

2024- 2025

Annual **REPORT**



GET TO KNOW US

WHO WE ARE:

The Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD) is a public agency headquartered in Redlands, California, working to preserve open spaces, elevate forest health and fire resilience, rehabilitate wildlands, support sustainable agriculture, and connect with local communities through a range of conservation education programs and events. A seven-member board of directors, appointed by the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors, oversees District activity and ensures alignment with the IERCD's mission and mandates. District staff members facilitate work consistent with Board direction, both independently and in collaboration with a range of public and private organizations and individual community members.

WHO WE SERVE:

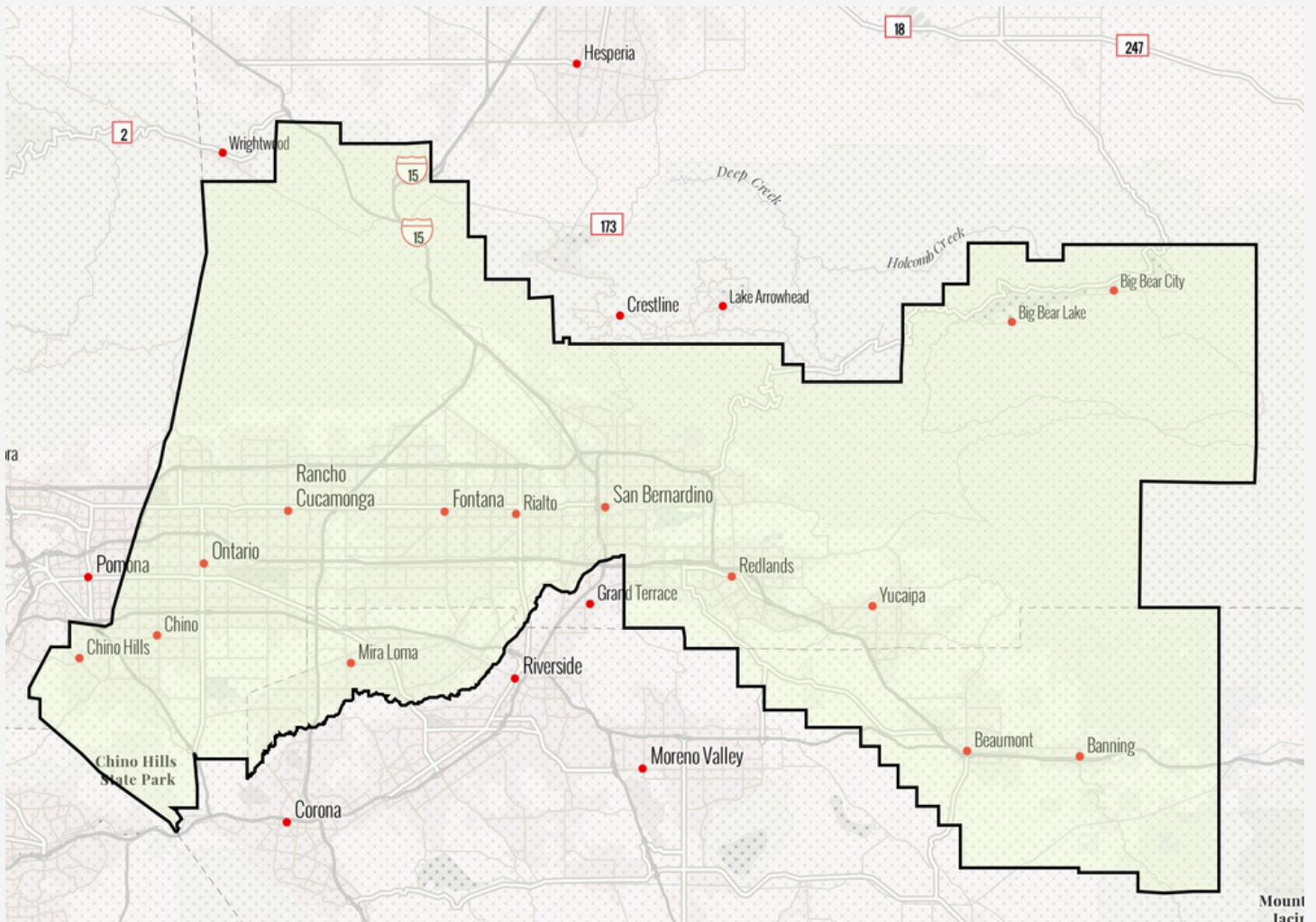
Our district spans 1,286 square miles of northwestern Riverside and southwestern San Bernardino counties, broadly defined as the Upper Santa Ana River Watershed.

