



# Annual Report

2005

Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District

FALL 2005

## Santa Cruz Countywide Partners in Restoration Permit Coordination

In 2004, Sustainable Conservation, the Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District (RCD), and the U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) focused efforts on shepherding the permit applications for the Permit Coordination Program through the regulatory review process. We also worked to engage the environmental community in Santa Cruz County to inform them about the Santa Cruz Countywide Permit Coordination Program.

Following submittal of the final permit application and the biological assessment to NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service in early 2004, the remainder of the year was spent "nudging" regulatory agency staff from the County of Santa Cruz, California Coastal Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, and California Department of Fish and Game to process the applications. The most extensive and challenging discussions took place with the County. For the Santa Cruz Countywide Permit Coordination Program, the County of Santa Cruz served as the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) since the Master Permit they would be issuing for the program represents the most prominent intersection of a state or local agency with the project.

The County of Santa Cruz completed their environmental review, per CEQA, in November and released the public review draft of the Initial Study and proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration for the program. For the County, the completion of the CEQA review was a necessary precursor to their issuance of the Master Permit which was brought

before the County Planning Commission for approval in Spring 2005.

In March of 2004, members of environmental groups and watershed groups in Santa Cruz County were invited to an outreach meeting to explain the program and provide a forum for them to ask questions and voice any concerns. We conducted outreach again to these groups at key points in the year,

including the start of the Public Review period for CEQA, and in 2005 when the Master Permit was brought before the County Planning Commission for review.

On April 13, 2005 the County of Santa Cruz Planning Commission (Commission) voted 5-0 in favor of approving the Master Permit to be issued by the County to the Santa Cruz County RCD to administer the Santa Cruz Permit Coordination Program. At the Hearing, Sus-

tainable Conservation, the RCD, and the NRCS made a presentation to the Commission and responded to questions from Commissioners. Individuals from environmental groups, watershed groups, private landowners and Monterey County appeared at the Planning Commission Hearing and spoke in support of the program. All were very pleased with the outcome and now we are working to secure approvals from the rest of the agencies in time for this construction season.



Proposed Ivy removal project in the City of Capitola

*The SCCRCD is a special district organized under state law, with no enforcement or regulatory functions. The SCCRCD works closely with groups and individuals to provide practical solutions for soil and water management problems. Our only interaction with regulation is to be of assistance to landowners in complying with them.*

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#### Our Mission

To help people protect, conserve and restore natural resources through information, education and technical assistance programs.

#### RCD Board of Directors

Jim McKenna, President  
Sheryl Bailey, Director  
Howard Liebenberg, Director  
Tom Lukens, Director  
Mike Manfre, Director  
John Ricker, Director  
Roberta Smith, Director  
Ward Hastings, Associate Director  
Kathryn Tobisch, Associate Director  
Vasiliki Vassil, Associate Director  
Steve Butler, Associate Director

#### RCD Staff

Tangi Chapman  
Administrative Assistant

Karen Christensen  
Executive Director of Programs

Carey Cooper  
Project Manager

Sharon Corkrean  
Executive Director

Dustin Dimauro  
Experienced Laborer

Leticia Hain  
Project Coordinator

Bobbie Haver  
Watershed Coordinator

Dawn Mathes  
Program Manager

Arianne Rettinger  
Watershed Coordinator

Jen Stern  
Watershed Coordinator

Angela Stewart  
Livestock Program Coordinator

#### NRCS Staff

Kelli Camara  
Soil Conservationist

Richard Casale  
District Conservationist

Craig Ficenc  
Conservation Engineer

## America's Conservation Agency

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), formerly the Soil Conservation Service, is a non-regulatory federal agency in the US Department of Agriculture. It was created through the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 to lead a national effort to prevent erosion and protect the Nation's privately owned soil and water resources. The NRCS is the technical partner to the SCCRCD. The NRCS provides free technical assistance through a variety of voluntary programs aimed at helping landusers protect, enhance and wisely use our Nation's soil, water and other natural resources.

