

Ventura County Resource Conservation District

Strategic Plan 2019-2023



Adopted: March 20, 2019

Current Board of Directors

Mark Mooring, President
Mike Mobley, Vice President/Treasurer (Past President)
William L. Morris, III, Director
Kevin Cannon, Director
Tom Crocker, Director
Merrill Berge, Secretary
Sean Anderson, Director

District Staff

Debra Gillis, Executive Director
Dr. Jamie K. Whiteford, District Scientist
Alexcia Ballinger, Environmental & Land Mgmt. Specialist
Vahid Akundzadeh, Irrigation Specialist
Dawn Whiteford, Administrative/Field Assistant

Creators of the Strategic Plan

Aubrey E. Sloan, Past President
Mike Mobley, Vice President/Treasurer (Past President)
Merrill Berge, Secretary
Tom Crocker, Director
William L. Morris, III, Director
Kevin Cannon, Director
Peggy Ludington, Director

Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Definitions 4

Continuation Process of the Plan 5

Mission, and Vision 6

District Elevator Speech..... 7

Five-Year Strategic Resource Priorities 7

- 1.0 Water Resources
- 2.0 Fire Preparedness
- 3.0 Soil & Climate Resilience
- 4.0 Invasive & Resistant Species
- 5.0 Land Resource Management
- 6.0 Wildlife Habitat
- 7.0 District Communication & Outreach
- 8.0 District Operations

Strategic Plan Consultant – Boardworks by Ledgerwood

Ray Ledgerwood

Introduction

A Strategic Plan is a top level planning document for an organization to set clear direction over all operational aspects of its mission. It serves as a framework for decision making over a five-year period. It is a disciplined effort intended to produce fundamental decisions that shape what a District plans to accomplish by selecting a rational course of action. This planning process began with a scan of the District's business environment including an objective assessment of the District's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Starting with that information the District's Mission, Strategic Resource Priorities and the overall structure of this Strategic Plan were developed by the Board and staff in a workshop setting. Within the framework of that structure and the business environment, strategies and goals were developed to sustain, and where appropriate, improve the District over the next five years. This Strategic Plan seeks to strengthen and build upon opportunities while addressing areas of concern.

This plan also identifies actions, activities, and planning efforts that are currently underway or planned and which are needed for continued success in operations and management of the District, and provides for periodic reviews and updates.

Strategic Planning Definitions

Mission Statement: A declaration of the District's purpose, which succinctly describes why the District exists. All activities of the District should be in support of the Mission Statement. The Mission Statement is adopted by the Board of Directors.

Strategic Resource Priorities: These focal areas of District business and opportunity represent what should or must be addressed over the planning period. Strategic Resource Priorities are derived from the foundational Mission

and Board Vision statements of the District. They are linked to action and results through the Strategic Goals written for each Strategic Resource Priority of the Strategic Work Plan. Within the five-year period covered by this Strategic Plan, addressing these Priorities assure that critical aspects of District operations are well supported and are moving forward in a way that reflects Board priorities.

Objective: A concise statement associated with each Strategic Resource Priority that describes the objective of that Priority. It explains why addressing that Priority is important to the District's overall strategy.

Strategic Goals: A short statement of desired success. The goal statement is supported by a narrative that more fully explains the nature of the goal and the issues that the goal intends to address. The Strategic Goals are prepared by management and accepted by the Board. The Strategic Goals will change from year-to-year when the annual assessment is made of the progress on each Strategic Element. The Strategic Goals straddle the line between policy (Board responsibility) and implementation (management responsibility) and as such are a collaborative effort of both the Board and management.

Continuation Process of the Plan

A key part of the Strategic Planning process is to conduct an annual review to update the Plan. These reviews allow for regular maintenance of the Plan so that it reflects the actual progress and conditional needs of the District. The reviews will be documented and followed up with by either a Plan supplement or an updated Plan. A five-year planning horizon will be maintained with each review effort developing a new fifth year of actions, projects and initiatives.

Mission Statement and Five-year Strategic Resource Priorities

DISTRICT MISSION

Our Mission is to Collaborate with Landowners, Government Agencies, and Willing Partners to Facilitate the Conservation and Restoration of Ventura County's Natural Resources for Current and Future Generations.

