



Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District (GCRCD)

An independent special district of the State of California

DATE: July 15, 2021
TO: GCRCD Board of Directors
FROM: Stephanie Moreno, Executive Director/District Clerk
SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2021-2022 (FY22) Projects and Programs

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Consider new potential project and programs and reach consensus on those to be funded by the Fiscal Year 2022 Budget using funding from undesignated operational reserves.
2. Continue adoption of the final budget to the September 2, 2021, Board meeting to allow for incorporation of new projects and programs into the budget document.

BACKGROUND:

The District uses its adopted Long Range Plan (LRP) as a framework to identify priorities for annual district activities. The 2019-2024 LRP sets forth the following areas of focus and goals:

- A. Agricultural Lands
Goal: Preserve agricultural lands by providing producers and land managers with access to best management practices and technical assistance so they may maintain economically viable enterprises while preserving soil health, enhancing crop diversity, and protecting natural resources.
- B. Biodiversity
Goal: Promote biodiversity through the conservation and protection of natural habitats and ecosystems that provide a variety of ecosystem services, such as protection of water resources, maintenance of soil health, appropriate nutrient storage, contributions to climate stability, and improved resiliency after natural disasters.
- C. Water Quality
Goal: Contribute to improvements in water quality available for the benefit of agricultural production, wildlife, and aquatic habitat within District watersheds.
- D. Fire Risk
Goal: Reduce fire risk and natural resource impacts to communities located within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) through rural road, vegetation management, and fuel load reduction programs and projects.
- E. Climate Change
Goal: Contribute to regional climate change efforts by raising public awareness of the need for individual action, while recognizing and addressing the differences in capacity of individual communities and populations to respond to requests for action.

F. Public Engagement

Goal: Ensure the public is aware of the role watersheds play in maintaining a healthy and resilient community, and the personal importance of preserving agricultural lands and healthy ecosystems.

G. District Operations

Goal: Build and maintain organizational capacity and financial viability to accommodate District mission and goals.

At the June 3, 2021, Board Meeting, the Directors shared their individual priorities for consideration in the FY22 Budget and indicated they would like to reduce the amount in operating reserves by investing in additional community projects. Several members of the public also provided input. Below is a summary of the “wish list”:

- President Rick Lanman: He indicated the importance of setting some general principles for providing funding on projects, such as giving priority to funding that will provide leverage for partners’ projects and grants, and ensuring that projects that are funding support the District’s mission. He has three specific focuses: 1) Tule elk habitat and passage (multi stakeholder meetings; expert consultants; DNA analysis); 2) watersheds (multi-stakeholder group; watershed assessment, top to bottom, of at least one watershed in conjunction with Valley Water and other parties); and 3) re-oaking projects (focusing on projects in disadvantaged communities to reduce ambient temperatures and particulate matter in the air).
- Vice-President Gary Jahns: He would like to see a request for proposal issued to solicit potential projects in line with District priorities and indicated he would prefer to spend down the operating reserves over a two-year period rather than allocating all of it this fiscal year. His priorities are habitat (in particular riparian habitat), biodiversity and water quality.
- Director Gail Bautista: She stated that she would like to follow up on the work of the ad hoc Environmental Justice Committee, and that her interests are public engagement, water quality, and providing student opportunities. She would also like to see projects that support the work being done by Veggielution and Master Gardeners.
- Director Susan Hare: She would like to see the District move this year from funding lots of little projects to funding a big idea that is important and measurable. She believes the District should show leadership in addressing climate change, and that a large climate change project could encompass other District priorities as well.
- Director Paula Quintero: She is interested in public engagement; hiring a grant writer as previously suggested to assist community organizations; and providing opportunities for engagement with students, particularly minorities and persons of color, on climate change and sustainability issues. She also would like to see more equity in providing funding to underserved communities.
- Additional comments: During the meeting discussion, Director Jahns echoed Director Quintero’s comments on equity and said he would like the District to be conduct more outreach. Program Manager Hale recommended that the Board consider hiring an outreach coordinator given the Executive Director Moreno’s current work demands. Director Hale voiced her support for hiring a grant writer. Associate Director Leikam indicated a Board member with the Urban Wildlife Research Project has grant expertise and may be able to provide insight to Ms Moreno regarding starting a grant writing program. District Conservationist James Booth offered his observation that resource conservation districts, and especially GCRCD, have been most impactful when they are able to fill in the gaps in services that other agencies cannot provide.