OUR MISSION:

To promote the understanding that the quality of the environment determines the quality of life. In cooperation with landowners, local, state and federal agencies, the agricultural community, environmental and community groups, we will promote good stewardship of our soil, water, and other natural resources. We will provide strong education programs that will encourage today's youth to accept the responsibility of conserving our natural resources for tomorrow's generations.



OUR SERVICE AREA:



ELISAMA ORTEGA

Restoration
Technician I

“

One accomplishment I am really proud of during my time with IERCD is being part of a team that has made a real impact through habitat restoration projects — from native plantings to invasive species management. It has been rewarding to see the ecological improvements firsthand and know we are contributing to long-term conservation. I have also had the chance to support outreach events, which showed me how interested the community is in conservation. Being able to connect people with resources, share volunteer opportunities like planting events, and help them feel more engaged in conservation has been a highlight for me. It has shown me how important that community connection is to the success of our work.

”

RESTORING AND PROTECTING LOCAL LANDSCAPES

The IERCD continues to manage multiple aspects of compensatory mitigation projects within its 1,286-square-mile service area. Mitigation requirements are determined by regulatory agencies with jurisdiction over areas impacted by development projects. From there, IERCD works in a variety of capacities to establish highly functional, sustainable habitats that provide long-term benefits to affected species and surrounding ecosystems.

The success of this work is grounded in strong internal capacity, collaboration with external partners, and consistent application of adaptive management strategies for land acquisition, protection, improvement, and long-term stewardship.

During the 2024–2025 fiscal year, the Mitigation Program achieved the uplift and preservation of **1,440 acres** across **52 unique project sites**, advancing the District's long-term commitment to ecological restoration and habitat resilience.

GROWING THE FUTURE OF RESTORATION

Since its establishment in 2023, the IERCD native plant nursery at the Louis Robidoux Parkland and Pecan Grove has continued to grow in support of local restoration work. The nursery is the site of IERCD's propagation of locally sourced native plants that are genetically adapted to the Inland Empire's soils and climate.

KEY IMPACTS:

1,440

acres uplifted across

52 project sites,

including conservation,
enhancement, and
restoration work.

2,354

plants grown in our nursery.

217,000

invasive garlic mustard plants
removed from watershed.

A photograph of a field of wildflowers. In the foreground, a tall, thin stem with several small, light purple flowers is in focus. The background is a dense field of various wildflowers, including many small white daisies, yellow flowers, and some dark purple thistle-like flowers. The overall scene is a vibrant, natural landscape.

Using seeds sourced by IERCD's Natural Resources Team under sustainable collection guidance ensures that each plant grown contributes directly to ecosystem recovery while preserving the genetic diversity of local plant populations. By expanding nursery operations and integrating volunteer support, the IERCD continues to grow both native plants and community investment in long-term landscape restoration.

This year, the nursery program produced and distributed **2,354 plants** representing more than **50 native species**. Of these,



1,629

were installed
in Natural
Resources
Team
restoration
projects



266

were shared
through
community
giveaways



87

enhanced the
demonstration
gardens at
LRPPG



134

were donated
to partner
organizations



214

were made
available for
public purchase



24

supported
forestry-related
plantings.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION FOR ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE

The IERCD serves the southwest corner of San Bernardino County, and maintains an active Memorandum of Understanding with the adjacent Mojave Desert RCD (MDRCD) to provide support as needed throughout individual and shared service areas. This agreement allows collaborative work that crosses District boundaries, including the 2024-25 Garlic Mustard Project. Originally released as a 2023 Request For Proposals, this project solicited responses from regional conservation entities with capacity to identify and control expanding populations of the highly invasive garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*). Garlic mustard is considered to be both detrimental and limited enough in range to enable successful containment provided quick action is taken. IERCD and MDRCD collaborated on an ultimately successful application to complete the work on a range of lands in and around Hook Creek in the community of Lake Arrowhead. Following the contract award, IERCD and MDRCD completed 30 days of scouting and mapping, identifying **217,806 garlic mustard plants**, with treatments restricted to hand-pulling due to the sensitivity of project lands. Work is scheduled to continue through 2028 with partners including MDRCD, San Bernardino County, private landowners, and the United States Forest Service.



BUILDING WILDFIRE RESILIENCE

The IERCD continued to advance regional wildfire resilience through coordinated work in forest health, hazard reduction, and post-fire recovery. These activities are guided by local and state wildfire priorities and supported by partnerships that align planning, implementation, and funding to protect high-risk areas and improve ecological conditions.

