency of local lands to climate change.

This year we recognized two of our long-standing board members. First, Mr. Mike Bonnheim was awarded the Conservationist of the Year Award by the RCD for his dedication to the responsible management and stewardship of soil, water, and natural resources. Mr. Bonnheim owns and operates a family-owned cattle ranch in the Adelaide area and has been a leader in conservation for many years. Additionally, we recognized Mr. Chuck Pritchard for his Lifetime Achievement Award. Mr. Pritchard has been with the Upper Salinas – Las Tablas RCD for over 40 years. Mr. Pritchard has been involved at the local and state level, advocating for conservation and collaboration with varied groups. Mr. Pritchard served on the boards of numerous natural resource and rangeland related organizations and committees, including serving as president of the California Association of Resource Conservation District's (CARCD).

This next year will present challenges, but also promises. As a small organization, we have remained relevant and necessary to help our local growers in improving their land management despite COVID-19. We have secured funding, hired staff, increased board membership, and implemented projects. We continue to be a central figure in conversations about resource issues and community networks. I look forward to the challenges ahead and building long-lasting partnerships.

Sincerely,

Devin Best

Healthy Soils in Northern San Luis Obispo County

The first full year of our second CDFA Healthy Soils Program demonstration project is nearly behind us and it proved quite eventful. This iteration of the popular California Department of Food and Agriculture grant program came to pass through determined outreach from our Templeton neighbors at Mesa Vineyard Management and Black Diamond Vermicompost. Combined with a willing and interested participant in Castoro Cellars and a long cultivated relationship with the Cal Poly Soils Department, this project began in earnest in the Fall of 2019. This state sponsored grant program comes through the Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation and is funded by the state's cap and trade proceeds also known as California Climate Investments (CCI).

This project was designed to assess the impact on vineyards of vermicompost solids and liquid vermicompost extract in congruence with organic dairy compost in contrast to a standard compost or no application at all. Throughout the lifetime of this project we will be collecting standard soil health data as well as Phospholipid Fatty Acid data. Annual yield and qualitative characteristics will be documented by the Mesa Vineyard Management team.

Unlike our first foray into the world of the Healthy Soils Program (HSP), this version of the project requires consistent Greenhouse Gas (GHG) monitoring throughout the period of performance. Dr. Charlotte Decock and her dedicated Cal Poly grad students assisted with the fabrication of these GHG sampling chambers which allow for a "flux" of GHG's to be measured over the course of several days. Their gas spectrometry lab has been analyzing data for trends. There are no definitive results after year one, although this isn't unexpected.

The addition of vermicompost trials into the HSP is evidence of a maturation of the program; recognizing the need to further our understanding of traditional and non-traditional agricultural techniques in the local learn-by-doing vein.





Atascadero Lake Water Quality Improvement Project



Prior to shelter at home, our Watershed Stewards Program Members, Oswaldo Martinez and Hayley Barnes, partnered with the City of Atascadero to host a watershed awareness volunteer event at the Atascadero Lake Park. The event was intended to provide an opportunity for community members to engage, improve and learn about their local watersheds. Over the two day event and with the help of many volunteers of all ages, a bioswale was installed and over 65 native plants were planted. The bioswale will help slow and filter storm water running off residential areas before it enters the lake, improving water quality for fish, wildlife and visitors. The bioswale was designed with two check dams that will slow the flow allowing sediment and other pollutants to drop out of the water column into the bottom of the swale and increase infiltration for a slower cleaner release of water into the lake.

The native plants, donated by Atascadero Mutual Water Company and the California Conservation Corps, were planted along the banks of the bioswale. These plants will help stabilize the banks of the bioswale and filter runoff. Volunteers also installed a drip irrigation system with help and material donated by Madrone Landscapes to ensure successful establishment of the new plants. Lastly, volunteers spread 40 cubic feet of mulch around plants and the surrounding area. The mulch will help protect soil in the area from erosion, improve soil health, improve water infiltration and sequester carbon. This event was a great opportunity to engage with the community to improve watershed awareness and health for fish, wildlife and recreationists. These plants will stabilize the bank of the bioswale and help filter runoff.

