

Nevada County Resource Conservation District

Strategic Direction

The Need

The communities and natural resources of Nevada County face many changes and challenges. The primary land use, culture, and activities on the land are changing. This land has a long history of applied farming, ranching, and industrial land uses that we see today. This is transitioning to a more diverse, agricultural landscape with a growing number of small farms supporting CSA's for residents and local restaurants and grocery stores. More recently there is a rapid increase in land use toward housing for a growing population of both urban/suburban residents and rural smaller landowners.

At the same time, there has been an increase in catastrophic wildfires, recurrent drought, insect outbreaks and large storm events. These are impacting the livelihoods and lifestyles of many throughout the County. This has made good land stewardship more important and at the same time more challenging than ever. Many of the new residents are from urban or suburban areas and are unfamiliar with what it takes to live in a more rural environment and steward the land. This has created more demand for water. More than ever, private landowners need reputable good information and technical support on best practices for land stewardship.

The Nevada County Resource Conservation District has been providing this support for nearly 80 years. As the needs change, the direction of the community support for land stewardship has changed. This strategic plan reflects a review of current challenges and needs private landowners face in land stewardship.

Our Vision

The Board of Directors and staff of Nevada County Resource Conservation District (NCRCD) envision and strive towards a future where we skillfully address these changing needs, so that abundant natural resources can continue to enrich and support the land, communities, and ecosystems of Nevada County.

Our vision for the future of Nevada County includes:

- Forests, rangelands, and other lands that have been restored to a fire-resilient state, allowing communities, wildlife, and natural resources to co-exist with fire.
- Vibrant and sustainable agricultural enterprises, where farmers and ranchers use conservation practices that create long-term health for the land and soils, helping our communities adapt to changes in climate and other conditions.
- Clean and abundant water for drinking, irrigation, and sustenance of the natural environment.
- Healthy habitat and functioning watersheds that support abundant plants, animals, and other species.

- Landowners have the knowledge and skills they need to successfully apply good stewardship practices to their land.

To make this vision possible, we must also envision a future where the stewardship actions of our entire community are enlisted to support the natural resources we cherish and rely on.

We are working towards a future where everyone in Nevada County is inspired, invited, and motivated to work together as partners in stewardship. In this ideal future, everyone will be able to participate in stewardship through the practices and decisions that happen on farms, ranches, and rural properties; in urban and suburban neighborhoods; in business and in government. Access to information, tools, and resources can make these conservation practices widespread and help more people relate to our environment in healthy, mutually beneficial ways.

Realizing this vision is bigger than any one agency—it will take many people and organizations working together and within their own organizations. Members of the board and staff of NCRCD are proud to play our role in working towards this future.

Our Mission, Visions, and Role

The mission of the Nevada County RCD is to promote responsible land stewardship within our jurisdiction through education, leadership, technical, and project facilitation.

We fulfill our mission by offering expertise that is grounded in a deep history of science, practical experience, and best practices. We specialize in coordinating efforts, meeting emergent needs, and serving as trustworthy advisors to help people bring stewardship practices to their land and communities.

As a special district guided by the State of California’s Natural Resource Code, Nevada RCD is led by an appointed board of directors who represent our community. Nevada County RCD can:

- Provide technical assistance, funding, and other resources directly to private landowners to help them implement stewardship practices on their properties, in a confidential, non-regulatory context.
- Partner with other public agencies to implement on-the-ground conservation.
- Respond to the emerging needs of our communities and our natural resources as conditions change around us.
- Participate in coordinating government, private, and nonprofit entities from the local, state, regional, and federal levels to support all partners to achieve more together.

