

North Santa Clara Resource Conservation District

Public Review Draft – 2025-2030 LONG RANGE PLAN

Contact Information:

North Santa Clara Resource Conservation District

888 N 1st Street, Suite 204, San Jose, CA 95112

www.rcdsantaclara.org

nscrcd@nscrcd.org

A. ABOUT THIS PLAN

The North Santa Clara Resource Conservation District (District) Long Range Plan (LRP) establishes the Board of Directors' strategic direction for advancing conservation throughout the District over the 2025-2030 planning period. It identifies the long-term conservation priorities, organizational goals, and strategies that will guide the District's work while maintaining the flexibility to respond to changing environmental conditions, community needs, partnership opportunities, and available funding.

The LRP serves as a governance document for the Board of Directors, providing a common framework for strategic decision-making while communicating the District's mission, conservation philosophy, and priorities to landowners, partners, funding agencies, and the communities the District serves. Unlike an annual work program, the LRP does not identify specific projects or establish annual performance targets. Instead, it establishes the strategic direction that guides the District's annual planning, budgeting, and program development.

Each year, the Board adopts an Annual Work Plan (AWP) identifying the projects, partnerships, funding opportunities, and organizational initiatives to be pursued during the coming fiscal year. At the conclusion of each year, the District Manager prepares a Year-End Progress Report describing accomplishments and evaluating progress toward the priorities established in the LRP.

The development of this LRP began in 2024 and reflects one of the District's most comprehensive strategic planning efforts in recent years. It was informed through a SWOT analysis, Board and Associate Director input, stakeholder engagement, prior planning documents, and review of regional resource conditions and trends. Survey results were used to guide relative emphasis among priorities while maintaining alignment with the District's statutory role and long-standing service areas.

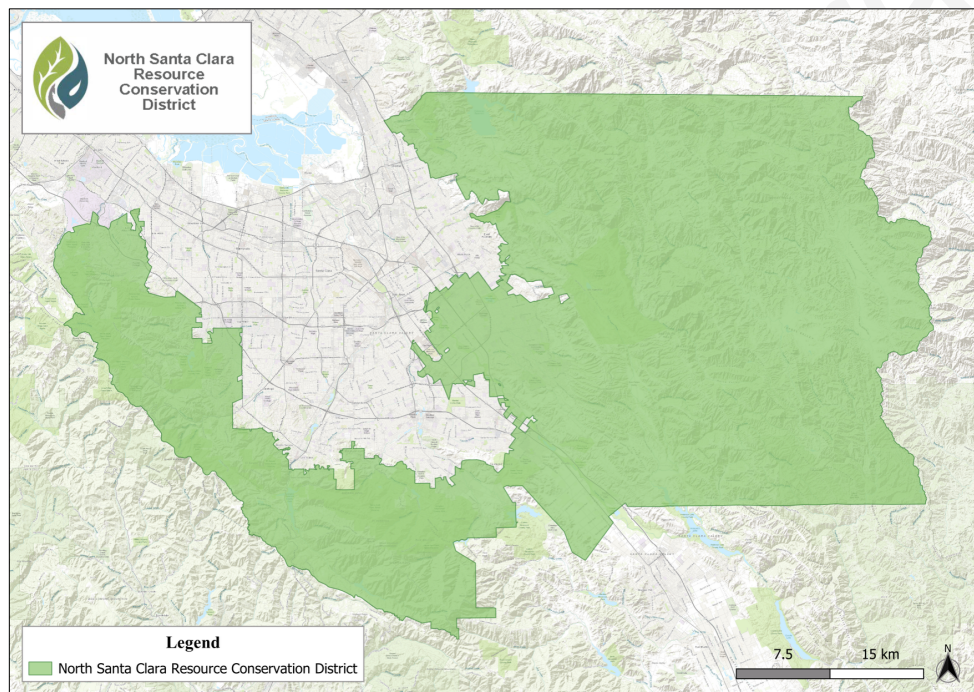
B. WHO WE ARE

Our Role

The District is an independent, locally governed special district of the State of California dedicated to helping people conserve, restore, and steward the natural and working landscapes of northern Santa Clara County. Unlike regulatory agencies, the District works collaboratively with landowners, agricultural producers, public agencies, Tribes, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and community members to develop voluntary, locally supported conservation solutions.

Established under Division 9 of the California Public Resources Code, Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) were created to address conservation challenges through community leadership, scientific expertise, and collaborative partnerships. Today, they continue that tradition by helping communities address increasingly complex conservation issues by bringing together technical expertise, practical stewardship, and diverse local perspectives.

The District is governed by a 5-member, volunteer Board of Directors. The Board also relies on its volunteer Associate Directors to provide additional expertise to the Board, including but not limited to the areas of natural resources conservation and management; agricultural and grazing management practices; environmental health; land use; engineering; physical and life sciences; public outreach and education; and local government policy and procedures.