Recognizing Outstanding Leadership

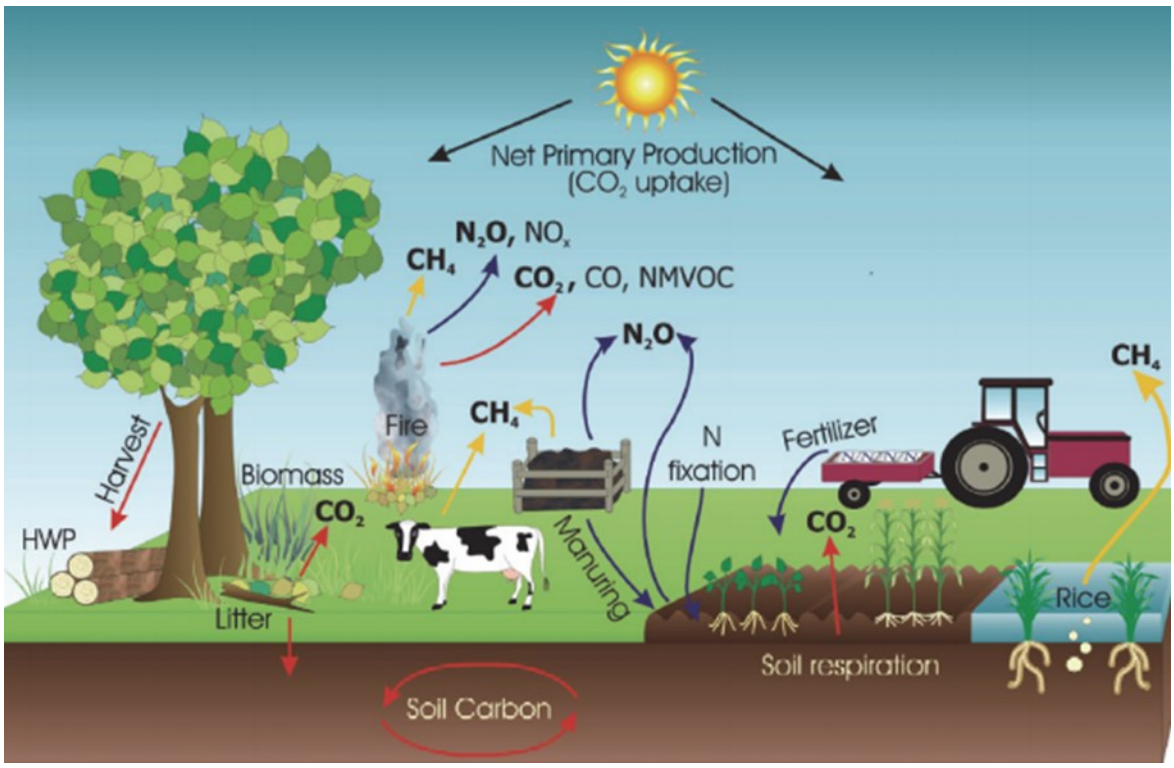
USLTRCD was pleased to award Mike Bonnheim the Conservationist of the Year for 2019.

Mike has been dedicated to land stewardship and is a fourth generation rancher specializing in multiple use management. Through his efforts, Mike has shown how to manage land for wildlife and agricultural production, while conserving natural resources. Mike continues to be at the forefront of conservation and a leader in developing best management practices and offers his expertise and insights to improve land stewardship and natural resource management for the community.