A diversity of technical expertise is available to assist landowners with resource concerns on their property. In Santa Cruz County, the NRCS staff frequently provides technical advice on issues such as improving drainage and reducing erosion on rural roads, addressing bank failures which might threaten structures, offering recommendations for revegetation of bare areas, and providing assistance to improve farming operations through the development of farm plans and engineering designs for structural practices.

The NRCS also has a number of cost-share programs available through the 2002 Farm Bill to aid in the implementation of practices to conserve natural resources. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) are two of the most used cost-share programs in Santa Cruz County. Last year, Santa Cruz received approximately \$500,000 to fund projects through EQIP and \$240,000 through WHIP. EQIP is available to agricultural producers to address resource concerns associated with agriculture production. WHIP is available to all landowners interested in improving habitat for wildlife species. This program has been used to fund projects to remove fish passage barriers, including fords and perched culverts, and to improve riparian function for threatened and endangered species.

For more information contact the NRCS office in Capitola at (831)475-1967.

## Integrated Watershed Restoration Program

The Design and Permitting component of the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program (IWRP) seeks to coordinate with resource, funding, and permitting agencies to reduce staff time and help ensure that critical restoration projects are implemented. One of the key goals is to focus the available resources to develop high quality designs, complete permit applications, and poise project applicants to apply for implementation funding. The program funds the designs and preparation of permit applications for high priority restoration projects and develops ways to batch these projects together for review and approval by the permitting agencies.

The first part of 2004 was spent developing the IWRP Design and Permit Coordination Process in conjunction with the Design and Permitting Technical Advisory Committee and conducting an orientation workshop for project leads. The Design and Permitting Component of IWRP got off to a strong start with a two-day working session with the Design and Permitting Technical Advisory Committee. This committee is comprised of representatives from the various regulatory agencies who will oversee the development of the designs and regulatory approvals for the restoration projects to be carried out under this component of IWRP. The Design and Permit Coordinators, Sustainable Conservation and their sub-contractor Jim Robins of *Alnus Ecological*, act as the liaisons between regulatory agency staff and project leads working on IWRP projects.

Site visits with regulatory agency staff were conducted for the first two "batches" of IWRP projects. Project leads in these two batches proceeded with project design work and began preparation of permit applications. Work on Batch I projects in 2004 served as a "test" of the IWRP Design and Permit Process. As such, many lessons learned were brought to light, emphasizing the need for this component of IWRP to be flexible and able to improve upon itself with each "batch" of projects. For more information visit the IWRP website at [www.iwrp.sccrcd.org](http://www.iwrp.sccrcd.org).

## Pajaro Watershed Water Quality Protection Program

The Pajaro River Watershed supports one of the most diverse agricultural and environmental areas in the state of California. The rich soils of the Pajaro Valley in combination with a Mediterranean climate allow for a wide diversity of crops to be grown. Of the many crops grown in the Pajaro Watershed, strawberry and lettuce growers are ranked among the Nation's top producers with a current economic annual value of \$851 million.

The Watershed has recently been listed by the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) as priority on the 303d list of impaired water bodies for nutrient, sediment, and pesticide pollution. The Regional Board has identified several potential sources of non-point source pollution (NPS), including: urban, rural residential, rangeland, and agricultural runoff. Ranchers and growers in the region have been very proactive over the last few years in working with numerous environmental



**Agricultural Water Quality Short Course**

organizations and government agencies to formulate strategies for addressing and improving water quality especially as it is related to agricultural runoff. The SCCRCD realizes, particularly under the current climate of Agricultural Waivers and increased attention paid to non-point source pollution and runoff, that agriculture more than ever is in need of assistance to address water quality.

The Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District was awarded *Proposition 13* grant funds from the State Water Resources Control Board to implement an urban and agricultural water quality protection program within the Pajaro River Watershed. The *Proposition 13* grant is currently funding programs aimed at protecting, improving, and restoring water quality in identified impaired water-bodies and critical wetland habitat.

In the first year of the program, three projects were implemented that ranged in scale and type and included native plant hedgerows, streambank stabilization plantings, cover cropping, and grassed agricultural roads.