Our values

Several principles guide our work and help us make decisions and relate well to one another:

- **Collaboration:** In our programs, we partner with a broad base of organizations and people throughout the community, joining our resources and expertise to reach shared goals. Within our organization, we work as a team, leverage each other’s strengths, and support each other in big and small ways.
- **Creativity.** We are a flexible, responsive, innovative agency driven by community needs. We are always seeking to improve our programs and to incorporate new resources and approaches. We are committed to learning and growth as an organization and as individuals.
- **Representative of the varied county environments and communities.** We provide support and resources to people throughout Nevada County, from the forests to the valley. We work to make our programs meet the needs of people from all backgrounds and interests.
- **Integrity and transparency:** The Board of Directors and staff share information openly, live up to our commitments, and bring excellence to our individual roles for the benefit of the whole.

About this document

The RCD’s 2025-2030 Strategic Direction describes our goals, strategies, and priorities for moving towards this vision over the next several years. In addition to deepening and expanding our core stewardship programs, we will make new investments in education and community awareness—and we will continue to strengthen our collaboration with community partners so that we can achieve more together.

Creation of the Strategic Direction

This strategic direction document was created by the Board of Directors and staff of the Nevada County RCD in in the Fall and Winter of 2024-2025. Our process included:

- The following stakeholders shared their perspectives via interviews, focus groups, and surveys:
 - ♦ *RCD Directors:* Jim Drew, Chair; JoAnn FitesKaufman, Vice Chair; Reed Hamilton, Director; Alana Fowler, Director; Linda Miller
 - ♦ *RCD Staff:* Briana Bacon, Executive Director; Anne Solik, Office Manager; Nathan Alcorn, Program Director, Emma DiClementi, ; Haley Coopergard, P; Jennifer Crosby, Prescribed Fire p
 - ♦ *Representatives from partner organizations including:* Nevada County Board of Supervisors; Nevada County Fire Department (multiple individuals); CAL FIRE (multiple individuals), California Association of Resource Conservation Districts; Placer County RCD; Nevada County (Executive Office, Parks Division, Ag Commissioner, Stormwater); Nevada County Water Agency (multiple individuals); Nevada Sierra Fire Safe Council; RCD contractors and former directors; U.C. Cooperative Extension Nevada County
- A three phase process was applied to develop the strategic plan.
 - ♦ Staff and board collaborate on an initial strategic plan framework.
 - ♦ Gather input from partners and stakeholders on the key challenges and needs they see for private land stewardship.
 - ♦ Integrate the framework and input from partners and stakeholders into a strategic plan for final review and approval by the Board of Directors.
- The Board of Directors approved the strategic direction on March 11, 2025.

Updates to the Strategic Direction

Acknowledging that our operating environment and organization are changing rapidly, we plan to check back regularly on this Strategic Direction document. We will incorporate the goals, strategies, and objectives into annual workplans, staff reports, and annual reports. The Board of Directors will consider revisions to this Strategic Direction document at approximately halfway through the planned timeframe. We will also update the measurable objectives outlined here each year as part of the annual workplan process.

Goals and Strategies

<p>Goal #1: Residents and land managers throughout Nevada County have the knowledge, skills, resources, and confidence they need to steward our land and resources.</p>	
Strategies for 2022-2025	Measurable Objectives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop an education, outreach, and communications plan to engage people in good land stewardship from the variety of communities in Nevada County, working in close partnership with other public and private organizations. 2. Continue Nevada County’s Beginning Farmers and Ranchers program, reaching urban and backyard gardeners and smaller rural producers. 3. Develop multiple programs to engage community volunteers in NCRCD programs. 4. Support the development of the youth in agriculture education programs such as with the Ranch School (student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff hired and plan developed ■ Plan objectives met ■ Pilot community volunteer program completed and evaluated ■ Youth education program approach developed if appropriate

<p>Goal #2: Strong and effective partnerships, funding and visibility ensure the RCD's programs are sustainable and effective.</p>	
Strategies for 2022-2025	Measurable Objectives
<p>1. Include opportunities for collaboration with other partners in the district.</p> <p>1. Include opportunities for collaboration with other partners in the district.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">1.1 Increase NCRCD's presence at key meetings with community leaders at the local, state, and federal levels.</p> <p>2. Increase the visibility of the NCRCD offerings and value in the community.</p> <p>3. Develop a long-range funding plan that includes an opportunity filter that will help staff and the board evaluate new funding, program, and project opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Plans developed ■ Evaluation process used to qualify and disqualify opportunities

