

# 2018 Annual Report

Nevada County Resource Conservation District  
& Natural Resources Conservation Service



Nevada County  
**RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

*Your Partner in Conservation and Agriculture*

# Resource Conservation Districts

## THE HISTORY

On May 20, 1862, the Homestead Act accelerated the settlement of the western territory of the United States by granting any adult citizen a claim of 160 acres of surveyed public land. Claimants were required to “improve” the plot by building a dwelling and cultivating the land. After 5 years on the land, the original filer was entitled to the property, free and clear, except for a small registration fee. The Homestead Act led to a massive influx of new and inexperienced farmers across the Great Plains, greatly increasing the acreage under cultivation.

At this point in time, the Great Plains had been covered by miles upon miles of prairie grass. But widespread conversion of the land by deep plowing and other methods ended up eliminating the native grasses which held the soil in place and helped retain moisture during dry periods.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I, creating a huge demand for wheat. Farmers began to push their fields to their limit, plowing under more and more grassland with the newly invented tractor, which chewed up huge amounts of land at unheard of rates.

Then, in 1931, a severe drought hit the mid-west and southern plains states. This drought is the worst ever in United States history, covering more than 75 percent of the country and affecting 27 states severely. As the crops died, the “black blizzards” began. Dust from the over-plowed and over-grazed land began to blow.

On May 11th, 1934, a massive dust storm two miles high sent millions of tons of topsoil flying toward the East Coast, right over the top of Washington, D.C. and 300 miles out into the



Atlantic Ocean. This prompted Congress to declare soil erosion “a national menace” and as a result, both the Soil Conservation Act and Soil Conservation Service (SCS) were created. This new federal agency (now called the Natural Resources Conservation Service or NRCS) developed extensive conservation programs to retain topsoil and prevent further irreparable damage to the land.

But by 1936, the damage had been done. Eight hundred and fifty million tons of topsoil had been blown off the southern plains. Soil conservation laws were enacted in 1937 that allowed farmers to set up their own local conservation districts (now called Resource Conservation Districts). These RCDs were controlled by local boards of directors and empowered to manage soil and water resources for the purpose of conservation. Until the formation of these RCDs, farmers and ranchers often had no way of reaching SCS scientists for soil and water information and guidance. The RCD program recognized that new farming science and technology needed to be tested, accepted, and enforced by the farmers working the land, rather than bureaucrats in Washington.

# Celebration of Service

## 75 YEARS AND GOING STRONG

On January 4, 1944 the Nevada County Board of Supervisors approved the organization of the Nevada County Resource Conservation District (NCRCD or RCD). The NCRCD is governed by a board of 5 directors appointed by the Nevada County Board of Supervisors and is made up of local landowners who provide input for local resource management. The original district boundaries included 54,600 acres in the Chicago Park and Wolf Creek areas. Since that time, the boundaries have expanded and contracted at least twelve times, and now include all of Nevada County and a portion of western Sierra County.

The NCRCD is a state mandated, not-for-profit, Special District that is neither a regulatory group nor a county entity. We are a “political subdivision” of the State of California (under California Public Resources Code, Division Nine, Section 9003), not funded by the state, and required to pay state sales tax. We are federally tax-exempt under Section 170(c)(1) of the Internal Revenue Service code and can accept donations as tax-free contributions. We receive a small percentage of revenue from property taxes of Nevada County residents.

We partner with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in assisting landowners and land managers in their efforts to conserve the natural resources of their land. Both organizations provide technical assistance regarding issues that include erosion control, drainage issues, pond management, invasive weed control, forest stand health, hazardous fuels management, wildlife habitat improvement, pasture, orchard and vineyard management, and rangeland management.

NCRCD continues to sponsor educational efforts to teach children and adults alike of the importance of conserving natural resources. Though there are growing contributions by other groups and organizations in communities that raise public awareness of resource conservation, RCDs remain one of the primary links between local people and government on issues related to conservation. With an ever-dwindling base of resources and environmental pressures from a host of human activities, the work of RCDs will continue to be needed far into the future.