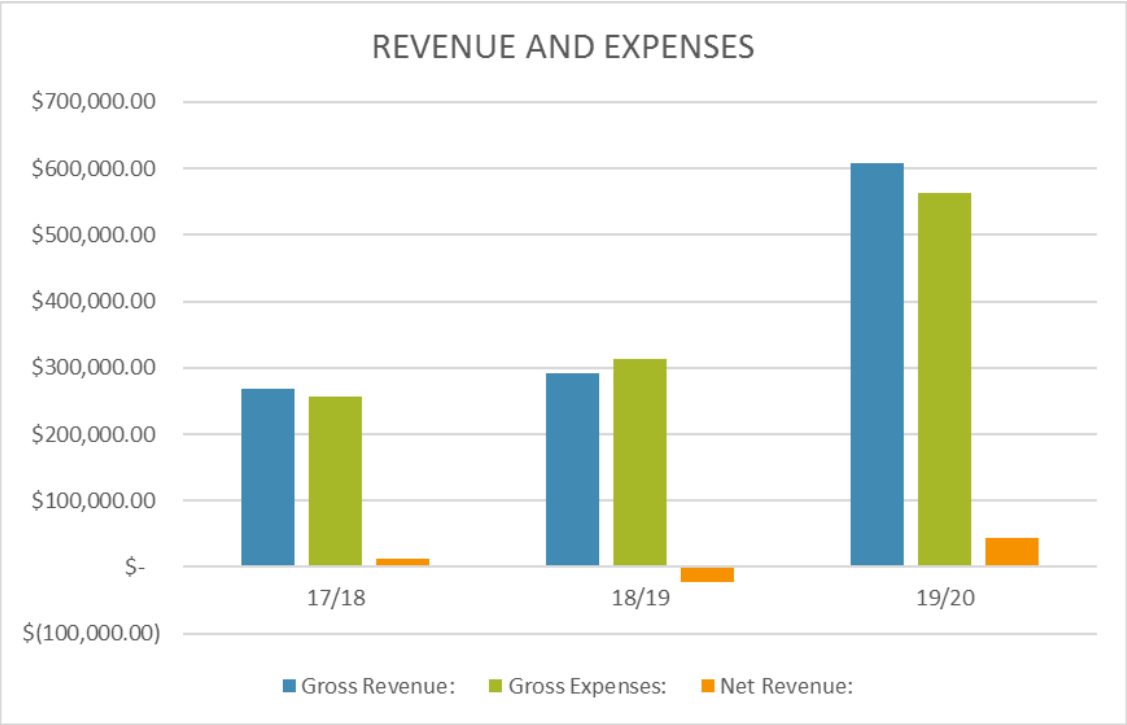


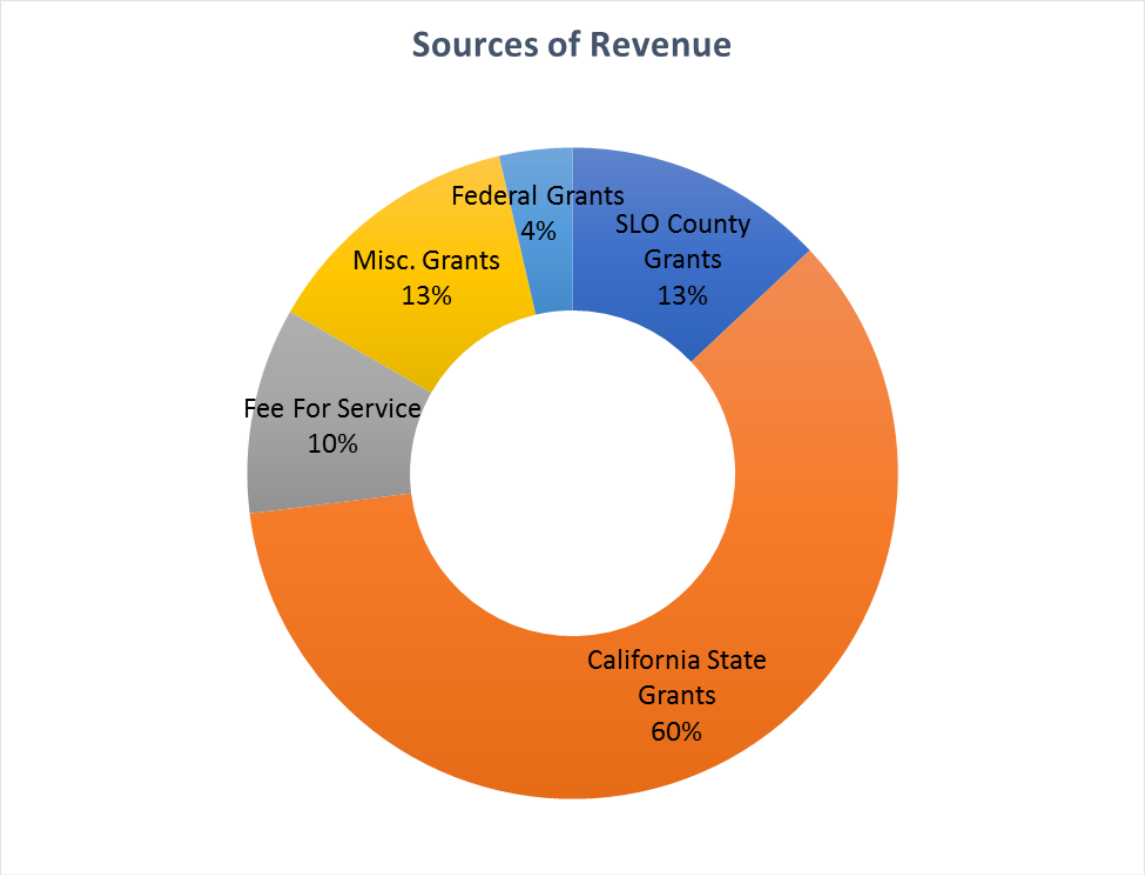
Carbon Farm Planning

Carbon farm planning is for agricultural producers who voluntarily want to be part of the global climate change solution. Grasslands are capable of sequestering atmospheric carbon in soils and vegetation and rangelands have the potential to be one of the largest carbon sinks in the world. By assessing the greenhouse gas balance of their entire farm operation, landowners can determine opportunities for GHG reductions and carbon sequestration associated with changes in land management. Carbon farm planning begins with establishing a baseline by documenting current land use practices and evaluating site specific factors. The carbon farm planner works with the landowner to identify conservation practice opportunities that will increase on farm carbon storage and improve soil health, water holding capacity and overall water quantity. Carbon farm practices that have been approved by the USDA-NRCS for greenhouse gas reduction include silvopasture establishment, forage and biomass planting, compost application, hedgerow establishment, residue and tillage management, critical area planting and many more. The final Carbon Farm Plan is a living document that can help guide the agricultural producer in management decisions that will provide greenhouse gas benefits and create more resilient landscapes for the future.



Finances and Funders







Thank you to our funders:

