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This is why I stay hopeful.

As Executive Director, my position takes me to parts of Contra Costa County I've never visited. But more importantly, I get to meet folks throughout the county that are also on the frontline of our environmental movement. It inspires me every day because while the RCD is doing its important work, there's only so much a staff comprised of two admin, six programmatic staff, and 2 interns can do. So, I get to see other passionate folks working towards a similar goal of improving the health of our watersheds for both today and in the future.

While folks might feel helpless with the significant challenges just on the horizon, I see every day how our collective actions can make a bigger difference. I see less trash in our creeks. I see more young people knowing the word “watershed.” I see climate change being rebranded as “climate crisis.”

This past year at the RCD has been an opportunity to strengthen our current programming while also building a foundation of what’s to come. We are diligently working on new programs such as environmental education, with field trips, for students, tackling illegal dumping, and restoring native fish. Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention the climate crisis (in this letter and for years to come). Yes, adapting to climate change will be the greatest challenge for our communities and this organization in the near and long-term futures. But again, I get to see all the agencies, special districts, nonprofits, and individuals working towards a common goal. There will come a day when working together to develop solutions to adapt to climate change will be at the forefront of everyone’s everyday consciousness.

Chris Lim
Executive Director

Message from the President

BIG STUFF is going on in the world. All over the world, our dependence on natural systems working in our favor is becoming recognized and articulated. We are collectively coming to realize that we are not separate from, but are dependent upon natural systems and processes working in ways that benefit us and make our lives and our civilizations possible. It was not always this way and there is no guarantee that it will always be this way. Over the course of Earth’s lifetime, many species have come and gone.

As far as we know, our own species is the first one able to consciously alter these conditions. We can tinker with the system, and actually change it... and we have. Up to now, the system has largely been able to tolerate this tinkering and still support us, but now we have reached a point where it may no longer be able to do so.

Here at the CCRCD, we are doing our part. In our annual report, you will see how we are working to sequester carbon, clean up our landscapes, restore community spaces, educate ourselves and our fellow community members, helping our watersheds, streams and ponds, among other things. We do all of these things in the spirit of helpful cooperation and sharing of knowledge and information and pitching in and doing the work.

We are building and enhancing our community relationships, and also building our capability to work with government agencies who have jurisdiction. In many cases, this capability proves to be the critical factor in determining if a project goes forward or not. In this way, we fulfill one of the original reasons for the creation of RCD’s in the wake of the dust bowl times: to act as the connection between the government and the people living and working on the land.

Chris Lim
Executive Director
Igor Skaredoff
Board President

The mission of the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District is to facilitate conservation and stewardship of the natural resources in Contra Costa County.
Our Staff
2018-2019

The CCRCDD Staff and Interns (Left to Right):
Chris Lim; Gabriella Ballardo, Intern; Lisa Anich;
Elizabeth Harrison; Heidi Petty; Elissa Robinson;
Patty Pell; Sue Voelkel, Intern; Lisa Damerel; Ben
Weise, and Isabella Brown, Intern

Chris Lim
Executive Director

Allison Rofe
Rangeland Specialist

Ben Weise
Working Lands Specialist

Elissa Robinson
Resource Conservationist

Lisa Damerel
Watershed Coordinator

Elizabeth Harrison
Watershed Coordinator

Heidi Petty
Watershed Coordinator

Lisa Anich
Watershed Conservationist

Patty Pell
Office Administrator
Robert Case

Bob Case came to the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District (CCRCD) on September 14, 2014. He brought with him a wealth of experience and knowledge from his many years with the Contra Costa Department of Agriculture. He also brought his passion for combat with the destructive incursions on invasive plant species. Much of California’s landscape has been transformed, usually to its detriment, by invasive plants. These range from the wholesale transformation of landscapes from perennial native grasses to European annuals, to yellow star thistle which makes native landscapes impassible, unusable for grazing and poisons horses to stands of arundo donax (giant reed) choking off our streams and watersheds. Bob brings this passion to his work on the CCRCD. During his tenure, he was active in restoring native plants and grasses, many acres of yellow star were reclaimed for productive rangeland and arundo is under siege. Bob’s network of “native plant friends” has been a resource for finding allies and partners in this war on weeds. Bob brings this passion to his work on the CCRCD. During his tenure, he was active in restoring native plants and grasses, many acres of yellow star were reclaimed for productive rangeland and arundo is under siege. Bob’s network of “native plant friends” has been a resource for finding allies and partners in this war on weeds. Bob also brought with him an invaluable insight into the inner workings of County government and has been an invaluable resource in finding ways to get things done. Bob is a gifted photographer and a wildflower enthusiast who has helped expand many people’s worlds and enjoyment of the beauty of nature through his shows and exhibitions. As he passes the baton of CCRCD Board Membership, Bob continues with us as an Associate Director and we look forward to many years of his engagement with the CCRCD.

