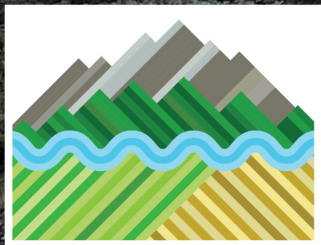


# ANNUAL REPORT

July 1 , 2023 - June 30, 2024



**PLACER  
RESOURCE  
CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT**



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# Community, Conservation, and Connection



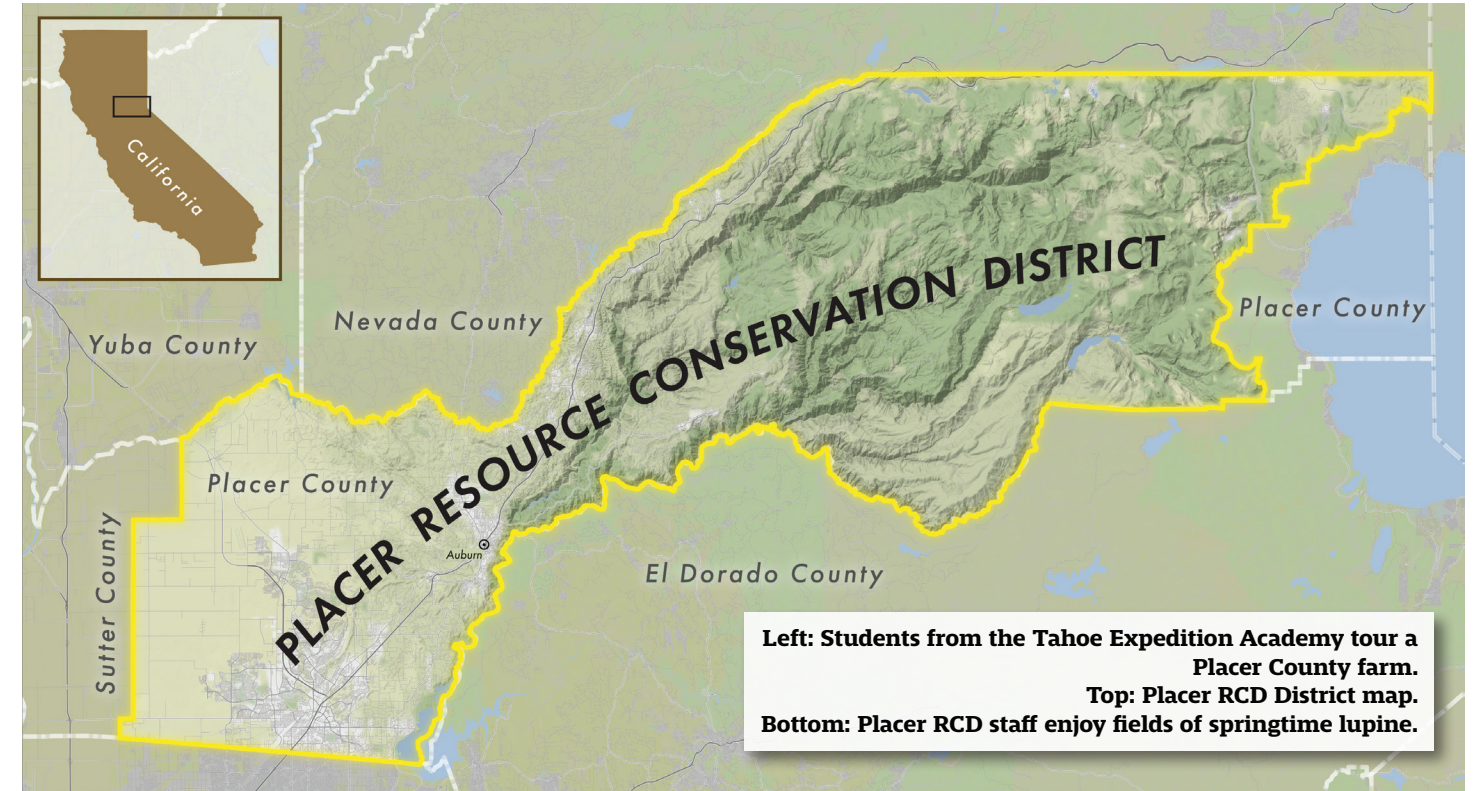
For more than 75 years, Placer County Resource Conservation District (Placer RCD) has provided technical assistance to private landowners, collaborated with state and local agencies, and implemented projects that promote sustainable land management.

