

# ANNUAL REPORT 2025

NAPA COUNTY RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
NAPARCD.ORG / 707.690.3110



# CONSERVATION SOLUTIONS



## **Napa County Resource Conservation District (Napa RCD) provides environmental expertise to help our community conserve local soil, water and wildlife.**

Since 1945, we have been a trusted partner, serving Napa County's diverse population — from agricultural producers, landowners, youth and community members — by providing the expertise and resources needed for a resilient environment.

### **MISSION**

The mission of Napa RCD is to support and empower everyone in Napa County to conserve, protect, and restore natural resources.

### **VISION**

Napa RCD is committed to a vision of Napa County as a model of sustainability: A place where a healthy natural environment and thriving communities are intertwined in a way that they depend on, support, and enhance each other.

## **TOGETHER, WE'RE MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

*Based on data from 2025–2026*

- Supported over 41 farms and educated almost 70 farmworkers with regenerative agriculture practices, resulting in significantly enhanced soil quality and water efficiency.
- Worked with the community to improve forest health, wildfire resilience, and wildlife habitat, improving 567 acres, and providing hands-on guidance to 85 landowners / properties.
- Provided critical monitoring of miles of stream to track impact of restoration activities and take pulse of watershed health.
- 1,529 youth participated in hands-on environmental projects, inspiring the next generation of conservation leaders.
- 770 community members volunteered with Napa RCD to help protect wildlife habitats, restore waterways, and promote local biodiversity.



# LEADERSHIP LETTER

**Dear Friends,**  
**We are grateful you are here, as volunteers, donors, partners, and supporters of Napa RCD.**

This past year brought real progress on the conservation challenges that matter most to Napa County. Farmers worked with us to build healthier soils and use water more wisely. Steelhead and other native fish are reaching spawning habitat they've been blocked from for decades. Thousands of students spent time outdoors learning about the watershed they live in, and volunteers hauled thousands of pounds of trash out of the Napa River. Across the county and region, our team worked side by side with many community members on projects built to last.

We are now in the third year of our Strategic Plan, and the work is cohering in a way that feels meaningful. Watershed and fisheries recovery, creek and wetland restoration, forest health, regenerative agriculture, and education are not separate things we do, they are one response to one challenge: keeping our local environment healthy and resilient as the climate changes around us.

We will be honest with you: The funding environment ahead is difficult. Federal conservation programs have been cut back, competition for state dollars is growing, and the agricultural economy that shapes so much of our landscape is in a period of adjustment. We are planning for all of this carefully and realistically.

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But we are also genuinely excited about what's ahead. As vineyard land fallows and transitions, we have a real opportunity to help landowners establish native habitat, improve groundwater recharge, and restore biodiversity. Our restoration work at Huichica Creek and Suscol Creek is moving toward implementation, with plans to weave together habitat, community partnership, public access, and education into the same projects. A fish pass on Sulphur Creek, years in the making, is now significantly improved.

None of this happens without community. We see that every week in the farmers who take care of their soils, the volunteers who show up at the river, the students who go home and tell their families about beavers. Our job is to connect those people to the tools, the science, and each other. We feel lucky to do it.

Thank you, deeply, for your support of Napa RCD and the environmental health of Napa County.

**Lucas Patzek, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director

**Bruce Barge**  
Board President



# HUICHICA CREEK PRESERVE: A CREEK RECLAIMS ITS FUTURE



Napa RCD has owned 21 acres along the lower Huichica Creek since 1991. For 25 years, we operated a demonstration vineyard at the site, tested regenerative practices and hosted community education. Repeated flooding and saltwater intrusion made viticulture untenable, and in 2022 we removed the vineyard and its infrastructure.

A community visioning process identified floodplain restoration as the best long-term use for the site. Paired with adjacent lands, it could restore roughly 70 acres of habitat for wildlife and people.

Over the next two years, Napa RCD will develop a restoration plan and permits with funding from 2016's Measure AA, the clean and healthy bay measure. Working with a range of restoration experts, landowners, and the community, the effort will restore the creek and wetlands and strengthen connections between land and community.