Our History

California RCDs were established in response to one of the nation's greatest conservation challenges. During the 1930s, widespread soil erosion, flooding, and drought demonstrated that conserving land and water required locally led solutions grounded in sound science and voluntary cooperation among landowners. California authorized the formation of RCDs to provide that local leadership. The modern District traces its origins to the Black Mountain and Evergreen RCDs, which were formed during the 1940s. Following their consolidation, the District became known as the Guadalupe-Coyote RCD, reflecting two of the county's principal watersheds.

Since that time, the role of RCDs has evolved alongside California's changing landscapes and communities. While early conservation efforts focused primarily on soil and water conservation, today's conservation challenges increasingly require an integrated approach that recognizes the interconnected nature of working lands, watersheds, biodiversity, climate adaptation, wildfire

preparedness, and healthy communities. In 2022, the Board determined that the District's identity should better reflect both its geographic service area and its integrated approach to conservation. The name *North Santa Clara Resource Conservation District* emphasizes the District's commitment to serving the broader conservation and community needs of northern Santa Clara County through stewardship of its interconnected working lands, watersheds, ecosystems, and communities.

C. OUR CONSERVATION LANDSCAPE

The District encompasses an extraordinary diversity of landscapes, communities, and natural systems. It serves approximately 583 square miles and an estimated 300,000 residents across urban, urban-edge, rural, foothill, forested, and working landscapes. These landscapes are interconnected through the region's watersheds and include agricultural lands, rangelands, stream corridors, open space, and communities that are increasingly vulnerable to wildfire and climate-related impacts.

Santa Clara County's agricultural heritage rests upon a much longer history of Indigenous stewardship. For thousands of years, Tribal communities maintained deep relationships with the region's lands, waters, and ecosystems through practices informed by ecological knowledge, cultural responsibility, and care for future generations. The District recognizes the continued presence, stewardship, and contributions of Tribal communities and values its ongoing partnerships that advance conservation, restoration, and resilience throughout the region.

Santa Clara County has a long history of agriculture, and the Santa Clara Valley was once known as the "Valley of Heart's Delight." Agriculture continues to play a vital role in the County's economy, landscape, and cultural identity despite ongoing urbanization and the continued loss of farmland. According to the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, Santa Clara County contained approximately 803 farms encompassing roughly 238,000 acres of farmland, representing declines of approximately 10% in the number of farms and 17% in farmland since preparation of the District's 2019-2024 LRP. Despite these declines, the County's 2024 Crop Report documented nearly \$390 million in agricultural production, reflecting the continuing importance of specialty crops, nursery production, mushrooms, lettuce and leafy greens, peppers, wine grapes, hay and forage production, and other working landscapes. The District also recognizes the growing role of urban agriculture, local food systems, and community-based stewardship throughout developed areas of the County. The long-term viability of agriculture is closely linked to the health of the watersheds, soils, biodiversity, and natural systems upon which it depends.

Regarding environmental stewardship, the District lies within the Santa Clara Basin, which consists of eleven interconnected watersheds that sustain communities, agriculture, groundwater recharge, fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, and other ecological functions throughout the region. As one of California's most economically dynamic and rapidly developing regions, northern Santa Clara County continues to experience increasing pressures from urbanization, habitat fragmentation, changing land use patterns, invasive species, climate change, drought, flooding, and wildfire. These challenges affect not only individual resources, but the health and resilience of the interconnected natural systems upon which both people and wildlife depend. For this reason, the District works collaboratively with federal, state, local, and Tribal governments; nonprofit organizations; educational institutions; industry associations; landowners; and community organizations to advance conservation, restoration, and stewardship throughout the region. By bringing together diverse partners and perspectives, the District can better advocate for integrated conservation solutions that provide multiple environmental, agricultural, and community benefits while making the best use of public and private resources.

Northern Santa Clara County is also one of California’s most economically dynamic and culturally diverse regions. The District serves communities representing many linguistic and cultural backgrounds, including significant Spanish-, Vietnamese-, and Chinese-speaking populations. These diverse perspectives strengthen the District’s ability to develop locally led conservation solutions that reflect the needs, values, and priorities of the communities it serves.

D. OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The District approaches conservation through an integrated landscape perspective that recognizes the interconnected nature of working lands, watersheds, ecosystems, wildlife, and communities. Effective conservation requires more than protecting individual resources – it requires stewardship that strengthens the relationship among people, the landscapes they depend upon, and the natural systems that sustain life. The District brings together scientific research, local knowledge, practical experience, and community partnerships to identify effective conservation solutions. Those solutions are then translated into on-the-ground stewardship, restoration, and education that improve the health and resilience of our landscapes and communities.