Placer County boasts a wide range of natural resources, from working rangelands to oak woodlands and alpine forests. Our programs reflect the diversity of needs in our community, from wildfire resilience to pollinator restoration.



We prioritize making positive impacts within the county, supported by scientific research and collaboration.

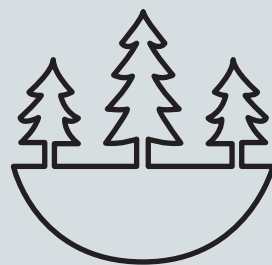
Placer RCD's mission is to advance the sustainable management of natural resources in Placer County among private landowners, local organizations, and public agencies through action, education, and outreach. Placer RCD's vision is to create a legacy of conservation by engaging with the community to support and inspire environmental stewardship.



Left: Students from the Tahoe Expedition Academy tour a Placer County farm.  
 Top: Placer RCD District map.  
 Bottom: Placer RCD staff enjoy fields of springtime lupine.

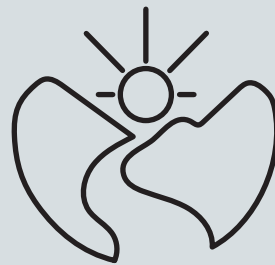
## Placer RCD's Vision for the Future of Placer County

Forests that have been restored to a fire-adapted state, allowing communities, wildlife, and natural resources to co-exist with fire.



Clean and abundant water for drinking, irrigation, and sustenance of the natural environment.

Vibrant and sustainable agriculture, where producers use practices that create long-term health for the land and soil.



Healthy habitats and functioning watersheds that support abundant plants, animals, and other species.



# Helping You Help the Land: Our Board and Staff



## Our Board of Directors



**Claudia Smith**  
Board Chair



**Patricia Beard**  
Board Director



**Cathy Johnson**  
Board Director



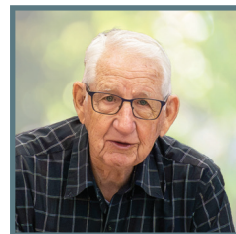
**Stephen Jones**  
Board Director



**Jonathan Jue**  
Board Director



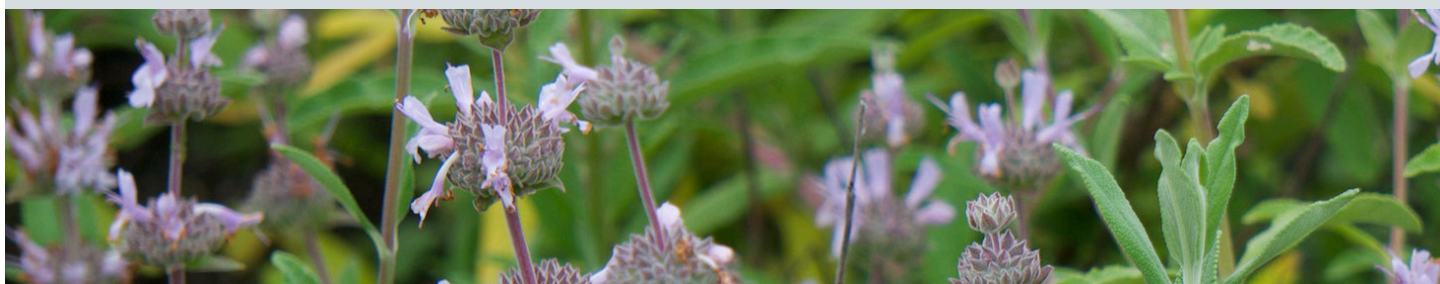
**Kristin Lantz**  
Board Treasurer



**Thomas Wehri**  
Board Director

**“At Placer RCD, we believe that creating a lasting legacy of conservation begins with the community. By engaging, supporting, and inspiring environmental stewardship, we help strengthen the bond between people and the land. The health of our ecosystems and the well-being of our communities are deeply connected. As we invest in conservation, we also invest in a resilient, thriving future for the residents of Placer County.”**

**Claudia Smith, Board Chair**



## Our Staff

Placer RCD staff has unique areas of expertise, from prescribed fire to irrigation and everything in between. While there’s an incredible value to specializing in a certain field, individuals’ diverse array of experiences are leveraged across teams, projects, and disciplines, ultimately creating a rich culture of collaboration that helps drive Placer RCD’s success.



