

# Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains Strategic Direction 2018-2022

*Adopted by the Board of Directors on April 23, 2018*

## **Our Vision**

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The Santa Monica Mountains are a unique treasure—an island of green in the midst of one of the most populated urban areas in the United States. Surrounded by dense urban development, these mountains are an oasis for native mountain lions; support one of the last historic runs of steelhead trout in southern California; contain endangered native amphibians that serve as indicators for the overall health of the ecosystem; and are covered with sensitive and diminishing oak woodlands that support many species of birds, plants, insects, and wildlife.

We believe that this special place deserves to be conserved and enhanced for the benefit of the animals and plants that live here—and their human neighbors who also call this place home.

***At the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains, we envision a future where the native plant and animal species of the Santa Monica Mountains thrive.***

We know that several elements are key to our success in pursuing this vision:

### ***Regional cooperation on critical issues***

The Resource Conservation District is one agency among many striving towards similar visions. We are committed to working closely with our many local, state, and federal partners, including California State Parks, the National Park Service, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Los Angeles County, local cities within the District, and many non-profit partners. Working together, we can leverage our strengths to reach our shared goals.

### ***Public engagement and support***

Agencies and organizations are not the only forces that matter when it comes to protecting and enhancing the ecosystems of the Santa Monica Mountains. The commitment of stewards of private lands, residents of the district, and visitors from throughout the Los Angeles area and beyond, is critical to the success of our efforts. Many people love these mountains as much as we do; harnessing their collective energy will move our efforts forward in new and creative ways.

### ***Preservation of open space***

One of the single most important factors in a thriving ecosystem is the ability of species to move freely and have the space to live out their lifecycles. Along with our partners, we will work to



preserve and enhance open spaces within the District to ensure the health of our ecosystems and native species.

### **Organizational Strength and Durability**

To accomplish real change, the Resource Conservation District organization itself must be strong and durable. Thus, we will work to create a culture of collaboration, creativity and accountability; we will work to generate stable and diversified funding; we will work to recruit, train and retain excellent staff and leadership; and we will work to ensure the Resource Conservation District has the facilities and equipment it needs to accomplish its mission.

### **Our Mission**

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The mission of the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains is to promote land stewardship and resource conservation through ecological research, conservation planning and design, habitat restoration and environmental education, while adhering to the highest standards of transparency and accountability as a public agency.

### **Goals and Supporting Strategies for 2018-2022**

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#### **Goal-Species Protection: Key species of the Santa Monica Mountains are protected**

##### **Strategies:**

- a. Conduct research to support the protection of key species.
  - ◆ *Identify key research needs.*
  - ◆ *Identify funding and partnership opportunities.*
  - ◆ *Integrate research with adult and student education.*
- b. Participate in activities to protect and enhance key habitats.
  - ◆ *Coordinate state of science research with planning and implementation of restoration actions, such as the wildlife crossings, Topanga and Trancas lagoon restorations, etc.*
  - ◆ *Convene teams of practitioners actively engaged in habitat restoration to share expertise in regional meetings.*
- c. Provide information to policy makers on natural resource concerns in the Santa Monica Mountains.
  - ◆ *Facilitate and participate in Technical Advisory Committees to provide a forum for integrating various agency and jurisdictional agendas into coordinated habitat restoration goal setting and implementation.*



- ◆ *Submit comments on local, regional and statewide plans and proposals with implications for the future of the Santa Monica Mountains.*
- ◆ *Continue to facilitate communication between agencies and public policy makers.*

**Goal-Partnerships: The RCD, landowners and regional partners work cooperatively and proactively to address natural resource priorities for the Santa Monica Mountains.**

**Strategies:**

- a. Understand the shared natural resource concerns of local jurisdictions and regional partner agencies.
  - ◆ *Initiate regular (bi-annual) and focused meetings with elected officials and agency leaders in all local jurisdictions and partner agencies to identify shared goals and opportunities for collaboration.*
  - ◆ *Invite elected officials and agency leaders to tour RCD projects.*
  - ◆ *Make regular presentations on the work of the RCD to the governing bodies of key jurisdictions and partner agencies.*
- b. Proactively convene regional conversations on key shared natural resource concerns for the Santa Monica Mountains.
  - ◆ *Convene one or two initial regional conversations about issues of urgent interest.*
  - ◆ *Document commitments of each partner in addressing the issues.*
  - ◆ *Encourage and document partnership projects that emerge.*
  - ◆ *Develop a framework for agencies to share in the cost of convening these conversations.*
- c. Leverage the RCD's strength in scientific research and conservation planning/design to support regional approaches.
  - ◆ *Identify and pursue funding opportunities that fit regional priorities and leverage RCD research and restoration design capacities.*
  - ◆ *Provide scientific and restoration design perspectives on key initiatives and projects throughout the region.*
- d. Work with private landowners in the Santa Monica Mountains to implement best management practices for land stewardship on their properties.
  - ◆ *Design and launch environmental services program.*
  - ◆ *Design and launch "conservation awards" program.*
  - ◆ *Design programming to encourage establishment of conservation easements.*
  - ◆ *Work with Los Angeles County and landowners to implement regional plans and their mitigation requirements.*



**Goal-Education: Residents and visitors to the Santa Monica Mountains understand the natural resource needs of the area and actively support the protection and enhancement of local ecosystems.**