## WHAT THE LAND IS TELLING US

Early findings point to strong potential for large-scale tidal and riparian habitat restoration:

- The site sits at an important transition zone between upland watershed and downstream tidal marsh
- Site conditions include existing infrastructure, periodic flooding, and channel degradation from historical modification
- Tidal influence and hydrology are primary design drivers
- Restoration must balance habitat with public access and continued farming nearby

## BUILDING A SHARED VISION

A public visioning process shaped the restoration direction, and engagement remains central to every phase ahead. Next steps include:

- Incorporate public feedback gathered through the initial comment period
- Complete the Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints report
- Develop restoration design alternatives and continue technical studies and modeling
- Hold the next round of community engagement in fall of 2026
- Continue guidance from the newly formed Advisory Committee, which includes members of the public

# FOREST HEALTH: BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

## THE CASE FOR PRESCRIBED FIRE

Fire, whether ignited naturally or strategically by humans, has been a part of California landscapes since time immemorial, shaping native plant, wildlife, and human communities. Over 100 years of fire suppression has dramatically changed California ecosystems and human relationship to fire. By returning beneficial fire to our landscapes, we can reestablish healthier ecosystems, and human connection to beneficial fire.

This is where Napa Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) comes in. Formed in 2023, and funded primarily by County of Napa and California Department of Conservation, Napa PBA is a volunteer-based mutual-aid network that empowers communities to use responsible burning practices to restore ecosystem health and reduce the risk of catastrophic fire by providing the education, training, and resources to conduct prescribed burns.

## A YEAR OF GROWTH, A YEAR OF IMPACT

With Napa RCD's focus on working with our community and partners, as well as our regional and state-wide collaborations, we are well suited to support the Napa PBA as the momentum builds. Currently Napa RCD dedicates staff time to coordinate Napa PBA, provide technical assistance, and secure funding to support the continued growth and impact of the movement.

Over the past year, Napa PBA and its partners have been increasing capacity to support the beneficial fire movement in Napa County. Key activities include providing technical assistance to landowners, bringing critical resources to private landowners to conduct pile burns, collaborating with neighboring PBAs to host certified trainings, coordinating educational and community-building opportunities, and ongoing efforts to deepen relationships with key community partners, like CAL FIRE, UC Cooperative Extension, and Napa Communities Firewise Foundation. As the need and scale of beneficial fire continues to increase, Napa PBA looks forward to building a strong PBA community to meet this need.

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# REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE: EXPLORING THE POWER OF BIOCHAR AND COMPOST

Napa RCD is helping growers make informed decisions about soil health investments that benefit their land, their business, and the broader ecosystem. Through our partnership with North Coast Soil Hub, our impacts go well beyond Napa County.

## ANCIENT WISDOM, MODERN SCIENCE

Long before anyone used words like carbon sequestration, Indigenous farmers in the Amazon discovered how to turn red clay into rich, fertile soils that still feeds crops today. They are a living reminder that people can build soil, not just use it.



## SOIL HEALTH IS CROP HEALTH AND WATERSHED HEALTH

Healthy soils hold more water, cycle nutrients more efficiently, and resist erosion — directly protecting the watershed. As organic matter increases, microbial activity improves, helping soils store carbon and support vine health and climate resilience.

## THE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

In 2021, Napa RCD set out to demonstrate how to build soil health in local vineyards. With funding from the USDA's Western Sustainable Research and Education Program, Napa RCD and Treasury Wine Estates launched a study in a Cabernet Sauvignon block with low organic matter. Four treatments are compared side by side: compost, biochar, both combined, and an unamended control.

## RESULTS FROM 2025 SOIL TESTING

Compost and biochar together are storing nearly 11 times more carbon than the control, an early sign of long-term climate benefit. These plots also show higher soil respiration, generally indicating a high level of microbial activity and vitality.

Compost alone shows the strongest improvements in soil structure and active carbon, both indicators of growing microbial activity and fertility.

## PUTTING SCIENCE TO WORK FOR GROWERS

It is still early to link these changes to grape yields or quality, but initial results indicate compost is improving soil health and biochar may be amplifying those benefits. Napa RCD will continue monitoring to study long-term impact.

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# WATERSHED HEALTH: REMOVING BARRIERS FOR FISH

## A MAJOR INITIATIVE FOR NATIVE FISH

Since 1945, Napa RCD has been a leader in environmental stewardship across Napa County's forests, farms, and watersheds. In 2024, we launched a major initiative to remove fish passage barriers in the Napa River Watershed, supported by over \$7.6 million from NOAA and the California Wildlife Conservation Board. Improving access to quality habitat gives native fish a fighting chance at recovery and long-term survival.

