

***Ventura County Resource***

***Conservation District***

***Strategic Plan***

***2024-2029***



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## **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 Ventura County Resource Conservation District's (VCRCD's) business environment including an objective assessment of the VCRCD's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Starting with that information the VCRCD's mission, a set of 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 VCRCD over the next five years. This Strategic Plan (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 VCRCD and provides for periodic reviews and updates.

## **Strategic Planning Definitions**

Mission Statement: A declaration of the VCRCD's purpose, which succinctly describes why the VCRCD exists. All activities of the VCRCD 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 VCRCD 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 VCRCD. 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 the Priorities allows for critical aspects of VCRCD operations to be well supported and moving forward in a way that reflects Board priorities.

Objective: A concise statement associated with each Strategic Resource Priority that describes the objective of the priority. It explains why addressing the priority is important to the VCRCD'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. The review allows for regular maintenance of the Plan so that it reflects the actual progress and conditional needs of the VCRCD. The review will be documented and followed up with 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

The Ventura County Resource Conservation District is dedicated to promoting and facilitating the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of our natural resources. Through collaborative partnerships, innovative practices, and community education, we strive to enhance the health and vitality of Ventura County's ecosystems. Our Mission is:

*Facilitate the Conservation, Sustainability, and Restoration of Ventura County's Natural Resources for Current and Future Generations by working with Willing Partners and Community Members.*

### DISTRICT VISION

- *Provide leadership in the stewardship, protection, and the perpetuation of the County's agricultural and natural resources.*
- *Foster conservation stewardship of our agricultural and natural resources to perpetuate and sustain the County's economic viability.*
- *Collaborate with landowners, lessees, 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 relevant parties 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 CULTURE AND VALUES**

VCRCD's approach to its mission is rooted in the organization's culture of caring, collaboration, community, leadership, adaptability, and self-discipline. Embracing these six principles not only enables mission success, it makes the world a better place.

VCRCD's culture embodies its shared personal and professional values - justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, transparency, respect, integrity, curiosity, and commitment. These values bind VCRCD together in its dedication to its work, its team, and its community. They shape VCRCD's views and its actions, which, in turn, shapes the community's perception of VCRCD.

## **DISTRICT ELEVATOR SPEECH**

The VCRCD is dedicated to safeguarding Ventura County's natural resources through proactive conservation and community engagement. We work collaboratively with local partners, agricultural operations, and residents to enhance soil health and water quality, empower communities to be fire-wise and fire-adapted, promote habitat and climate resilience, and educate the community on environmental stewardship. By fostering partnerships and implementing innovative practices, VCRCD strives to provide a resilient and sustainable future for Ventura County's ecosystems and communities.

## **DISTRICT FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC RESOURCE PRIORITIES**

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

- *Water Resources*
- *Fire Preparedness*
- *Soil & Climate Resilience*
- *Invasive & Pesticide Resistant Species*

- *Land Resource Management*
- *Wildlife Habitat*
- *Outreach & Education*
- *District Communication*
- *District Operation*

## **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 scope of VCRCDD’s irrigation-related technical services.***

***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 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, onsite water storage, and conversions of Water Districts from scheduled to on-demand water deliveries.
- 1.4 Diversify the VCRCDD's 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 and the use of drought-tolerant plants, rainwater capture, and graywater system installation.
- 1.5 Support County and Conservation Partner water resource initiatives by assisting with the coordination, streamlining and management of local and regional water resource-related planning and implementation projects.

## 2.0 Fire Preparedness

**Objective: Establish a fire preparedness program, develop and provide fire recovery resources, and coordinate with other agencies to streamline fire-focused awareness efforts that include land conservation.**

- 2.1 Continue and expand upon efforts to reduce fire spread and safety initiatives, including the development of a comprehensive "living with fire" educational campaign, technical (planning and assessment) assistance, support for beneficial fire / Prescribed Burn Association (PBA), and cost-share opportunities for fuel reduction management practices on high fire risk lands.
- 2.2 Improve the pace and scale of post-fire recovery projects on impacted lands, including the development of informational toolkits, technical planning assistance, and implementation funds.