DISTRICT VISION

- *Provide leadership in the stewardship, protection, and perpetuation of the County's natural and agricultural resources.*
- *Foster conservation stewardship of our agricultural and natural resources to perpetuate and sustain the county's economic viability.*
- *Collaborate with landowners and partners to create, promote, and apply innovative methodologies for the protection, enhancement and resilience of agricultural and natural resources.*
- *Lead the community in collaborative dialogue with land use stakeholders in the resolution of diverse agricultural and natural resources issues.*
- *Promote greater community involvement in developing programs and practices that protect our agricultural and natural resources.*
- *Provide education and outreach opportunities to improve understanding of natural and agricultural resource conservation.*

DISTRICT ELEVATOR SPEECH

Resource Conservation Districts, or RCDs, are special districts of the State of California. There are about 100 RCDs in the State and the Ventura County RCD is your local RCD. We work with landowners, such as farmers, ranchers, and other public agencies, to address natural resource issues. We apply for public and private grants to assist landowners with projects that conserve water, protect environmental quality, manage nutrients, improve soil health, restore natural habitat, and educate others about resource stewardship.

DISTRICT FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC RESOURCE PRIORITIES

The following are priorities in which the District plans to focus time and resources to strengthen and improve over the next five years.

- ***Water Resources***
- ***Fire Preparedness***
- ***Soil & Climate Resilience***
- ***Invasive & Resistant Species***
- ***Land Resource Management***
- ***Wildlife Habitat***
- ***District Communication & Outreach***
- ***District Operations***

Strategic Implementation

The Strategic Implementation Plan below lists the RCD's Strategic Resource Priorities along with their associated Objective and Strategic Goals which provide guidance on plans, actions, and initiatives organized to accomplish the Objectives.

1.0 Water Resources

Objective: Improve water quality, quantity, and security by working to achieve water quality standards, enhance water resources, reduce excess water use, and broaden the role of the Mobile Irrigation Lab beyond agriculture.

- 1.1 Improve water quality by increasing the use of irrigation, nutrient, and soil management practices, as well as other non-point source pollution control measures, through an expansion of both implementation projects and education projects.*
- 1.2 Improve water quantity by supporting agricultural, rural, and urban water resource enhancement and alternative source projects, including water recycling, reservoir evaporative loss reductions, stormwater quality improvements, and soil retention/groundwater recharge projects.*
- 1.3 Improve water security by increasing the use of water conservation practices that match water needs with water use, including climate and soil-based irrigation scheduling, near real-time automated irrigation management, on-site water storage, and conversions of Water Districts from scheduled to on-demand water deliveries.*
- 1.4 Diversify the Mobile Irrigation Lab to service urban areas by developing projects focused on urban water conservation priorities such as irrigation evaluations of large turfgrass areas, xeriscaping, rainwater capture, and gray water system installation.*

1.5 Support County and Conservation Partner water resource initiatives by assisting with the coordination and streamlining of local and regional water resource-related planning and implementation projects.

2.0 Fire Preparedness

Objective: Establish a fire prevention program, develop and provide fire recovery resources, and coordinate with other agencies to streamline fire-focused conservation efforts.

2.1 Continue and expand upon fire prevention and safety initiatives, including the development of a comprehensive “living with fire” educational campaign, technical (planning and assessment) assistance, and cost-share opportunities for fuel reduction management practices on fire-prone lands.

2.2 Improve the pace and scale of post-fire recovery projects on impacted lands, including the development of an informational toolkit, technical planning assistance, and implementation funds.

2.3 Coordinate with other agencies to avoid duplicity, streamline and strengthen support aid for impacted landowners, define the RCD’s role, and develop coordinated, multi-agency agreements and grant applications.

3.0 Soil & Climate Resilience

Objective: Develop projects and programs to expand the use of soil-based practices linked to climate resilience, particularly those that sustain soil health, sequester carbon, reduce energy consumption, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions

3.1 Continue to implement soil conservation practices and prioritize areas where soil loss can exacerbate vulnerabilities in natural climate mitigation ecozones, such as riparian corridors, estuaries, wetlands, and coastal zones.

3.2 Increase the use of soil carbon sequestration practices on public and private lands to improve soil health, protect environmental quality, provide habitat, and mitigate climate change.

3.3 Collaborate with landowners to develop carbon plans and quantify the impact of agricultural practices on carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions to support the emergence of a carbon-based climate-change mitigation market.

3.4 Provide technical assistance to landowners and conservation partners applying for funds to implement soil and climate resilience projects, initiate soil health education efforts, and develop a soil health demonstration curriculum for youths and adults in the county.

4.0 Invasive and Resistant Species

Objective: Address invasive and pesticide resistant species through education programs and management projects that protect surface water beneficial uses, restore native species habitat, and mitigate impacts from these species on agriculture.

4.1 Work with partners to implement removal projects and identify strategies to reduce the spread of invasive species such as Arundo and Tamarix in Ventura County's watersheds.

4.2 Continue current and pursue new projects to identify and eliminate refuge for insects such as Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer and Asian Citrus Psyllid within urban landscapes and parklands.

4.3 Provide outreach on how to identify invasive, noxious, and pesticide-resistant weeds and guidance on treatment practices to control their spread.