## 9 MILES OPENED TO FISH IN 2025

In 2025, Napa RCD opened up over 9 miles of creek habitat to fish by removing barriers from Sulphur Creek, Carneros Creek, and Huichica Creek. The Sulphur Creek project was the most impactful to local steelhead and salmon, as it opened up 3+ miles of one of Napa County's most important creek habitats. Working in close partnership with dedicated landowners, the project included removal of a broken fish ladder, replacement of an undersized bridge, and restoration of the creek channel.

## MORE TO COME - A LIVING ROADMAP

Working alongside a technical and cultural advisory group, Napa RCD is developing a science-based roadmap to identify, prioritize, and remove the remaining human-made barriers preventing fish from moving freely in the Napa River watershed. Current work includes:

- Removing 2 barriers in 2026, one on Dry Creek, and further lowering one on Huichica Creek
- Designing and permitting removal of barriers in Soda Creek and Pickle Creek
- Assessing the remaining 32 barriers to build a project pipeline
- Expanding fish monitoring to evaluate restoration effectiveness

## CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE WORK

Restoration doesn't end at the water's edge. Napa RCD is engaging the broader community through education, school trips, events, and volunteer opportunities that connect people directly to local habitat restoration — building a shared culture of stewardship that sustains this work for generations.



*Before and after fish passage improvements on Sulphur Creek*

# BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSERVATION LEADERS

## A DECADE OF PARTNERSHIP WITH VALLEY OAK HIGH SCHOOL

For over a decade, Napa RCD has partnered to provide environmental education to Valley Oak High School (VOHS) — a school renowned for its wraparound support of students' academic and personal growth. The majority of the school's students are from communities underrepresented in environmental jobs. Together, we've given hundreds of students the chance to engage with nature, plant acorns, and explore careers in Napa County's treasured open spaces.

This year, in partnership with long-time VOHS educator Julie Lovie, we led four cohorts of VOHS students through our Green Futures environmental education program. Major funding was provided by Lewis Cellars and County of Napa. Green Futures includes guided nature exploration time on campus paired with a day-long field trip to Skyline Park. More than 120 VOHS students practiced conservation job skills and connected with career mentors. Ultimately, we hope this plants the seed for a more diverse environmental workforce.

## IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

After participating in Green Futures this year:

- Each student spent 5.5 hours outside connecting with nature
- 91% of students reported positive or very positive outdoor experiences
- 100% felt more connected to local parks and open spaces
- 91% reported meaningful interactions with environmental professionals, gaining insight into potential career paths

## PATHWAYS TO CONSERVATION CAREERS

Napa RCD's Green Futures program provides a taste of what the environmental career pathway has to offer. For students looking for a deeper exploration, Napa RCD offers a paid Teen Conservation Internship that exposes students to a variety of job skills and opportunities while building leadership experience and connection to community.

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# THINKING ABOUT OUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

## FINANCIAL FOUNDATION

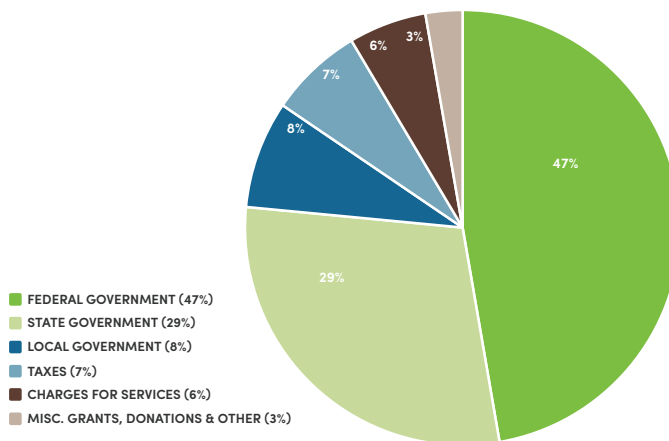
Napa RCD runs on a \$7.6 million budget, and nearly 80 cents of every dollar goes directly into community work: wildfire resilience projects, farmer support, habitat on the ground, and community education, not overhead.

## A FUNDING LANDSCAPE IN FLUX

Federal conservation dollars are shrinking and increasingly uncertain, so we're being disciplined: pursuing fewer federal awards and not building programs around grants we don't yet have in hand. Meanwhile, California's Proposition 4 is opening new state funding channels. Our near-term focus is clear: state and local partnerships, including deeper ties with regional governments.

| REVENUES                        | AMOUNT      | % OF TOTAL |
|---------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| State Government                | \$2,232,989 | 29%        |
| Federal Government              | \$3,611,938 | 47%        |
| Local Government                | \$610,132   | 8%         |
| Taxes                           | \$531,856   | 7%         |
| Misc. Grants, Donations & Other | \$209,859   | 3%         |
| Charges for Services            | \$442,260   | 6%         |
| TOTAL REVENUES                  | \$7,639,034 |            |

As a steward of public and private funds, Napa RCD is held to transparency and accountability laws: public meetings, open records, and annual audits. Figures reflect the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026.