- 2.3 *Coordinate with other agencies to streamline, avoid duplicity, and strengthen support aid for impacted landowners, define the VCRCD's role, and develop coordinated, multi-agency agreements and grant applications.*
- 2.4 *Incorporate our local tribes and indigenous groups in partnerships, collaborations, and educational programing related to fire preparedness.*

### 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 and lessees to develop carbon farm 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, lessees, 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 Pesticide 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 donax and Tamarix spp. in Ventura County's watersheds.*
- 4.2 Continue current and pursue new projects to identify and eliminate refugia for insects such as Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer and Asian Citrus Psyllid within urban, agricultural, and park lands.*
- 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: Oversee easement and support/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 conservation easement opportunities.*
- 5.2 Begin to work with respective agencies to identify potential mitigation projects to manage.*

- 5.3 Assess, develop, and prioritize a holistic framework of practices, such as critical area plantings, water capture, and hedgerows, to implement in for 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.
- 5.5 Continue to offer technical and financial assistance to landowners, lessees, and other interested, affected, and relevant parties to implement natural resource conservation and mitigation projects on Ventura County's land.
- 5.6 Assist landowners seeking to transition towards multi-benefit land repurposing programs or implement similarly transformative land-use practices.
- 5.7 Develop, acquire and work on mitigation-funded projects and conservation easements. Research different mitigation funds and strategies and determine how to participate. After approval in a mitigation program, begin working with conservation mitigation projects.

## 6.0 Wildlife Habitat

**Objective: Become active in habitat restoration and conservation, including mitigation programs and provide education to various land users.**

- 6.1 Use the VCRCD 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 land users the importance of their role in providing and maintaining wildlife habitat on or adjacent to their properties by actively

*recognizing and supporting individuals who implement wildlife stewardship practices.*

- 6.3** *Encourage working lands to be a refuge for wildlife by promoting and supporting habitat enhancement projects and quantifying ecosystem benefits.*
- 6.4** *Identify the VCRCDD's role in collaborating with stakeholders with regards to wildlife corridors in Ventura County.*
- 6.5** *Continue to pursue fire preparedness projects with communities in areas that have the potential to impact sensitive habitats and reduce those impacts.*
- 6.6** *Continue to provide technical and financial assistance to agricultural operations and land users in areas that have the potential to impact sensitive habitats and species.*

## **7.0 Outreach & Education**

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

- 7.1** *Develop a strategy that communicates our work to constituents by utilizing social media platforms, VCRCDD 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, which may be administered through attending County events, fairs, field trips, demonstration site visits, 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. It will be achieved through distributed educational materials and outreach to local schools, libraries, and community groups.*
- 7.4 Become known throughout the County as a force for good conservation, restoring, and stewarding our natural resources. Identify and attend relevant meetings in the County. Participate and provide input to other agencies or groups when needed and relevant.*
- 7.5 The VCRCD will continue to maintain Tier II status with the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts, and work to obtain Tier III status.*
- 7.6 Publicly recognize the community's role, efforts, and contributions in volunteering to help the VCRCD achieve our Strategic Resource Priorities by hosting community appreciation events.*
- 7.7 Develop guidelines for placing signs, placards, or other VCRCD-specific identifiers on our project sites.*

## **8.0 District Communication**

***Objective: Develop and implement strategies that enhance clear, consistent, and impactful communications with donors, stakeholders, local government, and the Board of Directors to strengthen relationships and support the VCRCD's mission.***

- 8.1 Foster strong relationships with key stakeholders by providing regular updates, insights, and engagement opportunities tailored to their interests and needs.
- 8.2 Increase transparency and collaboration with local government and the Board of Directors through clear, concise reporting and strategic communications.
- 8.3 Enhance donor retention and growth by delivering targeted, compelling communications that demonstrate the impact of their contributions on the District's conservation efforts.

## 9.0 District Operation

**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.**

- 9.1 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 VCRCD will provide overhead and be profitable for the VCRCD. Develop and implement a “giving Tuesday” campaign using social media and mailing lists.
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 Develop and acquire principal staff and be strategic in how we expand staff. Have an annual evaluation of staff workload. As the need arises, expand staff and determine appropriate responsibilities and pay. Analyze

*current staff's workload and determine additions, reassignment or reductions as necessary.*

- 9.4** *Develop dynamic and diverse programs encompassing urban and rural areas. Develop programs suitable for the VCRCD 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.*
- 9.5** *Enhance VCRCD transparency and resilience through redundancy and clear operational protocols.*
- 9.6** *Enable the professional development of our staff and implement measures to encourage retention.*
- 9.7** *Establish key performance indicators (KPIs) for each goal and track progress as needed.*
- 9.8** *Conduct relevant surveys and feedback sessions to assess community engagement.*
- 9.9** *Prepare an annual report highlighting achievements, challenges, and future priorities.*

## **Conclusion**

The Ventura County Resource Conservation District's 5-year plan aims to create a sustainable future by protecting, enhancing, and restoring agricultural and natural resources, promoting resilient ecosystems, and fostering community involvement. Through strategic partnerships and innovative practices, we aspire to leave a positive environmental legacy for future generations in Ventura County.