**Sarah Jones**  
Executive Director

**Kate Espinola**  
Executive Assistant

**Donna Thomassen**  
Administration &  
Finance Manager



## Ag & Community Team

**Andrew Justus-Fritz**  
Community &  
Conservation Director

**Brian Pimentel**  
Agriculture Program  
Manager

**Liana Vitousek**  
Community Engagement  
& Outreach Specialist

**Mark White**  
Conservation Planner



## Forestry Team

**Scott Stephenson**  
Forestry Director

**Allison Erny**  
Forestry Project Manager

**Cordi Craig**  
Prescribed Fire Program  
Manager

**Chris Paulus**  
Forestry Technical Advisor

**Jerry Reieux**  
Conservation Planner

**Lewis Campbell**  
Forestry Project  
Coordinator



## Chipper Crew

**Jason Graydon**  
Chipper Program Crew  
Supervisor

**Brandi Calderon**  
Chipper Program  
Crew Lead

**Chad Chaney**  
Chipper Program  
Crew Lead

**Liliana Santellano**  
Chipper Program  
Crew Lead

**Anthony Corral**  
Chipper Program  
Crew Member

# Highlights from the Year



Workshop attendees join Placer RCD at Twin Peaks Orchards for a cover crop workshop.

The literal meaning of the word conservation is “to save together.” This year, through partnership and collaboration with community members, fellow RCDs, state agencies, local government, and more, Placer RCD has enacted conservation practices throughout Placer County and beyond, which will benefit both current and future residents. From soil health to reforestation, prescribed fire to community gardens, shaded fuel breaks to career mentorship, Placer RCD has worked to foster trust, creativity, enthusiasm, and teamwork with stakeholders of all backgrounds.

While many of Placer RCD’s programs saw immense progress and success (see program highlights starting on page 12), there were many other moments of connection, expansion, and enlightenment worth celebrating.



## Workshops

Between July of 2023 and June of 2024, Placer RCD hosted or collaborated on 25 workshops within Placer County, spanning a wide range of topics. These workshops include the following:

- Local Working Group Meeting
- Rancher-to-Rancher Field Day
- Cover Crop Workshop
- Rx Fire 101 Workshop
- Understanding Fuels/Fire Behavior
- Pollinator Habitat Workshop
- Chainsaw Basics Workshop
- Permaculture Workshop
- ... and more!

During workshops, Placer RCD works hard to ensure that the latest research and most accurate information is shared with attendees, while understanding that often the richest and most rewarding learning experiences occur when thoughtful reflective questions are encouraged, and when learning goes both ways.

By ensuring that the residents of Placer County



Sue Ingle smiles for the camera during the Auburn Community Garden Tour.

have access to the best and most relevant conservation education – as well as a safe, welcoming environment in which to learn and connect – Placer RCD is equipping the community with the tools and knowledge necessary to enhance the environment and build a more prosperous future.

## Placer County Community Garden Network

In 2024, Placer RCD launched the Placer County Community Garden Network through its Urban and Community Program. This initiative aims to foster cooperation, kinship, and knowledge-sharing among community gardeners, enhancing the network of support that helps community gardens thrive.



Attendees of the Auburn Community Garden Tour marvel over veggies at the School Park Preserve Community Garden.

Community gardens rely on the support and generosity of their members and others. They have a remarkable ability to yield significant quantities of food while building and positively influencing the culture of their respective communities. As President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, the aim of conservation districts is “to enable farmers to take the necessary cooperative action.” Placer RCD’s collaboration with Placer County’s community gardens serve as a perfect example of this mission.