## MORE COMPETITION, SAME MISSION

As other organizations chase the same shrinking pool of federal and state dollars, we're doubling down on two strengths: partnership and integration. Multi-partner, multi-jurisdictional proposals beat solo submissions. And projects that combine restoration, education, and community engagement—like our work at Huichica Creek—are simply more compelling to funders, because that's how conservation actually works on the ground.

## BUILDING FOR THE LONG HAUL

Winning the next grant isn't our overarching strategy, durability is. We're growing our donor base, expanding fee-based services, and pursuing new capacity funding, all to reduce reliance on any single source. The goal: an organization steady enough to weather changes without losing momentum on the work our partners and community members count on.



# CELEBRATING OUR SUPPORTERS

Conservation happens because people show up with their time, expertise, and generosity, and choose to make Napa County's natural resources a little healthier than they found it. This year, we celebrated that spirit with two unforgettable gatherings.

## AN AFTERNOON AMONG THE VINES

During Earth Month, golden light spilled across the patio at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars as donors, partners, and new friends gathered for an intimate celebration overlooking vineyards and centuries-old oaks. The event was made possible by Associate Director Balkis Johnson, and was equal parts celebration and conversation, as guests learned firsthand about the conservation work unfolding across the county.

## A THANK YOU: 800 VOLUNTEERS IN THE MAKING

This year also marked a first: Napa RCD's inaugural volunteer appreciation event, honoring the people who roll up their sleeves for our watersheds year-round. And what a year it was. Nearly 800 community members joined us in the field, photographing streams to monitor flow, planting trees, pulling invasive weeds, and hauling trash from the places they love. Every hour of that work adds up to healthier habitat for the wildlife that calls Napa County home.

# DONOR CIRCLE

## DONATIONS OF \$25,000+

Andy Beckstoffer  
Lewis Cellars  
Steve Rasmussen & Felicia Woytak

## DONATIONS OF \$1,000 – \$24,999

Bruce Barge  
Paul D'Antilio  
Isabella & Launce Gamble  
Wayne Grout  
Greg McGrath  
Robert Lee Hudson Foundation

## DONATIONS OF \$250 – \$999:

|                  |                     |
|------------------|---------------------|
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| Andrina Carlsen  | Shinnamon           |
| Carol Glaser     | Laura Snideman      |
| Jim Lincoln      |                     |
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## DONATIONS OF \$1 – \$249

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Paulette Litz  
Julie Lovie  
Kelli Marchbanks  
Robin McCarthy  
Wanda Miller  
Melissa Moravec & Kurt Reaume  
Patricia Moynihan

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



We are grateful for all of the partners in conservation with whom we work, including community members; local, state, and federal agencies; community organizations; foundations; and more. Our work is a team effort, and we are honored to work together to help the land, water, wildlife, and communities of Napa County thrive.

## STAFF

Lucas Patzek, Executive Director  
Danielle Ashton, Project Manager  
Karime Avalos, Accounting and Administration Specialist  
Bill Birmingham, Senior Project Manager  
Paul Blank, Program Manager  
Ali Blodorn, Program Director  
Monique Byro, Project Manager  
Aaron Fairbrook, Program Manager  
Miguel Garcia, Senior Project Manager  
Frances Knapczyk, Program Director  
Ashley Kvitek, Senior Project Manager  
Francisco Larios, Project Assistant  
Eric McKee, Senior Project Manager  
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Frank Bradley, Biologist  
Ben Schutsky, Engineer  
Erika Valek, Soil Conservationist

## PHOTO CREDITS:

Andrew Lincoln  
Napa RCD Staff and Volunteers





## BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Second Thursday of every month

8:00AM at the NVT, 625 Burnell St., Napa (*unless otherwise posted*)

Meetings are open to the public

Agendas and minutes may be found online

## NAPA RCD OFFICE

1303 Jefferson St., Suite 500B Napa, CA 94559

707.690.3110 / [NapaRCD.org](http://NapaRCD.org)

## NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE - NAPA OFFICE

1303 Jefferson St., Suite 500B Napa, CA 94559

707.252.4189 / [nrcs.usda.gov](http://nrcs.usda.gov)

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