Tom Brumleve

Tom Brumleve came to the CCRCD in the 80’s after a career at Sandia Labs of working to capture the heat of the sun for use later to generate electricity. He was living and working on the family ranch on Mt Diablo at the time and deeply interested in resource conservation. He participated as an Associate and joined the Board Sept 20, 1983. He has been an active participant and served as Board President for a decade during that time. Tom likes to remind us that: “The power of the RCD is that we don’t have power”. We are non-regulatory, and cannot compel anyone to do anything. We rely on science, persuasion, incentives, enlightened self-interest and sweet reason to facilitate landowners and managers to “do the right thing” by the resources entrusted to their care. Tom is a big fan of Coordinated Resource Management Process which provides a framework for collaborative, rather than adversarial, resource management which emphasizes developing trust among stakeholders by seeking and working toward common interests and taking ownership for moving toward success. As a supporter of this approach, Tom was one of the “godparents” of the Contra Costa Watershed Management movement, which has resulted in active and ongoing, beneficial management of Contra Costa’s watersheds with many of them having effective “Friends” groups. Tom advocates use of rotational grazing to manage fire fuel load, to promote biodiversity and to generate income. Tom is an advocate for partnerships and alliances with other groups, organizations and individuals with complementary goals.

Meet our new Board Members...

Renée Fernandez-Lipp

Renée has over 20 years of experience in the promotion of resource conservation programs and projects in the areas of renewable energy, distributed generation, demand response, water conservation, and waste management. She is an advocate for integrated sustainability solutions, and has authored papers on “Utilizing Biomass and Solid Waste as a Renewable Energy Resource” and “How to be Green at Home.”

Lorena Castillo

Lorena is a Bay Area native with roots in Guadalajara, MX. She has a passion for working with youth, environmental education, civic engagement, and community arts. She worked as staff photographer for the Martinez News-Gazette. She also worked at the New Leaf Collaborative as Internship/Outreach Coordinator. She has worked at John Muir National Historic Park leading the Youth Conservation Corps for the last 9 years. She is currently the Communications Director for Groundwork Richmond.

Changes in 2019!

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Bob Peoples

Bob is retired from a varied career in natural resource and open space conservation and management at the Federal level. He recently moved to Contra Costa County from Virginia and is learning about and adapting to this area’s totally new environment. The RCD provides a great home for his interests, experience, and expertise and he has become actively involved in its efforts.

Bob Simmons

Bob was appointed as an associate director on the CCRCD Board in 2017. He is Chair of the Walnut Creek Watershed Council (WCWC) and is devoted to watershed health in the county. He has previously served on the Board of the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation. Bob brings to the Board an understanding of watersheds and open space issues.

and our new Associate Directors!

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Fighting the Good Fight against *Arundo donax*

You may not have heard of giant reed (*Arundo donax*), but if you’ve spent any time near Contra Costa County’s creeks, you’ve probably seen it. Arundo is an invasive non-native plant that grows in riparian areas. It can grow four inches a day and up to a total height of thirty feet. The plant easily outcompetes native plants for resources and space, and it provides little food or habitat for insects, birds, and other wildlife. Arundo’s encroachment on waterways can lead to flooding, and the plant poses a fire hazard. Efforts to remove and replace this plant are gaining momentum in Contra Costa County, and the CCRCD is helping to lead the way.

Educating the Public about Arundo

Over the past year, the CCRCD has been instrumental in multiple efforts to educate the public about Arundo and how it impacts waterways. On October 4th, 2018, the CCRCD, the Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, and the Walnut Creek Watershed Council (WCWC) hosted a Creek Invaders event at Diablo Valley College. The event brought together experts from around the region to share their knowledge of Arundo. More than 140 attendees learned about the dangers of Arundo, local efforts to eradicate Arundo, and related ways to restore the health of the watersheds in Contra Costa County.

CCRCD worked closely with the Flood Control District and the WCWC to create a new Arundo brochure to educate people about the plant and eradication efforts in the Walnut Creek Watershed. CCRCD also co-hosted an Arundo information session for people who live in the Pine Creek neighborhood. The session was enlightening, as it revealed some of the main concerns of people who have Arundo on their properties—the use of herbicides and how to shore up the creek bank once the Arundo is removed.