The District's approach combines technical fieldwork, community collaboration, and long-term investment in regional capacity. Through this work, the IERCD helps safeguard natural landscapes, promote native vegetation recovery, and reduce wildfire risks for both ecosystems and communities. During the 2024–2025 fiscal year, forestry and fire program activities included the assessment of **44 properties**, surveys of **2,684 trees**, and managing more than **\$8.7 million in funding** to support wildfire resilience initiatives.



KEY IMPACTS:

\$8.7 million managed

2,684 trees surveyed

44 properties assessed

1,490 sandbags distributed for Bridge and Line Fire recovery

BEARPAW RESERVE POST-FIRE RESTORATION

The 2020 El Dorado Fire critically impacted the ecology and forests of The Wildland Conservancy's (TWC) Bearpaw Reserve in the San Bernardino Mountains. The IERCD partnered with TWC to address some of these impacts through an application for funding to implement hazardous fuel removals. The project received **\$150,000** from the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) through their Post-Fire Disaster Recovery Agreement with the USDA Forest Service. During the project term, 10.5 acres were treated, totaling approximately 275 tons of logs and debris removed. Through additional grant funding, The Wildlands Conservancy was able to continue fuel reduction on the Bearpaw Reserve, treating an additional 5.25 acres and removing 17.7 tons of hazardous fuels. With time and continued management to prevent scrub oak encroachment, the area is expected to continue recovering from the El Dorado Fire.



**KAYLA
THOMPSON**

Forestry Programs
Specialist

As someone born and raised in San Bernardino, it is incredibly meaningful to be able to give back to the communities and ecosystems I have always called home. I take pride in serving San Bernardino County and helping develop programs that address the unique needs of our District. One example is the pilot home assessment program we launched this past year, which supports landowners in making their homes more wildfire-resilient through defensible space and home hardening. These concepts can be challenging to navigate, so our program focuses on helping residents identify small, practical changes that can make a big impact in protecting their properties from wildfire.

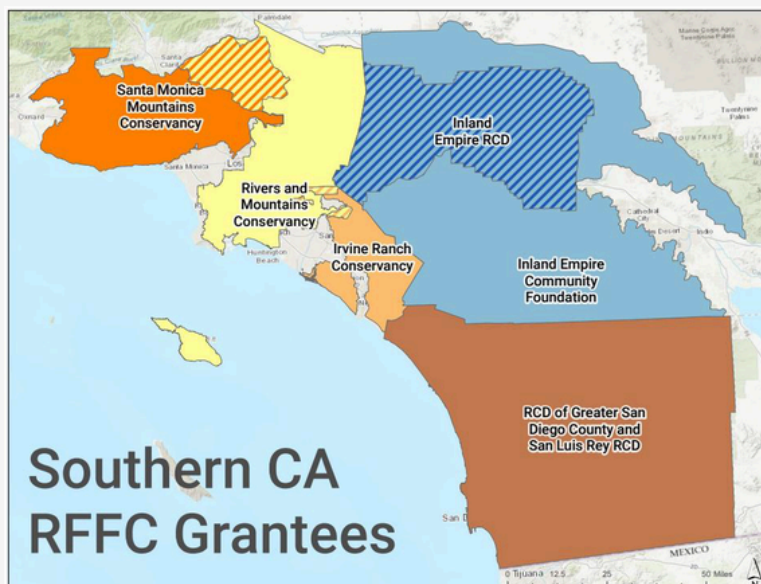
REGIONAL FOREST AND FIRE CAPACITY (RFFC) PROGRAM

The Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) grant program was established to support regional leadership in building local and regional capacity, as well as developing, prioritizing, and implementing strategies and projects that create fire-adapted communities and landscapes by improving ecosystem health, community wildfire preparedness, and wildfire resilience. The program is administered by the California Department of Conservation. The Department of Conservation provides block grants to regional entities (Regional Block Grantees) and to eligible coordinating organizations (Statewide Block Grantees) to support statewide implementation of the program. The IERCD became an RFFC Regional Block Grantee in 2019 with an initial investment of **\$1.425 million**. In 2021 and 2023, the IERCD received an additional combined investment of **\$5.695 million available through 2027**.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024–2025:

Expanded Regional Coordination

- Co-founded the Southern California Wildfire Resilience Partnership, bringing together six Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) grantees.
- Contributed to a neighboring RCD's acquisition of a **\$10 million CAL FIRE Block Grant** to support wildfire prevention and capacity-building projects across Southern California.
- Hosted the annual Southern California Wildfire Resilience Convening at the University of Redlands, which brought together over **100 practitioners** to share outcomes, strengthen collaboration, and identify emerging needs.