## Mosquito Fire Recovery and Reforestation

On March 12th, 2024, Placer RCD planted 8,500 trees across 36 acres of the Mosquito Fire footprint as part of the Mosquito Fire Recovery and Reforestation Program. The ponderosa pine, sugar pine, and Douglas fir seedlings were donated by the Bureau of Land Management’s Mother Lode Field Office. Ultimately, Placer RCD is working toward restoring 2,000 acres of

**“I stepped into a leadership role this year in our community garden and had the privilege to connect with the Placer County Community Garden Network, facilitated by Placer Resource Conservation District. From these interactions I have gleaned wisdom from other community garden leaders on ways to improve our garden, how to overcome different logistical and social obstacles, and feel I am part of a larger group of like-minded people who believe organic gardening is an instrumental part of a flourishing community.”**

**Nicole Lescher, Community Garden Liaison**

land in the Mosquito Fire footprint by planting 250,000 trees.

## Placer County Ag Tour

A cornerstone of Placer RCD’s outreach and stakeholder engagement, the Placer County Ag Tour is an annual event that connects local leaders, legislators, and decision-makers with Placer County’s agricultural producers, farmers, foresters, and ranchers. Each tour focuses on topics of discussion relevant to the current opportunities and challenges faced by producers. The 2024 Placer County Ag Tour theme “Amazing Grazing” highlighted the extensive benefits of grazing for restoration, fire suppression, education, and livelihood. Attendees began the tour by learning about the history and future of Hidden Falls Regional

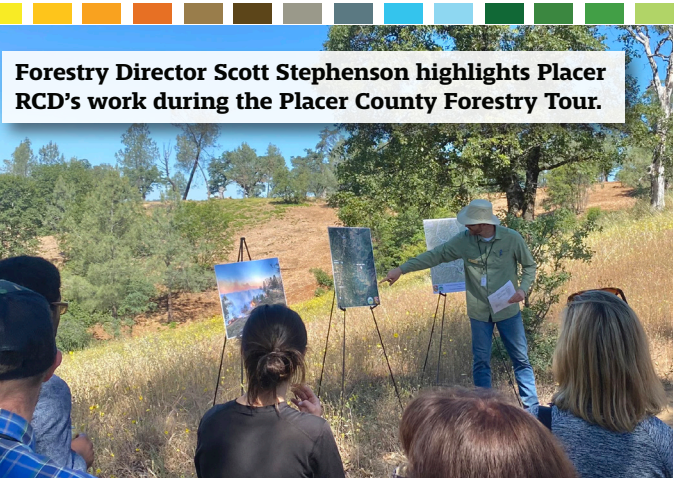
Park through the lens of grazing. The tour proceeded to the Lincoln High School Farm, where Agriculture Instructor Barret Hess discussed learning objectives for the over five hundred students taking classes at the farm. The tour concluded at Swainson’s Grassland Preserve, where the managing rancher Greg Lawley and Elias Grant, Land Manager at Placer Land Trust, shared the importance of grazing and soil compaction to maintaining vernal pools and burrowing owl habitat.

## Placer County Forestry Tour

In addition to the Ag Tour, Placer RCD hosted the inaugural Placer County Forestry Tour. Local leaders, legislators, and decision-makers convened to learn about forestry projects happening in the county. The Forestry Tour



Contractors plant out seedlings in the Mosquito Fire footprint.



**Forestry Director Scott Stephenson highlights Placer RCD's work during the Placer County Forestry Tour.**

underscored the importance of protecting the I-80 corridor and surrounding communities from wildfire, with a particular focus on three projects: Placer County Coordinated Fuel Break in Applegate, the North Fork American River Shaded Fuel Break (Phase II), and the Kearsarge Mill Fuel Break.



**“We wanted to look at the impacts of a wildfire moving through the I-80 corridor; not only impacts to the communities in the wildland-urban interface, but to the County, region, and state as a whole. When you can get out onto the landscape and understand what the conditions are, you really have a better understanding of what the threat is, and what work needs to be done to mitigate that threat.”**

**Sarah Jones, Placer RCD Executive Director**



**Executive Director Sarah Jones discusses Placer RCD Programs at outreach event.**



**UCCE Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor Dan Macon and USFWS Biologist Rosalinda Gonzalez examine forage during the 2024 Placer County Ag Tour.**



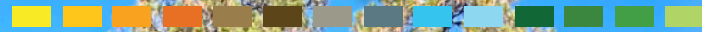
A cover crop seed mix awaits planting during Placer RCD's Cover Crop Workshop.