BioDiversity First

Department of Food and Agriculture

Carbon Cycle Institute

Coastal Conservancy

County of San Luis Obispo

Department of Conservation

Department of Water Resources

Pacific Gas and Electric Company

Patagonia

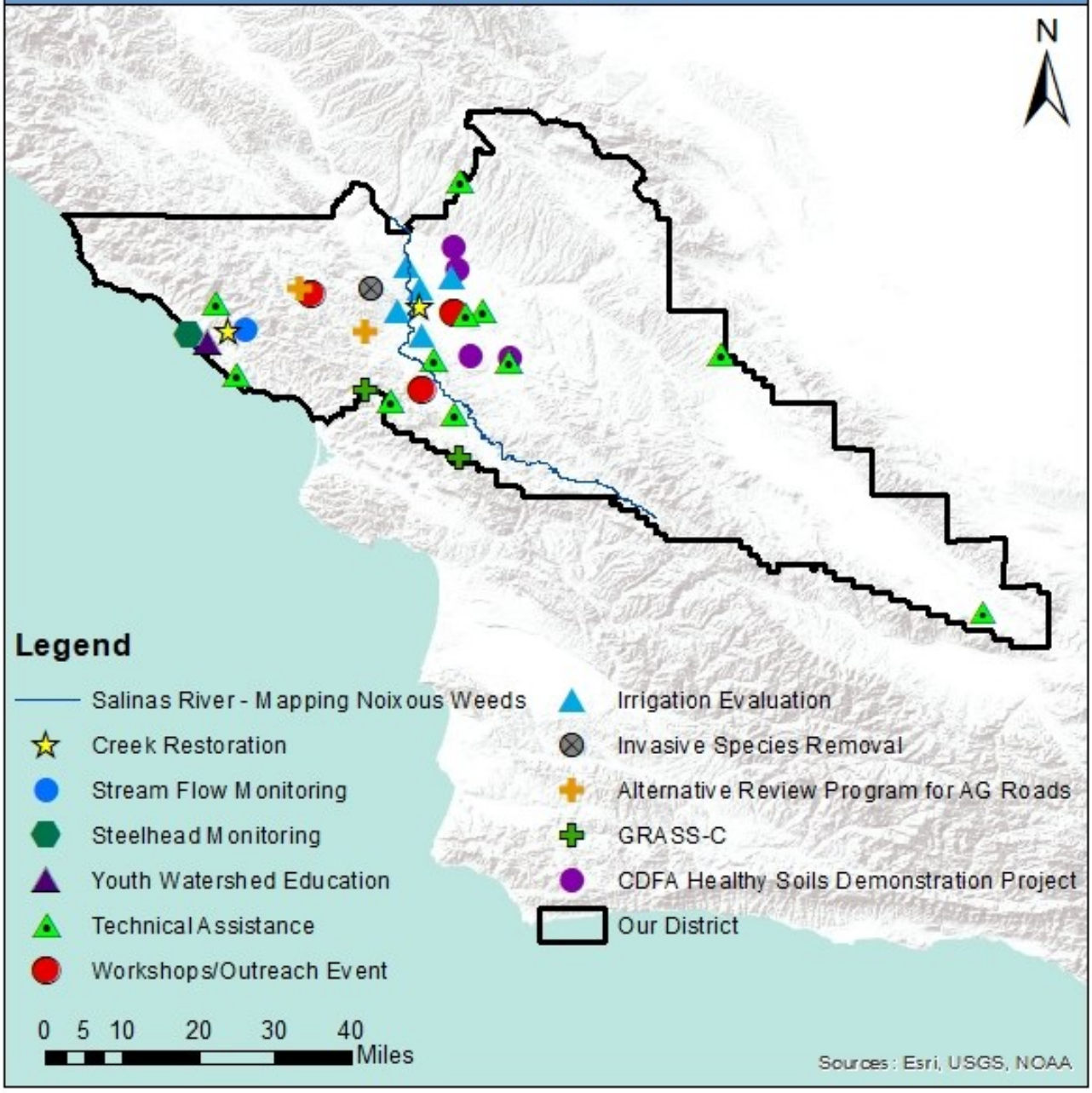
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

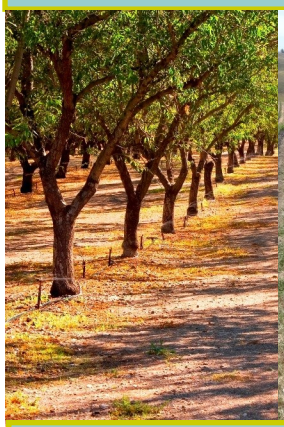
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Resource Legacy Fund

United States Fish and Wildlife

Our Impact


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Legend
Salinas River - Mapping Noixous Weeds
Creek Restoration
Stream Flow Monitoring
Steelhead Monitoring
Youth Watershed Education
Technical Assistance
Workshops/Outreach Event
Irrigation Evaluation
Invasive Species Removal
Alternative Review Program for AG Roads
GRASS-C
CDFA Healthy Soils Demonstration Project
Our District
0 5 10 20 30 40
Miles
Sources: Esri, USGS, NOAA









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