Getting to Work

Volunteers in the Walnut Creek Watershed have been particularly active in their efforts to combat Arundo. The CCRCD and the Flood Control District led two volunteer Arundo removal events along San Ramon Creek in Danville last fall. The CCRCD also worked with Friends of the Creeks and the WCWC to remove portions of stands in Civic Park.

This year, the CCRCD will provide support for the recently-formed Arundo Removal and Replacement Team (ARRT). This team is made up of volunteers from multiple creek groups in the Walnut Creek Watershed. The ARRT is currently doing research on various Arundo-infested sites to determine which ones will be its primary targets in the coming year. The CCRCD has done a lot to educate the public about Arundo and to remove it from Contra Costa’s waterways, but there is still much to do. With its partners and dedicated volunteers, the CCRCD is ready to continue the fight against Arundo.
Carquinez Watershed

After 12 years, the CCRCD expands its coordination along the Carquinez Strait to include all the sub-watersheds that drain into the strait. This new reach includes the towns of Crockett, Martinez, Port Costa, Rodeo and Tormey. Our newly created Carquinez Watershed Council compliments the longstanding Alhambra Watershed Council and provides a forum for information, education and collaborative projects along this important water corridor. With the formation of the council, an ad hoc committee, Carquinez Recover the Waterfront, was also formed to assess the possibilities for the now, vacant Crockett Waterfront. Through a series of public meetings, a Vision Plan was created and funding for the native park project has become a priority for the group. Please contact hpetty@ccrcd.org for info.

Pinole Creek Watershed

CCRCD continues to support the Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed (FOPCW) as they protect Pinole Creek's unique habitats. This has been a year of renewal for FOPCW, with a fresh start on the creekside native plant garden at Pinole Library and a productive partnership with Earth Team's internship program at Pinole Valley High School. CCRCD led an educational workday at the Pinole Creek Fish Passage Project and organized public meetings with guest speakers in Fall 2018 and Spring 2019. The County Watershed Program provides funds for watershed coordination. In addition, FOPCW won an award from the Rose Foundation’s Northern California Environmental Grassroots Environmental Fund for 2019.

Walnut Creek Watershed

The Walnut Creek Watershed Council is made up of creek group, city, and agency representatives. It covers the largest watershed in Contra Costa County, totaling 146 square miles. The Council works to preserve watershed health and raise public awareness of creek issues and opportunities in the watershed. Friends of the Creeks, Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks, Friends of San Ramon Creek, and the Lafayette Creeks Committee are active community groups that hold volunteer events throughout the year. From creek cleanups, to restoring native plants, to bird surveys, there are a number of ways that the public can get involved! To learn more about what the Council is up to check out their new website at https://www.wcwatershed.org/
Our partnership with the agencies such as the Natural Resource Conservation Service helps to move projects forward!

The working lands staff at the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District was hard at work this year partnering with volunteer farmers and rancher to facilitate the conservation and stewardship of the agricultural natural resources within our county. We began writing the first Carbon Farm Plan in Contra Costa County for Frog Hollow Farm in Brentwood, CA.

After conducting a site visit and learning Farmer Al’s goals for his operation, staff began working to draft a plan that would meet his goals through selected management practices that also increase carbon sequestration on his property. After some revisions and calculations, staff completed the writing portion of the plan and work will now begin to help Frog Hollow Farm implement these practices as funding opportunities arise.

In summer 2018, we also connected east and west Contra Costa county by hosting the Urban Tilth Summer Apprentice Program at Frog Hollow Farm and First Generation Farmers in Brentwood, CA. The Urban Tilth Summer Apprentice Program hires youth and young adults to lead other youth around Richmond, CA performing green maintenance on their properties including a 3-acre urban farm located in North Richmond.

On that hot July day, we brought out 14 youth and young adults to tour a 240-acre orchard and an 1100+ alfalfa and specialty crop operation, meet the farmers, and facilitate cross-pollination of ideas between newly emerging urban farms and traditional row crop agriculture.

Fall of 2018, CCRCD and our federal partner, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) hosted the 2018 Local Work Group meeting, “Government and Agriculture, Partners in Conservation.” We brought a number of local, state, and federal government agencies together to talk about our various programs that work with the agricultural community.