Prescribed fire moves slowly across the forest floor, consuming pine needles and branches in the understory.



# Our Projects & Programs



A volunteer with the Placer PBA moves vegetation during a prescribed fire.

## Central Sierra Healthy Soils Program

In fall 2023, Placer RCD was granted \$4,000,000 from the California Department of Food & Agriculture to fund the Central Sierra Healthy Soils Program. Managed in partnership with Amador County RCD and El Dorado & Georgetown Divide RCDs, the Program aims to incentivize farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices that improve soil health and increase carbon sequestration.

The Program covers eight counties and has created partnerships with the following RCDs: Amador Resource Conservation District, Calaveras County Resource Conservation District, El Dorado & Georgetown Divide Resource Conservation Districts, Florin Resource Conservation District, Nevada

County Resource Conservation District, and Sloughouse Resource Conservation District.

### Program Stats:

- \$3,990,360.97 funding allocated to producers
- 20 of 46 applications were from Placer County
- 37 producers awarded
- 38% of funding allocated to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers
- Conservation practices implemented on 3,585 acres
- 10,547 feet of pollinator hedgerow or windbreak/shelterbelts proposed



Amador RCD Healthy Soils Natural Resource Specialist Anna Mariscal helps landowner with soil health questions.



Residents hear from Andrew Justus-Frtiz during the Atwood Ranch Open Space Preserve Walk & Talk.

## Atwood Ranch Open Space Preserve

The Atwood Ranch Open Space Preserve is a ten-acre designated legal preserve within the Atwood Ranch HOA neighborhood in North Auburn established to counter potential adverse effects of development on riparian areas or wetlands. Placer RCD oversees this preserve, which provides crucial habitat for numerous plant and wildlife species.

Designated preserves can pose challenges in urban settings, where cultural expectations about undeveloped areas may not align with a preserve’s purpose.

To engage the community and educate on the role of a preserve, Placer RCD and the Auburn Recreation District (ARD) held five stakeholder meetings and hosted a “Tour and Talk” for residents of the Atwood Ranch HOA to learn

more about the preserve’s ecological benefits and purpose.

In my view, the work of community is to lead with the principle that ‘it all belongs,’ warts and all,” said Andrew Justus-Fritz. “What one person sees as a dead tree and an eyesore, another sees as a vital wildlife habitat. A perceived threat to home value for one is a natural mosquito control for another. Our role is to ensure the preserve functions as it should while creating space for individuals to consider a deeper relationship with their community—whether with people, preserves, or otherwise.”

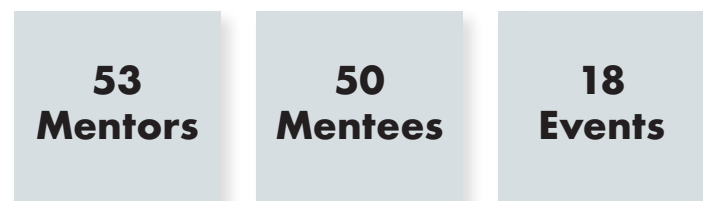
## The Forestry and Natural Resources Career Mentorship Program

As threats to California’s forested landscapes and communities continue to increase, a qualified and diverse workforce is more important now than ever. The Forestry and Natural Resources Career Mentorship Program recognizes this, and works to increase recruitment and retention of early-career forestry professionals by: pairing university and community college students with a professional mentor, providing networking and training opportunities, and offering insight into a forestry career that is inclusive of individuals from all backgrounds and experiences.

By supporting California’s future foresters

through their early career, the Program hopes to foster a community of dedicated and educated professionals. This year, 53 mentees were paired with 50 mentors, 18 events were hosted, and four diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice trainings were completed to further these goals.

### By The Numbers



Program Mentors and Mentees enjoy a hike.