## Fiscal Year 2005 Budget

### Income Sources

Interest	\$2,211
Local & Private Sources	\$16,987
Augmentation Funds	\$36,128
Other Revenue Grants	\$577,058
<b>Total</b>	<b>*\$632,384</b>

### Expenses

Outside Professional Services	\$308,264
Salaries	\$197,597
Office, Insurance, Audit	\$129,576
Mileage & Transportation	\$1,154
<b>Total</b>	<b>*\$635,592</b>

\*The difference between income and expenses represents grant money spent but not yet received by the RCD.

## San Lorenzo River Watershed

Project details and permit needs are being coordinated with agencies, consultants and the Boulder Creek Recreation and Park District Board for the adult fish passage improvement project to be implemented at the Boulder Creek Recreational Dam on the San Lorenzo River. The goal is to get this project implemented this construction season. Permits will dictate whether or not the project will happen this fall.

Grant funds have been received from the San Lorenzo Valley Water District for a project to remove *Arundo donax* and several Acacia trees from a private property in the San Lorenzo Valley. Implementation of this project will be this construction season.

Several projects are currently under development in the watershed. RCD staff continues to collaborate with the County Fisheries Resource Planner on potential fish passage projects in the San Lorenzo watershed and future priorities. A potential project on Branciforte Creek is being developed. Applications have been submitted to the USDA NRCS Wildlife Incentives Program for the Deer Creek Ford removal project and the

Bear Creek Canyon Humboldt crossing removal project. Both of these projects reduce sediment load and are fish habitat or passage improvement projects.

The Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park Salmonid Interpretive Panel is now standing in Henry Cowell Park on the River Trail. Another interpretive panel to be placed above the San



**Henry Cowell Salmonid interpretive sign.**

Lorenzo River Lagoon is in the final stages of completion. Both the San Lorenzo River Lagoon panel and the Henry Cowell Park panel focus on salmonid life cycle and habitat requirements.

The first "Creek Days" event was held at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park on March 18, 2005 and was very successful. RCD staff, NRCS staff, State Parks docents and other local experts manned the stations and led activities. The goal of this event, to promote watershed education in local schools and get students interested in their local creeks, was definitely achieved. Teachers and parents alike complimented the event and the students were very interested. Henry Cowell Redwoods State Parks will make this an annual event.

## Soquel Creek Watershed Assessment and Enhancement Implementation Program

Outreach, education and technical assistance continues in the Soquel watershed as a result of the Soquel Creek Watershed Assessment and Enhancement Implementation Program. This program was funded in May 2003 by the Coastal Salmon Recovery Program. It is administered by the California Department of Fish and Game.

Efforts to eradicate *Arundo donax* from the watershed began last year. This invasive bamboo-like grass spreads quickly and crowds out native plants. It can grow up to four inches a day and 30' tall. It robs creeks of water, destroying fish and wildlife habitat. The thick thatch that is produced can cause wildfires and creates erosion and flooding problems. Work began in the Fall of 2004 with the removal and tarping at *Arundo* site #1 in Soquel across the creek from Carpo's. The site weathered the wet winter well; the tarping will be removed in October 2005. The Santa

Cruz County Fish and Game Advisory Commission, Patagonia and Lomak Properties funded this invasive removal project. The Friends of Soquel Creek and the Wildlands Restoration Team provided tremendous support for the project and assisted the SCCRCD staff. Two new *Arundo* removal projects and one new ivy removal project along Soquel Creek have been partially approved for funding.

Elsewhere in the watershed, there are two ford removal projects in development phase. The fords will be replaced by bridges and serve to improve salmon habitat. Both projects are scheduled to be implemented in the Summer of 2006.



***Arundo donax* thicket growing on top of a 20 foot cliff.**

## Santa Cruz County Fuel Load Reduction and Outreach Program

In 2004, the SCCRCD implemented three fuel load reduction projects in the San Lorenzo Valley. This was through a grant from the Sacramento Region Community Foundation's Community-Based Wildfire Prevention Grants Program. The goals of this program are to increase fire prevention awareness through implementation of fuel load reduction projects, distribution of fire prevention information and holding education workshops.