It took a crisis of national proportions to bring this about. Farmers and ranchers still need up-to-date scientific information and techniques to manage the natural resources on their land, and the need for ongoing conservation education and assistance among all sectors of the public is as great or greater than it ever has been. Today, there are approximately 3,000 conservation districts throughout the United States. ■





# ~ Jan Blake: Moving on ~

On July 31, 2018, Executive Director Jan Blake retired from the RCD. Well... “retired” is a relative word – she has literally moved on to greener pastures living and working at one of Nevada County’s historical ranches. In this new phase of her life, Jan is living her dreams and re-imagining her life as a ranch hand. She has found her love of the land here and she’s following in the footsteps of her grandfather to find a new passion in farming and ranching. We all know that she has a particular affinity for animals, so this path seems most appropriate!

Jan’s career with the RCD started in April 2008. Over the last 10 years Jan started many new events and projects, re-built relationships with local organizations, partnered with organizations on their projects and events, and most notably, spearheaded a new awareness of the history and importance of agriculture in Nevada County by co-producing not just one,

but *two* documentaries on Nevada County agriculture (Working Lands volumes I & II, both of which were shown in part on PBS and are available for purchase.)



Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Jan is as busy as ever mowing over sprinklers, chasing loose livestock, naming the livestock, and adopting all the dogs in the neighborhood (most of which now share the comfort of her couch). When she has a spare moment, Jan continues her work with the RCD as a consultant. Jan, we miss our daily dose of your passion and get-it-done spirit, but we all wish you nothing but the best and hope you continue to enjoy this new phase of your life. You’ve earned it! ■



# Lions Lake Improvement Project

The location of the Lions Lake Improvement Project is at our beautiful Nevada County Fairgrounds in Grass Valley. The project was approved by the NCRCD Board of Directors in June 2017, and after working through various stumbling blocks, work on the lake began in April 2018.

The purpose of the project was to improve the health and recreational use of Lion's Lake while educating the community on the importance of erosion control, lake/pond management, wildlife habitat improvement, and invasive species and hazardous fuels management.

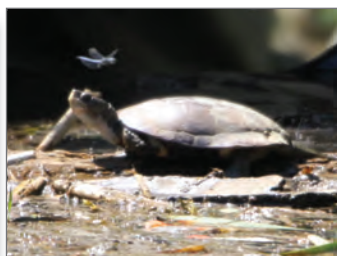
The project included removing a partially collapsed block headwall, re-shaping the shoreline where the headwall was removed and re-grading the angle of the shoreline for safety, removing approximately 6,000 cubic yards of silt from the bottom edges of the lake, removing the majority of invasive cattails and blackberries from the edges of the lake, armoring (lining with rock) the shoreline for bank stabilization and fish and wildlife habitat with 775 tons of angular rock, and re-grading then graveling the path around the lake to inhibit soil from again infiltrating the lake. Large natural boulders were also placed as habitat structures in the lake. Ineffective culverts were replaced, and one useless culvert was removed. An existing culvert at the southeast corner of the lake

(near McCourtney Road) was removed and the shoreline was returned to its original state. The existing drainage area at the south berm of the lake was improved, as was the "V" ditch to eliminate surface runoff and prevent polluted water from entering the lake. Four diseased ponderosa pine trees south of the lake berm, within the path of the "V" ditch, were removed allowing for better drainage and community safety.

Our contractors were extremely efficient and conscientious regarding the potential disturbance this work would cause to the wildlife and to the surrounding neighbors. Clean-up of debris occurred simultaneously with the work, leaving the area accessible to the community for the duration of the project.

Some of the many benefits of this project to the community include:

- The ability to safely access this previously deteriorating area,
- An increase in botanical diversity of native plants by removing competitive invasive plants,
- The improvement of wildlife habitat for fish, birds, turtles and insects, and
- Shoreline stabilization, and runoff and erosion control around the lake. ■





# Community Outreach

## PUBLICATIONS

The NCRCD offers the latest science-based literature along with many of our own publications. Local historical books, documentaries, and instructional guides are offered side-by-side with books on Rural Road Maintenance, Gardening in Nevada County, and Stockmanship. Along with these are nesting boxes, hats, and bumper stickers which are sold year-round.