**“My Mentee seemed to gain more confidence in himself after each session.”**  
Mentor, 2024

**“[My Mentor] really helped me out when it came to perfecting my resume for summer positions, which resulted in me getting hired for a field assistant position!”**  
Mentee, 2024

## Prescribed Burning on Private Lands and the Placer Prescribed Burn Association

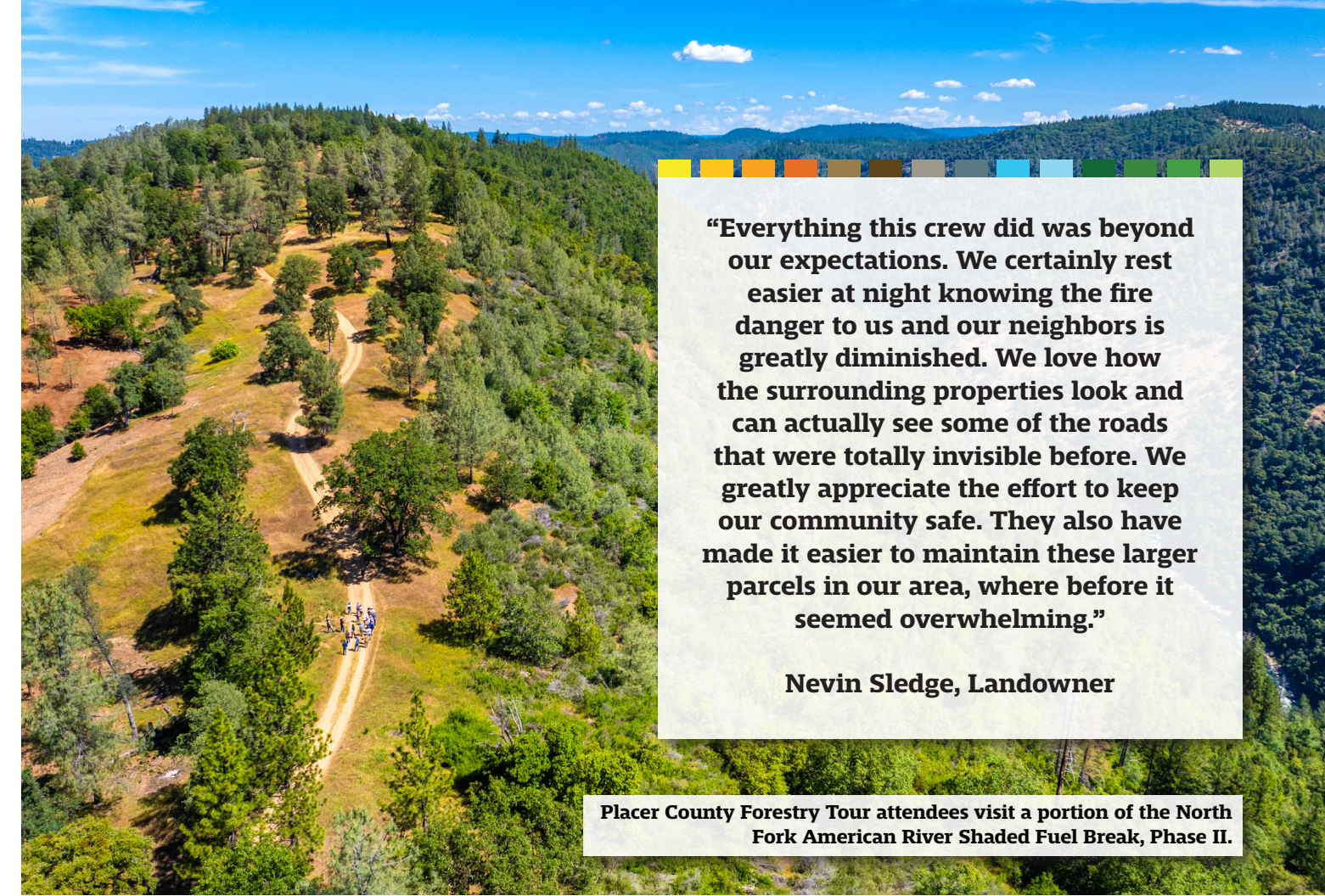
Prescribed burning is one of the essential tools used to manage wildfire risks today. The Placer Prescribed Burn Association (Placer PBA), created under the Prescribed Burning on Private Lands (PBPL) program, trains community members and private landowners to gain the capacity, skills, and knowledge to return fire to the landscape. Placer PBA is building a foundation for the continued application of safe, legal, and ecologically beneficial prescribed burns by establishing collaborative partnerships with Tribes, land stewards, and public agencies.

