

Improved Ag Water Management Results from RCD Program

The Agricultural Water Quality Grant Program concluded this past year after a final workshop was held in Knightsen. The State Water Resources Control Board funded this project to reduce irrigation runoff from agricultural fields in east Contra Costa County, and thereby reduce the contributions of sediments and contaminants into creeks and the Delta. Participating growers volunteered to convert furrow irrigated fields into drip irrigation on 335 acres of tomato and corn crops, with positive results on many fronts. Tailwater samples from control sites and from those sites with the new drip irrigation were collected and compared. In general, the sediments leaving the fields were reduced and the growers reported increased yields and reduced maintenance efforts.

The results of the grant project encouraged several east county farmers to apply for additional cost-share funds through the NRCS in 2008. In total, 716 additional acres of traditionally furrow-irrigated fields were converted to drip irrigation.



Traditional furrow irrigation was replaced by water-conserving drip irrigation on 716 acres of tomato and corn fields in this 2-year program.

Information about other beneficial management practices (BMPs,) such as buffer strips, cover crops, and integrated pest management, was also distributed to farmers to promote additional means of reducing sediment runoff from fields.

The RCD's Water Quality Grant program was not only successful with sediment reduction in the fields that it funded directly, but it had a wide-spread effect on the promotion of BMPs throughout the farming community as well.

Restoring Barn Owls to Byron

In the fall of 2007, the CCRCD worked with a major agricultural grower in the county whose tomato fields were being decimated by gophers. The District obtained grant funding from the Department of Fish and Game through the



One of the Barn Owl boxes installed by an agricultural field.

Contra Costa County Fish and Wildlife Committee to provide 22 barn owl boxes for the farmer's fields located in the Kellogg Creek watershed and East County Delta Drainages. Within months, half of the boxes were occupied by nesting pairs who successfully reduced the rodent problem to a much more manageable level. The common barn owl can be a farmers ally in his battle against gophers and other rodent pests... a family of barn owls can consume as many as three thousand rodents during a single nesting season! These beneficial predators play an important role in an integrated approach to gopher management by reducing the need for rodenticide applications.

This project met the Department of Fish and Game's goal of improving wildlife habitat by restoring once abundant nesting sites, and the CCRCD's strategic goal of enhancing wildlife habitat.

Partnership with NRCS

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) continues to be a primary partner in our advocacy for the wise use and management of our natural resources. Collaboration between the NRCS, RCD, and other local groups or agencies strengthen our collective ability to accomplish common environmental goals and priorities.

NRCS programs contribute to the conservation and enhancement of many land uses, including rangeland, cropland, and wildlife habitat. Several projects have been completed under

the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program, allowing NRCS to technically and financially assist with repairs to severely damaged creekbanks which threatened the stability of local homes. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides assistance for agricultural producers and opportunities to promote the work and efforts of the RCD. The recently passed 2008 Farm Bill ensures that funding for these and other programs will continue to be available to Contra Costa County residents.