## 2018 PUBLIC SEMINARS

We strongly believe that education is the foundation of assisting landowners and land managers in maintaining the land. To this end, each year we offer 5 to 10 seminars hosted by local professionals who we feel will help the community in understanding rural life here in Nevada County and what it takes to make it thrive.

**Nevada County Resource Conservation District**  
**2018 SEMINAR SERIES**

UCCE LIVING WITH FIRE PRESENTS  
**FIRE ADAPTED STRATEGIES for your Home & Land**  
FEBRUARY 20<sup>th</sup>, 6 - 9 PM at the Rood Center in Nevada City

KELLY WEINTRAUB, POINT BLUE WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST PRESENTS  
**WILDLIFE of the PACIFIC CREST TRAIL**  
MARCH 29<sup>th</sup>, 6 - 8 PM

JANEY POWERS PRESENTS  
**BIRDS IN BLACK**  
APRIL 9<sup>th</sup>, 6 - 8 PM

FOOTHILL FIBERS GUILD PRESENTS  
**Discover the Fun of NATURAL FIBERS**  
APRIL 19<sup>th</sup>, 6 - 8 PM

STEVE EUBANKS, NEVADA COUNTY BIOMASS TASK FORCE PRESENTS  
**PREPARING FOR A NEVADA COUNTY BIOMASS FACILITY**  
MAY 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6 - 8 PM

CHRIS BIERWAGEN, DONNER TRAIL FRUIT PRESENTS  
**FRUIT TREE PRODUCTION AND PRUNING**  
MAY 31<sup>st</sup>, 6 - 8 PM

BONNIE BRANDT PRESENTS  
**WASPS of NEVADA COUNTY, Friend, Foe, or Both?**  
JUNE 11<sup>th</sup>, 6 - 8 PM

NORCAL BATS PRESENTS  
**NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BATS**  
JUNE 21<sup>th</sup>, 6 - 8 PM

## SPEAK-OFF CONTEST

The NCRCD offers all Nevada County high school students the opportunity to participate in our annual Speak-off Contest. Students research an agriculture, conservation, or environmental topic and then put together a creative, informative speech. Speeches are presented to our Board of Directors who score the student based on the speech's content, composition, and delivery. First, second, and third place winners take home cash prizes and first place winners are encouraged to advance to the California State Championship competition.

# Community Outreach

## MONARCH SEMINAR

In an effort to help avoid listing the Monarch Butterfly as an endangered species, the NCRCD brought together experts from the Xerces Society, Master Gardeners of Nevada County, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and California Farm Bureau Federation to educate the public on the potential effects of a listing. Topics included conservation status, threats, monarch biology, habitat improvement, and native milkweed ID.



## RANGE CAMP

Range Camp is designed to offer an appreciation of the importance and value of California's rangelands. It fosters an appreciation for several fields of applied science and management through interaction with university faculty and experienced professionals in classroom and field activities. Range Camp is open to all Nevada County high school students and applications can be found on our website in March each year.

## WILDFIRE PREVENTION & PREPAREDNESS TOWN HALL

As fire season is now nearly year-round, we partner with representatives from CAL FIRE, local law enforcement, and city/county officials in offering "Town Hall" meetings where attendees can speak with experts and get the information they need to aid in becoming better prepared for wildfire in our community.

## IRRIGATED PASTURE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

Our Irrigated Pasture Management workshop is offered in partnership with Nevada Irrigation District and the UC Cooperative Extension.

Experts from UCCE explore topics covering soil moisture, water-efficient irrigation methods, soil biology, and irrigation scheduling.



## AVP, TOOL LOAN/RENTAL, & MANURE EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

The Advisory Visit Program, tool loan/rental, and Manure Exchange Program help connect Nevada County farmers, ranchers, gardeners, and landowners with free expert technical assistance and local resources.



## SFREC'S BEEF & RANGE FIELD DAY

NCRCD helped support the Sierra Foothills Research and Extension Center's Beef & Range Field Day. This 5th annual event put 4-H and FFA students in touch with researchers and scientists who are utilizing current scientific methodologies related to agriculture and natural resource management so students can see firsthand some of the career pathways that are open to them.