Supported Local Implementation

- Funded upgrades to native plant nurseries in Big Bear and Lytle Creek to increase the supply of locally adapted plants for post-fire restoration.
- Provided field and planning support for post-fire recovery and hazard tree assessments on private lands.



Improved Data and Planning

- Provided technical assistance for the 25,000-acre Community Defense Fuel Break Project in the San Bernardino National Forest.
- Conducted 44 property assessments and **2,684 tree surveys**, identifying 78 hazard removals to improve safety and forest health.

These investments strengthen long-term wildfire resilience across public and private lands, improve vegetation recovery after fire events, and build capacity for locally led forest and community protection efforts.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO NATURE

IERCD's programs help people understand and care for the places where they live. Through classroom lessons, community workshops, and public events, the District works to make conservation part of everyday life and to show students, families, and residents how small actions can protect local ecosystems and improve community well-being.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN LOCAL SCHOOLS

This year, IERCD delivered **308 K-12 presentations** throughout our service area, reaching **7,189 students** in both English and Spanish-speaking classrooms. Of the 308 programs presented, 153 were drawn from IERCD's 10-topic catalog covering a range of subjects aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The remaining 155 presentations were conducted in partnership with local water provider partners to help students connect with everyone's role in preserving short- and long-term water supplies for all those who depend on them.

KEY IMPACTS:

308

classroom programs
presented

7,189

students reached

31 community events
attended, reaching

4,300
attendees

21 workshops
coordinated



In addition to classroom programs, District staff members completed the second year of Know Your Water field trips for third- and fourth-grade students. Funded by the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District and hosted at the San Bernardino County Museum, three separate trips were held in the spring of 2025, benefiting 150 students in six classrooms as they moved through hands-on educational stations. Pre- and post-trip content and companion activities helped to prepare attendees and reinforce learning following the trips. The successful reception from participating students and teachers led to additional trips scheduled for 2025–26.



GROWING RESILIENCE THROUGH SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

IERCD supported local food production and agricultural resilience by investing in farmers, schools, and community organizations working to grow food sustainably in the Inland Empire.

URBAN AGRICULTURE IN ACTION

In June 2024, the IERCD received a regional block grant through the California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Urban Agriculture Program, enabling the District to support small farms, schools, and community organizations working to strengthen local food systems. The program funds infrastructure and equipment that help urban growers increase production, improve efficiency, and expand community access to fresh, locally grown food.

In 2024–2025, the District approved **\$604,000** in project funding to **23 subawardees** for projects that improve growing capacity, transportation, and on-site food storage.



KEY IMPACTS:

\$604K
approved for
23
subawardees



DIRECT FARMER AND COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

In September 2024, the IERCD was awarded its third National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Urban and Community (UAC) Grant. The approved project received funding to increase critical support for school and community gardens, as well as urban farms, while promoting peer-to-peer learning and providing technical assistance. As a result, the grant has significantly advanced urban agricultural efforts in the region, benefiting **24** unique educational and community sites across the Inland Empire.