**Strategies:**

- a. Understand the natural resource concerns of residents and visitors to the Santa Monica Mountains.
  - ◆ *Survey residents to understand their concerns and current levels of awareness.*
  - ◆ *Host community conversations about key natural resource concerns.*
  - ◆ *Review information gathered by partner agencies regarding visitor concerns and awareness.*
  - ◆ *Understand partner agencies' outreach and education priorities.*
  - ◆ *Work with agencies and partners to create programs that align with RCD mission and vision.*
- b. Provide opportunities for adult residents and visitors to learn about and connect to the Santa Monica Mountains and understand their role in protecting and enhancing the area.
  - ◆ *Expand adult education programs tied to RCD research and restoration work.*
  - ◆ *Establish and promote regular volunteer opportunities to engage the community in RCD projects via restoration and citizen science.*
  - ◆ *Develop certification courses and college credit classes for environmental education.*
  - ◆ *Expand participation in local, regional and statewide environmental and outdoor education groups (i.e., Association of Outdoor Educators, NPS Education, Southwest Marine Educators' Association, SMM Education Consortium)*
- c. Provide opportunities for students to learn about and connect to the Santa Monica Mountains and understand their role in protecting and enhancing the area.
  - ◆ *Refine school-age programs to connect more closely to current natural resource issues and RCD research and restoration projects within framework of NGSS.*
  - ◆ *Expand school-age programs to more schools, both in the field and in the classroom.*
  - ◆ *Create learning opportunities for educators to better serve students.*
  - ◆ *Expand internship opportunities with local research, secondary and higher education institutions.*



**Goal-Staffing and Culture: The RCD's staffing structure and internal culture support long-term sustainability of the organization.**

**Strategies:**

- a. Establish a staffing and compensation structure that allows the RCD to accomplish its goals.
  - ✦ *Review the staffing structure of the RCD to clarify responsibilities and ensure key functions, including partnership development, fundraising, and outreach, are covered.*
  - ✦ *Develop policies and procedures for performance planning and staff development.*
  - ✦ *Research and develop a compensation and benefits plan to better retain staff.*
- b. Establish a culture of collaboration and communication.
  - ✦ *Maintain regular communication between departments.*
  - ✦ *Establish the roles and responsibilities of the leadership team.*
  - ✦ *Conduct annual planning activities.*
  - ✦ *Maintain and enhance cross-program integrations to support RCD goals.*
  - ✦ *Create and execute communication methods and activities to integrate all Directors, staff and volunteers into the RCD and keep them informed of happenings.*

**Goal-Advancement: The RCD has the funding, recognition, and infrastructure it needs to accomplish its goals.**

**Strategies:**

- a. Establish a diversified and resilient funding structure for the organization.
  - ✦ *Ensure that partnership development and fund seeking duties are assigned and executed.*
  - ✦ *Plan for and execute boundary expansion into areas adjacent to the District that make sense from a watershed, ecological and financial perspective.*
  - ✦ *Research funding structures of comparable RCDs in California.*
  - ✦ *Conduct program-by-program funding analysis and business planning.*
  - ✦ *Establish multi-year budget projections to support strategies and activities.*
  - ✦ *Develop an overall revenue plan for the RCD.*
- b. Ensure that the RCD communicates its value to stakeholders.
  - ✦ *Identify key audiences, messages, and communications methods.*
  - ✦ *Establish an RCD communications work plan and budget.*
  - ✦ *Assign communications roles to staff and board*



- ◆ *Plan for assessment method to determine effectiveness and necessary corrections.*
- c. Proactively plan for the capital and facility needs of the RCD.
  - ◆ *Identify the RCD's facility needs over the next five to ten years.*
  - ◆ *Create a plan to locate and fund facilities before Topanga office lease expires.*
  - ◆ *Establish a capital replacement plan for program and administrative equipment.*

**Goal-Board: The activities of the Board of Directors advance the goals of the RCD.**

**Strategies:**

- a. Engage in strategic visioning and planning for the RCD.
  - ◆ *Conduct semi-annual review of the annual plan and budget.*
  - ◆ *Review Strategic Direction document annually.*
  - ◆ *Hold an organizational planning retreat every three years.*
- b. Act as ambassadors to enhance the RCD's public engagement and image.
  - ◆ *Identify key audiences for board outreach.*
  - ◆ *Communicate opportunities for board engagement in outreach activities.*
  - ◆ *Establish expectations for board engagement in outreach and funding development.*
  - ◆ *Track board member outreach activity.*
- c. Recruit and engage advisors and future Board members.
  - ◆ *Identify needed skills and qualities.*
  - ◆ *Identify potential associate directors, committee members and advisors.*
  - ◆ *Develop clear job descriptions and assignments.*
  - ◆ *Engage with the District's County Supervisor to establish priorities for RCD board service.*
  - ◆ *Establish a recruitment plan.*
  - ◆ *Track recruitment activity.*
- d. Conduct annual review of the Executive Officer.
  - ◆ *Annually revisit Executive Officer job description and key duties.*
  - ◆ *Establish process for annual review.*
  - ◆ *Conduct annual review.*
- e. Provide orientation and training to new and existing board members.



- ◆ *Ensure compliance with Brown Act, Division 9 and other training and applicable disclosure requirements.*
- ◆ *Maintain regular exposure to RCD programs for all board members.*
- ◆ *Identify ongoing board training needs.*
- ◆ *Ensure content is provided and updated for orientation of new Board members.*



## Components of a Strategic Plan

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### Vision, Goals, Strategies, and Activities

#### Vision

- Why you are doing this work in the first place—what is the ultimate result you seek?

#### Goal

- What you want to be true at the end of the plan timeframe (or often beyond).

#### Strategy

- At a high level, how you intend to move towards the goals over the next several years.

#### Activity

- At a more detailed level, how you will move forward on a particular strategy.