# Annual Events

## CONSERVATION DINNER

This dinner is our favorite way to say “thank you” to the many people who work with the NCRCD each year. In 2018, Rea Callender, CEO of the Nevada County Fairgrounds, took us through the Fairgrounds’ contributions to local agriculture for the last 134 years.

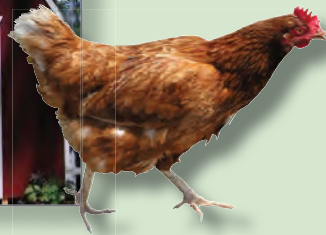


## PLANT GIVE-AWAY

The NCRCD celebrates Arbor day with a free plant and seedling give-away. In 2018 we offered ponderosa pines, sugar pines, Douglas-firs, pacific coast hybrid iris, vine maples, redosier dogwoods, and narrow-leaved milkweed.



## NEVADA COUNTY FAIR



Each year the NCRCD offers resources and information to the public at the Nevada County Fair. The NCRCD strives to continue educating and raising awareness of important local natural resource topics such as: forest health, agriculture, native plants, invasive species, living with wildlife and



composting. We share space with the Nevada County Farm Bureau where children get to play farmer for a day and receive prizes - all while learning about how food gets from the farm/ranch to their tables.





# Nevada County Ag Tour

Once again, the Nevada County Resource Conservation District and the Nevada County Farm Bureau (NCFB) teamed-up to put together a great selection of locations for the 2018 Nevada County Agriculture Tour. This all-day event, featured farm and vineyard visits that represented the diversity and innovation of agriculture in Nevada County.

## 2018 Ag Tour stops included:

- Nightingale Farms – milk goats and goat-milk body products
- Dinner Bell Farm – heritage pigs and cut flowers (separate locations)
- Bakbraken Acres – organic farm
- McClaughry Farms – apiary and honey (demo at Bakbraken Acres)
- Montoliva Vineyard - wine tasting

Tickets for the Ag Tour are always sold out and available by advance purchase only from the NCFB website. Admission includes comfortable air-conditioned transportation, educational talks at each stop, lunch, and wine tasting.

Hope we see you on the 2019 tour!





# 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Farm Day

## NEVADA COUNTY AG IN THE CLASSROOM

September 20, 2018, marked Nevada County Ag in the Classroom's 4th Annual Farm Day at the Nevada County Fairgrounds. Farm Day introduces children to different types of agriculture in an era when children are increasingly disconnected from how food gets from the farm/ranch to their plates. It is surprising how many children don't have a full understanding of where their food comes from! At Farm Day, students see firsthand how their favorite foods are grown and

raised and are exposed to a wide variety of agricultural fields.

Nevada County Ag in the Classroom is made up of representatives of the following organizations: Nevada County Ag Commissioner's office, Nevada County Fairgrounds, Nevada County Farm Bureau, NCRCD, Placer Nevada Cattle Women, Sierra Foothills Research & Extension Center, and Sierra Harvest.



FFA – BARREL RACING AND ROPING  
 FOWLER FAMILY FARM – IRRIGATION RELAY  
 PLACER NEVADA CATTLE WOMEN - STORY TIME



FFA – TOP 10 AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES  
 4-H – POULTRY, GOATS, AND SHEEP



BIERWAGEN FARM – CIDER PRODUCTION  
 SIERRA HARVEST – SEED HARVESTING

MULES AND DRAFT HORSES –  
 THEIR HISTORY & RANCH-USES BEFORE MACHINES





NID – WHERE YOUR WATER COMES FROM



CALFRESH – NUTRITION  
FOREST HILL LUMBER – MILLING



NEVADA COUNTY FLYWHEELERS – GRINDING  
FOOTHILL FIBERS GUILD – SPINNING



NORCAL BATS – THE IMPORTANCE OF BATS TO FARMS/RANCHES;  
SFAS – BIRDS AS PEST SUPPRESSION



CALIFORNIA DEPT OF AGRICULTURE – PEST-DETECTING DOGS  
SFREC – ANIMALS



NC BEEKEEPERS – WHY WE NEED POLLINATORS  
NC AG COMMISSIONER – INSECTS AND WEIGHTS



FFA – BEEF AND SWINE





# Partners & Supporters