<p>Goal #3: The forests, rangelands, farms, landscapes and communities of Nevada County are resilient to changes in land use, drought, wildfire and other influences on sustainable land stewardship.</p>	
<p>Strategies for 2022-2025</p>	<p>Measurable Objectives</p>
<p>1. Develop and support use of an adaptive approach for supporting best practices for long-term maintenance of resilient forests, rangelands, and landscapes through the use of prescribed fire and grazing, for example through additional treatments and technical assistance.</p> <p>1.1 Lead the development and implementation of a Prescribed Burn Association in Nevada County and provide prescribed burn and forest health education.</p> <p>1.2 Improve and expand assistance to residents to restore forests, rangeland, and landscape resilience through education, technical assistance, and other support.</p> <p>2. Examine the feasibility of new forest and ecosystem health programs including</p> <p>2.1 Options for forest products generated by fuel reduction.</p> <p>2.2 Rehab of wildfire burned areas including soil erosion control, water quality protection and reforestation or revegetation.</p> <p>3. Collaborate with partners in the projects. Restore and maintain forest and landscape resilience and function.</p> <p>3.1 Improving pollinator and wildlife habitat.</p> <p>3.2 Landscape resilience projects across multiple landownerships, where we focus on private lands.</p> <p>3.3 Provide expertise and support for maintenance treatments using prescribed fire and grazing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Collaborative plans developed ■ Prescribed Burn Association established ■ Number of acres treated with fuels reduction strategies ■ Number of acres treated with prescribed burn ■ Number of vulnerable residents served by fuels reduction programs.

Goal #4: Farmers, ranchers, and other rural landowners have the information and resources they need to sustainably manage their land, including larger and smaller operations.	
Strategies	Measurable Objectives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaborate with Nevada County with ongoing Healthy Soils programs to provide technical assistance and funding support to help landowners implement soil and water conservation practices. 2. Work with related entities including NRCS, U.C. Cooperative Extension, Nevada County Ag Commissioner, etc. to develop shared strategies for agricultural conservation. 3. Develop educational materials, technical assistance resources, and outreach strategies to reach smaller landowners and those newer to land management in Nevada County. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Expand our focus on underserved farmers/ranchers through outreach and education materials. 3.2. Further develop a conservation planning approach that helps rural landowners look at multiple resource issues and approaches on their lands. 4. Research the feasibility of a conservation learning hub or establishing best practices demonstration sites in Nevada County. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Number of landowners assisted ■ Conservation plans developed ■ Number of landowner applications funded ■ Shared outreach plan developed with other entities ■ Number of educational offerings

Goal #5: The Nevada County Resource Conservation's people, systems, and organizational culture support excellence in serving its mission.	
Strategies	Measurable Objectives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create an agile and well-rounded staff that is able to change to meet changes in needs. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Increase finance and management capacity in the RCD staff. 1.2 Increase capacity for outreach, education and communications to promote all NCRCD programs. 1.3 Support organizational growth with revised staff management structures, role clarification, onboarding practices and annual workplans. 2. Create a board recruitment and development plan that includes succession of officers and longtime directors, recruitment of new associate directors representing the diversity of communities within Nevada County, and support for directors. Maybe replace it with the CARCD Board Excellency Program? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Update director and officer position descriptions to clarify roles and responsibilities. 2.2 Develop a recruitment and outreach strategy for associate directors. 2.3 Clarify approach to training and orientation of new directors. 2.4 Integrate strategic meeting agendas. 3. Establish opportunities to build community, celebrate, and learn within and between the board and staff teams. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1. Adopt regular practices for evaluation / reflection on programs and projects. 5.2. Clarify professional development policies and opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ New positions hired ■ New structures roles established ■ Board recruitment and development plan created ■ Team celebration/connection schedule established