Our Mission

The District is considering several options for updating its mission statement. The final one will consider the options and public input when selecting a final mission statement.

Current mission statement:

- Option a: To provide education and technical assistance to constituents and watershed stakeholders to sustainably manage soil, water and wildlife with the best available science.

Other mission statement options being considered:

- Option b: To conserve natural resources and support sustainable land stewardship.
- Option c: To cultivate stewardship of soil, land, and water.
- Option d: To cultivate a resilient future by connecting communities to the science that protects our soil, water, and wildlife.
- Option e: To cultivate a resilient future through science, community action, and conservation.

Our Vision

Healthy, resilient landscapes and communities achieved through collaborative, locally led conservation.

Our Values

- Inclusive service.
- Collaborative leadership.
- Science-based decision making.
- Responsible stewardship.

E. HOW WE DELIVER CONSERVATION

The District advances its resource priorities by providing a consistent set of core services throughout its service area. While programs, projects, and funding opportunities evolve over time, these core services represent the primary ways in which the District supports landowners, agricultural producers, residents, partner organizations, and communities. Their delivery depends upon a combination of local property taxes, competitive grants, cooperative agreements, collaborative partnerships, and the District's organizational capability to respond to changing conservation needs and emerging opportunities.

District Service	Description
Technical assistance	Provides conservation planning, resource assessments, technical guidance, grant assistance, and implementation support that help landowners, residents, agricultural producers, and partners address local conservation needs.
Project Development and Implementation	Develops and implements conservation projects that restore, enhance, and steward working lands, watersheds, ecosystems, and communities.
Education and Outreach	Builds conservation awareness, stewardship, and informed decision-making through education, training, and community engagement.
Monitoring and Adaptive Management	Evaluates conservation outcomes and changing resource conditions to improve future planning, project implementation, and management decisions.
Partnership Development and Coordination	Builds collaborative relationships that leverage expertise, funding, and organizational capacity to achieve shared conservation goals.
Research and Demonstration	Supports applied research, innovation, and demonstration projects that improve conservation practices and inform future decision-making.

F. OUR CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

1. Working Lands Stewardship

Overview: Working lands – including farms, ranches, orchards, vineyards, managed forests, and rangelands – are fundamental to both Santa Clara County's heritage and environmental future. Because many conservation outcomes depend upon voluntary stewardship by private landowners and producers, support for working lands is foundational to many of the District's other conservation priorities. Accordingly, support for agricultural producers, land stewards, and conservation practices on working lands will remain integrated through the District's planning, partnerships, and implementation efforts. This approach reflects both the District's statutory role under Division 9 and the practical reality that many regional conservation objectives are achieved through voluntary stewardship on privately managed lands.

Goal: Support the long-term stewardship, resilience, and viability of working lands that sustain agricultural production, natural resources, and ecosystem services.

Guiding Strategies:

a. Support the people who steward working lands.

Provide technical assistance, conservation planning, and project support that helps agricultural producers, ranchers, landowners, and other land stewards conserve soil, water, wildlife habitat, and productive agricultural lands, including practices that support pollinators, beneficial insects, and integrated approaches to pest management.

b. Connect working lands to healthy landscapes.

Recognize that well-managed working lands contribute to healthy watersheds, wildlife habitat, pollinators and other beneficial insects, climate resilience, wildfire preparedness, and resilient communities.

c. Bring people and resources together.

Develop partnerships and secure funding to expand opportunities for voluntary conservation and make the best use of available expertise and resources.

d. Help the public understand the value of working lands.

Increase public understanding of how farms, ranches, forests, and other working lands contribute to healthy ecosystems, local food production, clean water, wildfire resilience, biodiversity, and resilient communities.

2. Watershed Health and Biodiversity

Overview: Healthy watersheds provide clean water, groundwater recharge, flood resilience, healthy ecosystems, and habitat for native species. Coordinated stewardship across public and private lands is essential to maintaining these benefits.

Goal: Protect and improve watershed function, water quality, habitat connectivity, and native biodiversity throughout the District.

Guiding Strategies:

a. Protect and restore healthy watersheds.

Improve water quality, habitat, biodiversity, and ecological function by restoring and protecting streams, wetlands, riparian corridors, and other natural systems.

b. Think beyond property lines.

Encourage stewardship that connects habitats and strengthens watersheds across public and private lands, recognizing that healthy ecosystems depend on coordinated conservation efforts.

c. Work together to solve conservation challenges.

Collaborate with landowners, Tribes, public agencies, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and community groups to achieve lasting conservation outcomes.

d. Build a culture of watershed stewardship.

Use science, monitoring, education, outreach, and community engagement to help people understand how healthy watersheds and biodiversity support thriving ecosystems and resilient communities.