The three projects implemented included roadside brush clearing in the Huckleberry Woods neighborhood of Boulder Creek, fire break clearance in the Loch Lomond Reservoir Recreation Area and removal of Acacia at Quail Hollow Ranch County Park. These projects were implemented in collaboration with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), the Community Action



**Cleared understory at Huckleberry Woods.**

Board of Santa Cruz County's Natural Resources and Employment Program, the Huckleberry Woods Property Owners Association, the City of Santa Cruz Water Department and the Zayante Fire Protection District.

In addition to the fuel load reduction projects, the program included updating, printing and distribution of 10,000 copies of the "Living with Fire in Santa Cruz County— A Guide for Homeowners" to all the fire districts in Santa Cruz County. It was also distributed at educational events including the Zayante Fire Protection Districts annual Father's Day Pancake Breakfast. In the future, the SCCRCD will continue to collaborate on grants with the CDF and local fire districts on fuel load reduction implementation and outreach in Santa Cruz County.

## State Parks

In September 2001, State Parks and the SCCRCD formed a partnership to perform resource management practices. This unique partnership called for an ecologist, laborers, and the Community Action Board's Natural Resources and Employment Program to work on habitat restoration projects within State Parks. A diverse range of tasks was called for, from removing invasive plants, participating in prescribed burns, and performing erosion control to interpreting project information to the public and managing for threatened and endangered species. This partnership has worked so well that in January of 2005 we finalized our third contract to continue this collaboration.

With more than 60,000 acres of State Park in Santa Cruz County, there are several hundreds of exotic removal sites to visit each year. These must be checked annually to avoid reinfestation. This year's crews began removing pampas grass and fennel along the Highway 1 corridor.

## Upslope Assessment Organizational Grant

The Upslope Assessment Organizational Grant provided funds to support road-related outreach and education throughout the County. The *Santa Cruz County Private Road Guide* has been updated to include current information on erosion, drainage measures, road construction, road maintenance, vegetation, laws and local ordinances pertaining to the listing of coho salmon and steelhead trout. Also included are many resources including regulatory, community and technical. The guide is available throughout the county at the eight County Library branches, the SCCRCD office, the County Planning Department and at the SCCRCD website.

The grant also funded three workshops demonstrating road drainage improvements in the Spring and Summer of 2004. These workshops were a collaborative effort between the SCCRCD and the County Public Works Department, State Parks, and a private landowner. The County Public Works workshop was coordinated with FishNet 4C and utilized their manual *Protecting Aquatic Habitat and Salmon Fisheries for County Road Maintenance*.

## Arana Gulch Watershed Alliance

The Arana Gulch Watershed Alliance (AGWA) continues to implement the Arana Watershed Assessment and Enhancement Plan. The Plan identifies specific sources of sedimentation and outlines proposals for reducing this sedimentation.

Thousands of cubic yards of sediments are deposited into the Santa Cruz Harbor mouth annually from the Arana Gulch Watershed. Prevention measures include annual clearing of



Upper Harbor at high tide.

the Harbor High School sediment basin. The cooperative partnership between the City and County of Santa Cruz Public Works Departments, Santa Cruz Port District and AGWA are in process. Last year's basin material was used in a City restoration project. This year another project is the target destination for the reusable material. Putting the sediment back into the system in a useful way is a creative and ecologically sound scheme of sustainable resource management.

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Outreach to schools and the community continues with teachers using Arana as a field study and creek-side clean-up site. Students from Santa Clara Counties Fremont High School have once again attacked the invasive plants at the Harbor Fish Ladder Project. The Harbor High flow gauge installed three years ago is recording data every fifteen minutes. Records will be used to establish baseline data that will then be used to evaluate restoration project success in reducing sediment.

The newly formed Friends of the Harbor Group are actively supporting the Port District and the Arana Watershed effort for sediment reduction projects. Assistance from IWRP is funding design and permits for three of Arana's highest-priority identified projects from the Plan. For more information visit the AGWA website at [www.aranagulch.org](http://www.aranagulch.org).



Restoration at Harbor High fish ladder site.