NACD - UAC HIGHLIGHTS

\$60K
in funding

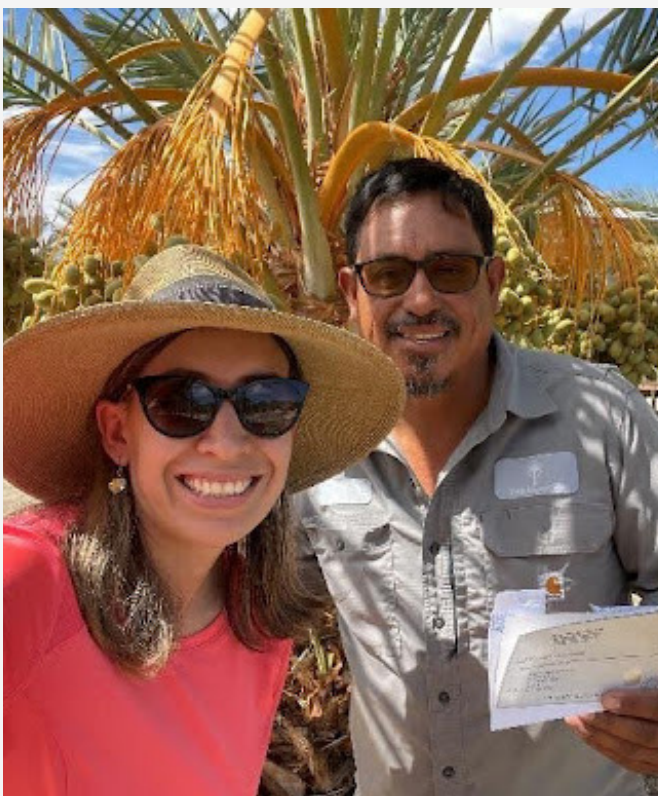
6 volunteer events

Establishment of a free tool lending library with

34 unique tool types

13

community workshops hosted



In the 2024–25 fiscal year, the IERCD began facilitating Round II of the California Underserved and Small Producer (CUSP) Grant, administered by the California Department of Food and Agriculture. The IERCD was awarded \$3.15 million to subgrant to producers affected by climate change-related extreme weather events. During this reporting period, the IERCD successfully completed one funding round, providing direct financial assistance to impacted farmers, supporting grant applications, and hosting workshops to ensure producers were aware of available funding.

CUSP BY THE NUMBERS

\$573,500

in funding for **38** awardees

11 local and regional partners engaged

One workshop with

41 attendees

LOUIS ROBIDOUX PARKLAND & PECAN GROVE

Louis Robidoux Parkland and Pecan Grove (LRPPG) serves as a regional hub for hands-on conservation, community learning, and habitat restoration. Managed by the IERCD in collaboration with key partners, the site demonstrates how ecological restoration, public access, and education can coexist to strengthen community connection with the environment.

SITE-WIDE IMPROVEMENTS

In 2024–2025, IERCD and its partners made significant progress in restoring and enhancing both the ecological health and visitor experience of the Parkland. More than **6 acres were restored** through invasive species removal, native planting, and ongoing site maintenance. Staff and volunteers installed **87 native plants, maintained 300 feet of trail, and constructed 500 feet of new fencing**. Two bee hotels and a bird blind were added to support pollinators and wildlife observation, while the removal of **3,353 pounds of trash** improved both ecological health and visitor safety. To further enhance public engagement, **41 new signs** were installed throughout the Parkland, including both interpretive and directional signage designed to make the site more welcoming, informative, and easy to navigate.

LRPPG IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS:

3,353

pounds of trash removed

87

plants installed

41

signs installed

4

workshops, engaging

157

attendees

52

volunteers





CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Throughout the year, IERCD hosted volunteer days, conservation workshops, and seasonal community events that drew **645 participants** and reached more than **76,000 people online**.

The third annual Fall Festival brought over **500** residents, partners, and families to the Parkland for an afternoon celebrating culture and conservation. The event featured live performances by Aztec and folklórico dance groups, locally sourced pumpkins, conservation-focused family activities, and partner exhibitor booths. Attendees also voted in the “Keep It Healthy, Keep It Wild” youth poster contest, which drew creative entries from local schools and showcased how young people connect with nature. Finally, community members present at the event were able to learn more about year-round volunteer and educational opportunities at LRPPG, connecting them to events planned for the 2026 calendar year.

STAFF AND BOARD

STAFF

Aaron Echols	Restoration Ecologist
Adrian Poloni	Forester
Adrian Rios	Restoration Technician I
Alma Eichman	Conservation Educator
Anthony Palafox	Restoration Technician I
Autumn Yanez-Jacobo	Sustainable Ag Technician
Chris Casillas	Restoration Specialist
Crystal Cortez	Education Programs Manager
Crystal Valenzuela	Community Engagement Specialist
Elisama Ortega	Restoration Technician I
Gaby Preciado	Education Programs Lead
Jennifer Castillo	Admin Programs Lead
Jocelyn Perez	Forest Ecologist
Jose Mora	Mitigation Programs Lead
Julian Marengo	Restoration Specialist
Kayla Thompson	Forestry Programs Specialist
Kevin Harrington	Field Ecologist
Kevin Hernandez	Habitat Site Lead
Lucy Ceja	Sustainable Ag Specialist
Lus Gomez	LRPPG Site Specialist
Madison Santiago	Sustainable Ag Lead
Malu Huerta	Conservation Planner
Mandy Parkes	District Manager
Melanie Garcia	Forestry Programs Lead
Miguel Aispuro	Restoration Technician II
Nancy Noriega	Grants Specialist
Omar Pena	Field Ecologist
Shari Tindall	Conservation Educator
Susie Kirschner	Conservation Programs Manager
Valerie Velazquez	Admin Assistant

BOARD

Rick Gomez
Board President

Nancy Sappington
Vice President

Rod LeMond
Secretary-Treasurer

Brad Buller
Director

Lorien Sanders
Director

David Friedman
Director

James Earsom
Director

Alicia Gyllenhammer
Associate Director

Andy Okoro
Associate Director