3. Climate Adaptation and Wildfire Preparedness

Overview: Changing climate conditions are increasing drought, extreme weather, and wildfire risk. Building resilient landscapes and communities requires proactive planning and coordinated stewardship.

Goal: Increase the resilience of landscapes, working lands, ecosystems, and communities to wildfire and changing climatic conditions.

Guiding Strategies:

- a. Prepare landscapes for a changing climate.**
Encourage stewardship that reduces wildfire risk and helps natural and working lands become more resilient to drought, flooding, extreme weather, and changing environmental conditions.
- b. Make resilience part of every conservation effort.**
Incorporate climate adaptation into conservation planning, restoration projects, land management, and District programs.
- c. Build strong partnerships before they are needed.**
Work with public agencies, landowners, Tribes, and community partners to strengthen regional preparedness and coordinated responses to climate and wildfire challenges.
- d. Help communities prepare for tomorrow.**
Support research, demonstration projects, education, and outreach that improve understanding of climate resilience and encourage practical actions that reduce risk and prepare communities for future challenges.

4. Restoration and Landscape Stewardship

Overview: Healthy landscapes require both protection and restoration where ecological functions have been degraded.

Goal: Restore, enhance, and steward natural landscapes to improve long-term ecosystem function and resilience.

Guiding Strategies:

- a. Restore places that need it most.**
Focus restoration efforts where they will provide lasting benefits to ecosystems, watersheds, wildlife, and communities.
- b. Think beyond project completion.**
Promote long-term stewardship so restored landscapes remain healthy, resilient, and productive long after restoration work is finished.
- c. Connect restoration to larger conservation goals.**
Coordinate restoration efforts with watershed health, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and wildfire preparedness to achieve multiple conservation benefits.
- d. Learn from every project.**
Apply monitoring, demonstration projects, partnerships, and shared learning to improve restoration practices and ensure restoration investments provide lasting ecological benefits.

5. Urban and Community-Based Conservation

Overview: The District serves highly urbanized communities as well as rural and agricultural landscapes. Urban and community-based conservation strengthens environmental quality and connects residents with stewardship.

Goal: Promote conservation awareness, stewardship, and sustainable resource management throughout the District's urban and suburban communities.

Guiding Strategies:

a. Create opportunities to get involved.

Create opportunities for residents, schools, businesses, and community organizations to participate in stewardship and improve the places where they live, learn, and work.

b. Make conservation part of everyday life.

Promote practical conservation practices – including community greening, urban agriculture, and pollinator-friendly landscapes – that improve environmental quality, sustainable resource management, and community resilience.

c. Build strong community partnerships.

Work with local governments, educational institutions, Tribes, nonprofit organizations, and community groups to expand conservation opportunities throughout the District.

d. Inspire lifelong stewardship.

Provide education, outreach, and equitable access to conservation programs that help people of all ages understand, value, and care for the District's natural resources and communities.

G. MEASURING PROGRESS

This LRP establishes the District's strategic priorities and organizational direction for the 2025-2030 planning period. Implementation of the LRP occurs through the annual AWP, which identifies the strategic directions to be advanced during each fiscal year and establishes the projects, partnerships, organizational initiatives, funding priorities, and measurable accomplishments that will support implementation of the LRP. Because funding opportunities, conservation needs, partnerships, and environmental conditions continue to evolve, AWP's may vary from year to year while remaining consistent with this LRP.

At the conclusion of each fiscal year, the District Manager will prepare a Year-End Progress Report (PR) describing accomplishments under the AWP and how those accomplishments advanced the strategic direction established by this LRP. Together, the LRP, AWP, annual budget, and PR provide the Board with a continuous framework for planning, implementation, evaluation, and adaptive decision-making.

In support of its governance responsibilities, the Board may periodically conduct focused reviews of conservation priorities and strategies, District services, organizational capability, funding opportunities, partnerships, or implementation activities to evaluate progress, identify emerging needs, and inform future decision-making. The Board will also use the annual RCD-NRCS Local Work Group meeting and other stakeholder engagement opportunities to solicit input on conservation priorities and District programs, projects, and services.

In addition to conservation projects and programs, the Board recognizes the importance of continually strengthening the District's organizational capacity. AWP's should therefore include activities that cultivate strategic partnerships and diversified funding sources to support long-term implementation of this LRP.

BOARD COMMITMENT

Through this Long Range Plan, the Board affirms its commitment to conserving natural resources and supporting sustainable land stewardship through collaborative, locally led conservation that benefits the lands, waters, wildlife, and communities of northern Santa Clara County for present and future generations.

Adopted by the Board of Directors on [insert month, day, and year]

President Frank Maitski

Signature

Vice President Gerardo Ixteyo Loera

Signature

Director Jeannie Entin

Signature

Director Matt Roben

Signature

Director Leah Stern

Signature