Throughout the day, we heard presentations from the NRCS and RCD, the USDA Farm Services Agency the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, University of California Cooperative Extension, Contra Costa Board of Supervisors, and the Contra Costa Dept. of Agriculture. Overall, more than 30 attendants learned of new opportunities to partner with government agencies in the name of increased conservation.

Though the Contra Costa Voluntary Local Program, CCRCD provided permitting assistance on 5 rangeland projects that resulted in improved water systems for livestock and improved breed habitat for specially-listed species. These projects included the development of off-stream water facilities through pipelines and troughs and the desiltation and in-stream channel stabilization of a degraded livestock pond. This program, through a partnership with the NRCS and voluntary ranchers, provides livestock with more reliable, clean, and accessible water, but also improved habitat and breeding conditions for the specially listed California Tiger Salamander, California Red-Legged Frog, and the Alameda Whipsnake.

Contra Costa RCD offers numerous opportunities to partner and increase conservation on your farm and ranch. If you are interested in any of our programs, please contact Ben Weise at bweise@ccrcd.org for more information.

This past year, we also worked to increase conservation within our row crop systems. Through the Specialty Crop Block Grant, Contra Costa RCD developed and released a survey in June 2019 to capture attitudes and perceptions of specialty crop growers in Contra Costa county around the management practice of cover cropping. With this data, Contra Costa RCD hopes to identify certain trends that will be used to increase the adoption of this management practice for the benefit of farm and soil health. Additionally, Contra Costa RCD also helped an urban farm in Pittsburg apply and receive funding through the California Department of Food and Agriculture’s Healthy Soils Incentives Program. Through this cost-share funding, the urban farm will apply compost annually for 3 years, establish 500 ft. of hedgerow planting, and plant a 1-acre riparian buffer to protect the nearby creek. Finally, Contra Costa RCD applied in spring 2019 on behalf of 3 farms in Antioch, Knightsen, and Brentwood for funding to remove and prevent illegal dumping on their operations. Through the CalRecycle Farm and Ranch Solid Waste Cleanup and Abatement Grant program, these three operations altogether will receive over $31,000 to remove tires, automobile parts, green waste, and household waste that’s been illegally dumped and construct abatement measures like perimeter fencing and gates.
With staff, revenue, outreach and projects all increasing, CCRCD continues to grow its impact throughout Contra Costa during 2018-2019. CCRCD implemented a social media plan to increase awareness, sponsored community gatherings to increase community involvement and developed education programs to foster conservation within all of our programs: watershed, working lands and restoration. These efforts have allowed the CCRCD to work with diverse partners to reach communities with varied needs as well as reaching previously underserved communities.

In order to continue funding this work, CCRCD will continue to focus on local and private funding opportunities and increased donations. For every dollar collected through tax revenue, CCRCD collected approximately 1.5 through collaboration and coordination with its many partners to fund its mission of conservation throughout Contra Costa County.

Contra Costa Resource Conservation District is a special district of the State of California, and as a government entity, is an exempt organization under the provisions of IRC §115. Contributions to the district are deductible under the provisions of IRC §170(c)(1). The condensed government-wide financial data ended June 30, 2019 presented above has been audited. A full independent audit report can be viewed on our website.

Patty Pell | Office Administrator

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS & SUPPORTERS!

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY!

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Beth Ludwig
Bill Concannon
Bonnie Pannell
Carol Lampson
Dean Kelch
Deborah Brandon
Elena Gomez
Hannah Hodgson
Hermanus von Greunen
Igor & Shirley Skaredoff
Kathy Kears
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Nancy Rieser
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LARGE DONORS
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Carquinez Regional Environmental Education Center
El Sol Mexican Restaurant
Gauge Point Calibrations
Phillips66 Refinery, Rodeo
Rodeo Sanitary District
Sugar City Pet Supply

FINANCIALS

2018-2019

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Thank you to our donors & supporters!

Together we can make a difference in Contra Costa County!

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS & SUPPORTERS!

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY!
We have a lot going on, please join us on Facebook, subscribe to our YouTube channel, and visit CCRCD.org

Contra Costa Resource Conservation District
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Igor Skaredoff
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Process Chemist (retired)

Walter Pease
Treasurer,
Consultant at waterTALENT, LLC

Bethallyn Black
Diablo Valley College, Horticulture Instructor

Lorena Castillo
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Renee Fernandez-Lipp
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Bob Peoples
Resource/Open Space Conservation Management

Robert Simmons
Chair, Walnut Creek Watershed Council

Currents is a Publication of the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District
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