

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH HAZARD MITIGATION PLANNING

 San Mateo
Resource Conservation District

The Best Form of Local Government You've Never Heard Of

The San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD) covers land stretching from the redwoods to the ocean in San Mateo County, California. Like most special districts, the RCD was created to fulfill an unmet need for local governance of natural resources—and it has leveraged its unique position to become a critical player in local hazard mitigation processes.

While the RCD primarily engages in “boots on the ground” conservation and restoration work, ***it is also able to partner with multiple county departments and with the board of supervisors.*** When it comes to local mitigation planning, this gives the RCD a unique insider-outsider perspective. While staying attuned to the priorities of both decision-makers and community members, the RCD operates as an outside entity, meaning it brings a unique perspective to planning efforts. In this role, the RCD is able to ***effectively communicate conservation efforts to policymakers and bridge different partners in the county for a more integrated planning process.***

WHY DID THE DISTRICT PARTICIPATE IN THE MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL LOCAL HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN?

Primed to help the community

After historic wildfires five years ago, the RCD was positioned to provide services to the community but was not included in the formal recovery process because it did not own the land that was impacted. By joining the county’s plan, the RCD established itself as an entity able to provide support for future recovery efforts.

Platform to communicate benefits of nature-based solutions

The hazard mitigation plan provides the RCD with a platform to spotlight the benefits of their work and communicate how nature-based solutions (NBS) can address interrelated crises.

Funding and support for projects

The RCD found that conservation projects with explicit hazard mitigation co-benefits were often more compelling and accessible priorities for constituents and decisionmakers.



CO-BENEFITS: BUTANO CREEK RECONNECTION PROJECT



Over time, Butano Creek became disconnected from its floodplain, accumulating sediment that blocked annual fish migration and caused floods in the town and surrounding farmland. The RCD undertook a dredge and fill project to reconnect the creek to the floodplain and restore its ecosystem function. The effort, completed in 2019, was co-managed by California State Parks and paid for using federal, state, and local grant money. The reconnection project successfully restored access to 10.1 miles of the creek for threatened trout and salmon and reduced flooding in the town of Pescadero.

Strategies for Reframing Solutions

San Mateo RCD is grant-dependent and applies for funding on a project-by-project basis, meaning it must actively identify funding streams and determine how to most effectively frame multi-benefit projects to different audiences. The RCD prioritizes a few key principles when communicating its priorities:

Think systemically with a watershed approach to isolate the root cause of the issue

With flood mitigation, it's important to communicate that where you see the problem is often a symptom of the greater issue rather than the source of that issue. The solution may be found elsewhere.

Develop the capacity to understand and communicate process-based restoration

Permitting for infrastructure and capital projects is often set up with metrics for accountability that rely on a precise outcome. However, when restoring an ecosystem process, outcome is a function rather than an object, meaning it is often harder to garner support from policymakers and community members for nature-based solutions with more ambiguous end results. ***In dynamic systems, ecosystem processes and ecological functions should be thought of as outcomes.***

ADDITIONAL PATHWAYS TO PROMOTING COORDINATED MULTI-BENEFIT SOLUTIONS WITH PARTNERS

Cutting the Green Tape: Regulatory Efficiencies for a Resilient Environment

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife recently developed the Cutting the Green Tape Initiative to reduce regulatory barriers to environmentally beneficial work. San Mateo RCD's Executive Director Kellyx Nelson was a key contributor to the initiative, which aims to accelerate state restoration efforts by streamlining pathways for habitat permitting and environmental grant funding and facilitating interagency coordination. Nelson emphasized that looking ahead, the initiative presents an opportunity for resource conservation districts to prioritize multi-benefit projects.

Learn more at
wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Cutting-Green-Tape.