DISCUSSION:

Using previous years' budget information and the background provided above, two tables were developed for the Board's review. The first table (begins on page 4) lists existing GCRCDC projects and programs, and amounts encumbered by previous Board action; these amounts will be factored in when determining available funding for new projects. The second table (begins on page 7) lists potential project and program options for consideration and are based upon the Directors' priorities as stated at the June 3, 2021, meeting. This list is not all-inclusive and other items may be added to it at the meeting by individual Directors or as a result of public input.

Once the Board reaches consensus on the highest priority project(s) to be funded from Table 2, staff will formulate budget estimates and incorporate them into a final budget document for the Board to adopt at its September 2021 Board Meeting.

Table 1: Existing Projects and Programs

Project/Program Title	Description	LRP Areas of Focus	Funding
1. Agricultural Pond Technical Assistance Program	CDFW and SCVHA funded two Local Area Grants to develop a pond hydroperiod model and take it open source to allow wider implementation of hydrologic investigations for climate-adaptive land use practices and initial applications for public lands containing habitat for native frogs, salamanders, and turtles. Technical assistance will continue to be provided to landowners as funding allows.	A, B, C, E, F, G	Grant closed 6/30/21; seeking grant opportunities to transition to land-based technical assistance services.
2. Anadromous Fish Monitoring and Research	Monitor existing conditions and conduct research in support of maintaining healthy populations of anadromous fish. Provide public education regarding the importance of species to riparian health. (Recommending this be incorporated into a new account titled “Watershed Education and Technical Assistance Program”).	B, C, E, F	Ancient DNA Salmonid project has been completed. The Chinook Salmon Natal Stream Analysis Project is in process, and \$8,000.00 has been encumbered.
3. Carbon Farm Program	Provide technical assistance to agricultural producers wishing to develop a carbon farm plan; participate in the Greater Bay Area Carbon Farming Hub (GBACH)	A, B, C, D, E, F	\$2,500.00 has been encumbered to prepare a carbon farm plan for Veggelution. Funding for additional plans is being sought through GBACH and the Carbon Cycle Institute’s statewide fund development effort.
4. Climate Action – Working Lands	Engage the agricultural community to: 1) raise awareness of the County’s working lands climate action project; 2) provide a forum for members of the agricultural community to voice their thoughts on the potential for integrating agriculture and working lands into the climate action plan; and 3) gather specific information on the scalability of, opportunities for, and barriers to carbon farming in Santa Clara County.	A, B, C, D, E, F	Grant funded.
5. Farm & Ranch SW Cleanup Program	Provide solid waste and habitat renewal services to agricultural landowners who are eligible for funding through the CalRecycle Grant Program.	A, B, C, E, F	Grant funded.

Project/Program Title	Description	LRP Areas of Focus	Funding
6. Healthy Soils Program	Provide match funding to: 1) implement a Nutrient Management Program (NMP) to provide soil, water and compost testing to agricultural producers, provide training on use of online nutrient management tools, and provide paid internship opportunities for students; and 2) to develop a Community Composting Network (CCN) to foster increased organizational self-sufficiency through the creation and sharing of compost.	A, B, C, E, F	NMP dependent on grant award from NACD; \$5,000.00 anticipated for cash match for grant. CCN dependent on grant award from USDA; in-kind match only.
7. Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Program	Provide materials and technical assistance to establish Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Habitat.	A, B, E, F	Xerces grant closed 6/30/21; in discussions with the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency (SCVHA) regarding potential regional project; no remaining funding allocated.
8. Agricultural Pond Technical Assistance Program	CDFW and SCVHA funded two Local Area Grants to develop a pond hydroperiod model and take it open source to allow wider implementation of hydrologic investigations for climate-adaptive land use practices and initial applications for public lands containing habitat for native frogs, salamanders, and turtles. Technical assistance will continue to be provided to landowners as funding allows.	A, B, C, E, F, G	Grant closed 6/30/21; additional funding needed to transition to land-based technical assistance services.
9. Post-Disaster Technical Assistance Program	Provide: 1) technical assistance to agricultural landowners and producers impacted by the SCU Lightning Complex fire and other disasters; 2) provide producer outreach on available programs; and 3) provide support to NRCS and Farm Service Agency.	A, B, C, D, E, F, G	\$3,483.96 remaining in GCRC program funding from original \$10,000 encumbrance; \$5,481.50 remaining in NRCS/SMRCD service agreement.
10. Rural Roads Program	Provide educational and technical assistance to rural landowners to mitigate environmental impacts of low volume roads on soil stability and health, wildlife, and water quality.	A, B, C, D, E, F	Original program was provided via NRCS grant; seeking funding opportunities to continue program.