4.4 Support County efforts to control priority species by developing Citizen Science-based programs that can be leveraged to identify and map emerging threats.

5.0 Land Resources Management

Objective: Hold easements and manage mitigation projects to facilitate the perpetual conservation of the County's natural resources.

- 5.1 *Begin to work with respective agencies to identify potential land easement opportunities.*
- 5.2 *Begin to work with respective agencies to identify potential mitigation projects to manage.*
- 5.3 *Develop a holistic framework of practices, such as critical area plantings, water capture, and hedgerows, organized in a prioritization matrix so practices can be implemented in order of their potential to maximize environmental multi-benefits.*
- 5.4 *Integrate mixed-use capacity for easements, recreation, education, and production, as appropriate, to demonstrate to the public the diverse value of Ventura County's lands.*

6.0 Wildlife Habitat

Objective: Become active in habitat mitigation programs and provide education to various land users.

- 6.1 *Use the District website, social media, and outreach to promote the importance of both native and introduced pollinators by providing toolkits, including pollinator seed mixes, habitat structures, and guidelines for reducing impacts on these species.*
- 6.2 *Demonstrate to all landowners the importance of their role in providing and maintaining wildlife habitat on or adjacent to their properties by actively recognizing individuals that implement wildlife stewardship practices*

-
- 6.3 *Promote working lands as refuge for wildlife by promoting habitat enhancement projects and quantifying ecosystem benefits.*
 - 6.4 *Identify potential role for RCDs to secure or develop linkage component for wildlife corridor.*
 - 6.5 *Continue to pursue fire preparedness projects with communities in areas which have the potential to impact sensitive habitat.*

7.0 District Communication & Outreach

Objective: Develop a strategy that communicates our work to constituents to be a leader in Ventura County conservation and known for conserving and developing our natural resources.

- 7.1 *Develop a strategy that communicates our work to constituents by utilizing social media platforms, RCD websites, community events, board members and landowners, events that invite speakers to provide information to the public on local land issues and solutions, quarterly newsletter and distribute to our email list, local agencies, the county and local media outlets.*
- 7.2 *Develop and implement a conservation and stewardship program, targeting school aged children and local landowners. Develop a conservation and agriculture education program to address current and relevant information for our County, administered through attending County events, fairs, meetings, and partnering with other agencies on their education and outreach needs as well as through social media.*
- 7.3 *Develop and implement a Citizen Scientists' Program to educate and involve the public on current environmental and conservation issues in our County. This will be achieved through distributed educational materials and outreach to local schools, libraries, and community groups. We plan to seek funding for this.*

-
- 7.4 *Become known throughout the County as a force for good conservation and developing our natural resources. Identify and attend relevant meetings in the County. Participate and provide input to other agencies or groups when needed and relevant. The RCD will continue to maintain Tier II status with the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts, and work to obtain Tier III status.*
 - 7.5 *Develop partnerships with agencies and organizations to improve relevance and visibility. Schedule brief and informal presentations with other local agencies to provide basic information to their boards. Develop and seek ways to work with local water districts, County agencies and others to increase visibility and to identify opportunities for partnerships.*
 - 7.6 *Publicly recognize the community's role, efforts, and contributions in helping the RCD achieve our Strategic Resource Priorities by hosting community appreciation events.*
 - 7.7 *Develop guidelines for placing signs, placards, or other RCD-specific identifiers on RCD project sites.*

8.0 District Operations

Objective: Remain on a sustainable path of financial resources, including a stable and foundational base of funding for both program and general funding and to expand and diversify our programs.

- 8.1 *We will continue to monitor and reduce expenses where practical. New expenditures and spending will be carefully considered before being implemented. All grants and programs administered by the RCD will provide overhead and be profitable for the RCD. Develop and implement a "giving Tuesday" campaign using social media and mailing lists.*
- 8.2 *Have stable, foundational, project, and transitional funding. Develop a plan and timeline to identify and apply for funding. Develop relationships*

with foundations and increase general funding solicitations. Identify and apply for grants that match our strategic plans.

- 8.3** *Develop and acquire principal staff and be strategic in how we expand staff. Have an annual evaluation of staff workload. If the need arises, expand staff and determine appropriate responsibilities and pay. Analyze current staff's workload and determine additions, reassignment or reductions as necessary.*
- 8.4** *Develop dynamic and diverse programs encompassing urban and rural areas. Develop programs suitable for the RCD to have in their suite of projects that follow the strategic plan, and seek funding as it is offered for these programs, execute and administer them.*
- 8.5** *Develop, acquire and work on mitigation funded projects and easements. Research different mitigation funds and strategies and determine how to participate. After approval in a mitigation program, begin working with conservation mitigation projects.*