## Rural Roads Technical Assistance Program

In 2004, the SCCRCD continued to assist private road associations through the Rural Roads Technical Assistance Program. This program is funded through a 319 (h) grant from the State Water Resources Control Board. The overall purpose of the program is to improve water quality and salmon and steelhead habitat in the San Lorenzo River watershed by enhancing drainage and reducing sediment inputs from rural roads. In 2003, four private road drainage improvement projects were implemented through the program. Last year an additional five projects were implemented in the San Lorenzo Valley.

Technical assistance was provided to road associations through educational workshops, technical trainings and informa-



The rural roads workshop

tion newsletters. In addition, road associations implementing projects through the program were given photo-monitoring training in order to document project improvements. This year, the program will expand into the Soquel Creek and Aptos Creek watersheds in addition to the San Lorenzo River watershed. This larger program is funded through a new 319(h) grant and through the Coastal Conservancy-funded Integrated Watershed Restoration Program (IWRP). A new component of the program will be to conduct road assessments which will be completed by Pacific Watershed

Associates (PWA). These road assessments will help to define and prioritize projects to be implemented. The Coastal Conservancy funds will also be providing cost-share assistance for road drainage improvement designs and permitting costs, while the State Water Resources Control Board 319(h) funds will provide cost-share assistance for implementation of nine to twelve road drainage improvement projects. For more information on this program, contact Carey Cooper (Project Manager) [ccooper@sccrcd](mailto:ccooper@sccrcd) or 464-2950.

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### Indicators of Stream Health

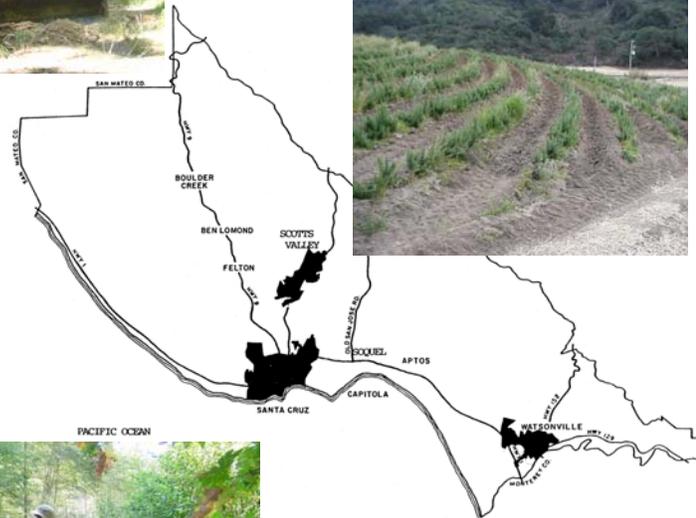
*Steelhead trout (Oncorhynchus mykiss) and Coho salmon (Oncorhynchus kisutch) living in the San Lorenzo River and its tributaries can be adversely affected by excessive erosion and sediment entering the stream. Sediment can fill in spaces in the redds (nests) of these important fish species, suffocating the eggs and newly hatched young. Too much sediment can also fill in pools and riffles in streams. Deep pools provide steelhead trout and Coho salmon with hiding places from predators. Riffles provide habitat for aquatic insects that juvenile steelhead depend on for food. Steelhead trout are listed as threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Coho salmon are listed as endangered under California's ESA.*

### District History in Santa Cruz County.

Resource Conservation Districts have had a presence in Santa Cruz County since 1941, when the Pajaro RCD was formed in South County. In 1978 the Redwood RCD was formed to serve the central portion of the County. As the County began to grow in population and development began to encroach on more mountainous and sensitive land, the need arose to address the resource issues beyond the then boundaries of the two Districts. Later, in 1978, the Directors of the two Districts petitioned the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to join and extend the District boundaries countywide, excluding the territories of the four incorporated cities. This new District was named the Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District with a service area of over 260,000 acres. The City of Capitola was subsequently annexed to the District in 1983, at the City's request.



## SANTA CRUZ COUNTY RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT



The boundaries of the District include the entire County excluding three incorporated cities (Santa Cruz, Watsonville, and Scotts Valley).



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