Project/Program Title	Description	LRP Areas of Focus	Funding
11. Silver Creek Linear Park Project	The project will determine the likely size and pathways of winter flows that leave the main channel during storm events and the results of the study could inform ultimate management of flows at the project site for enhancement of aquatic habitat, reduced flood risk and protection of infrastructure.	B, C, E, G	\$2,700.00 has been encumbered for site monitoring agreement; the remaining \$68,610.00 in expenses is funded by PG&E, with GCRCD in-kind match.
12. Tule Elk Habitat Program	Provide funding for: 1) habitat suitability analysis report in collaboration with CDFW; 2) facilitation of stakeholder meetings; and 3) DNA testing of museum bones.	A, B, C, D, E, F	\$15,000.00 has been encumbered.
13. Watershed Cap. Project	Historical account name for FAHCE and Adaptive Management Team (AMT) activities. (Recommending changing name to the more transparent, comprehensive and descriptive title “Watershed Education and Technical Assistance Program”.)	A, B, C, D, E, F, G	Annual funding commitment is developed based on projected activities for the year. This year’s needed allocation is estimated at \$20,000.
14. Watershed Group/RCMP	In collaboration with other watershed partners, provide funding to: 1) support development of a stakeholder-driven watershed group; 2) provide input on projects impacting watershed health; and 3) assist with development of a watershed assessment plan. (Recommend that this be incorporated into a new account titled “Watershed Education and Technical Assistance Program”.)	A, B, C, D, E, F	\$24,397.50 remaining in program funding from original \$30,000.00 encumbrance.

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Table 2: Potential New Project and Programs

Project/Program Title	Description	Potential LRP Areas of Focus	GCRCD Funding Needed
1. Climate Action – Urban Areas	Provide funding to implement projects in marginalized communities to reduce the impact of climate change, such as 1) tree planting; 2) neighborhood green infrastructure projects; and 3) public education.	B, C, D, E, F	TBD
2. Community Outreach Program	Contract with a local community organization to provide public education and organizational resources to community organizations, stakeholders and members, with a primary focus on reaching out to marginalized communities in the East San Jose region.	A, B, C, D, E, F	Estimated \$25,000.00 for 8 hours/week of service and outreach materials. (Current USDA grant application for developing a SJ Community Composting Network is pending; in-kind match only.)
3. Grant Assistance Program	Hire a grant writer to: 1) conduct outreach to local community-based organizations (LCBO); 2) provide grant-writing assistance to LCBOs to help them develop additional revenue sources and build organization capacity; and 3) write grants for the District in order to build capacity and offer a diverse range of services to constituents.	A, B, C, D, E, F, G	Estimated \$35,000.00 for a 16-hour/week employee (potential for cost-share with another RCD).
4. Urban and Community Farms Technical Assistance Program	Provide technical assistance to urban farms to: 1) provide information on available Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs; 2) provide public education on conservation practices; and 3) support efforts to increase food security through urban and community farms.	A, B, C, E, F	TBD
5. Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI) Technical Assistance Program	Providing funding for research, monitoring and implementation to: 1) support CalFire’s efforts to increase the use of prescribed fire as a land management tool; 2) provide tools to land managers for conservation planning and fire hardening activities; 3) implement re-oaking projects; and 4) assist with implementation of projects identified in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)	A, B, C, D, E, F	TBD