During the 2023 – 2024 season, Placer RCD offered five in-house educational workshops including Rx Fire 101, Understanding Fuels and Fire Behavior, and Chainsaw Basics. Between October 2023 and March 2024, the PBA hosted 11 demonstration burns totaling 38.9 acres. Cumulatively, more than 200 community members were educated through training and workshops.

From 79 responses across seven counties, landowners who had attended training burns reported:

- 657 acres of fuels modification
- 380 acres of pile burning
- 190 acres of broadcast burning

The PBPL Program successfully demonstrates that landowner education leads to landscape scale implementation.



**“Everything this crew did was beyond our expectations. We certainly rest easier at night knowing the fire danger to us and our neighbors is greatly diminished. We love how the surrounding properties look and can actually see some of the roads that were totally invisible before. We greatly appreciate the effort to keep our community safe. They also have made it easier to maintain these larger parcels in our area, where before it seemed overwhelming.”**

**Nevin Sledge, Landowner**

Placer County Forestry Tour attendees visit a portion of the North Fork American River Shaded Fuel Break, Phase II.



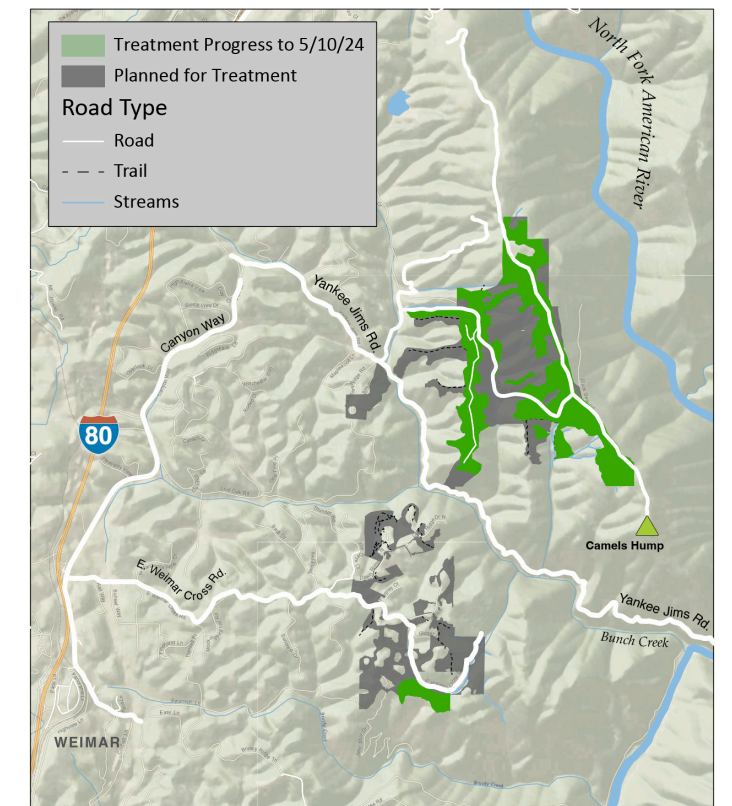
**“They have helped me to learn how to safely and correctly bring fire back to my land for fuel removal and ecological renewal. I’ve found the process fun, educational, incredibly economical, and my peace of mind has increased immeasurably. Working several Placer RCD-organized prescribed burns has been amazing, as I have been able to learn even more and meet others interested in being fire practitioners. I can’t speak highly enough about Placer RCD, it’s personnel, the Placer Prescribed Burn Association, and all they have to offer!”**

**Dennis Bogue, Landowner**

Prescribed Fire Program Manager Cordi Craig oversees a demonstration broadcast burn on private land in Placer County.

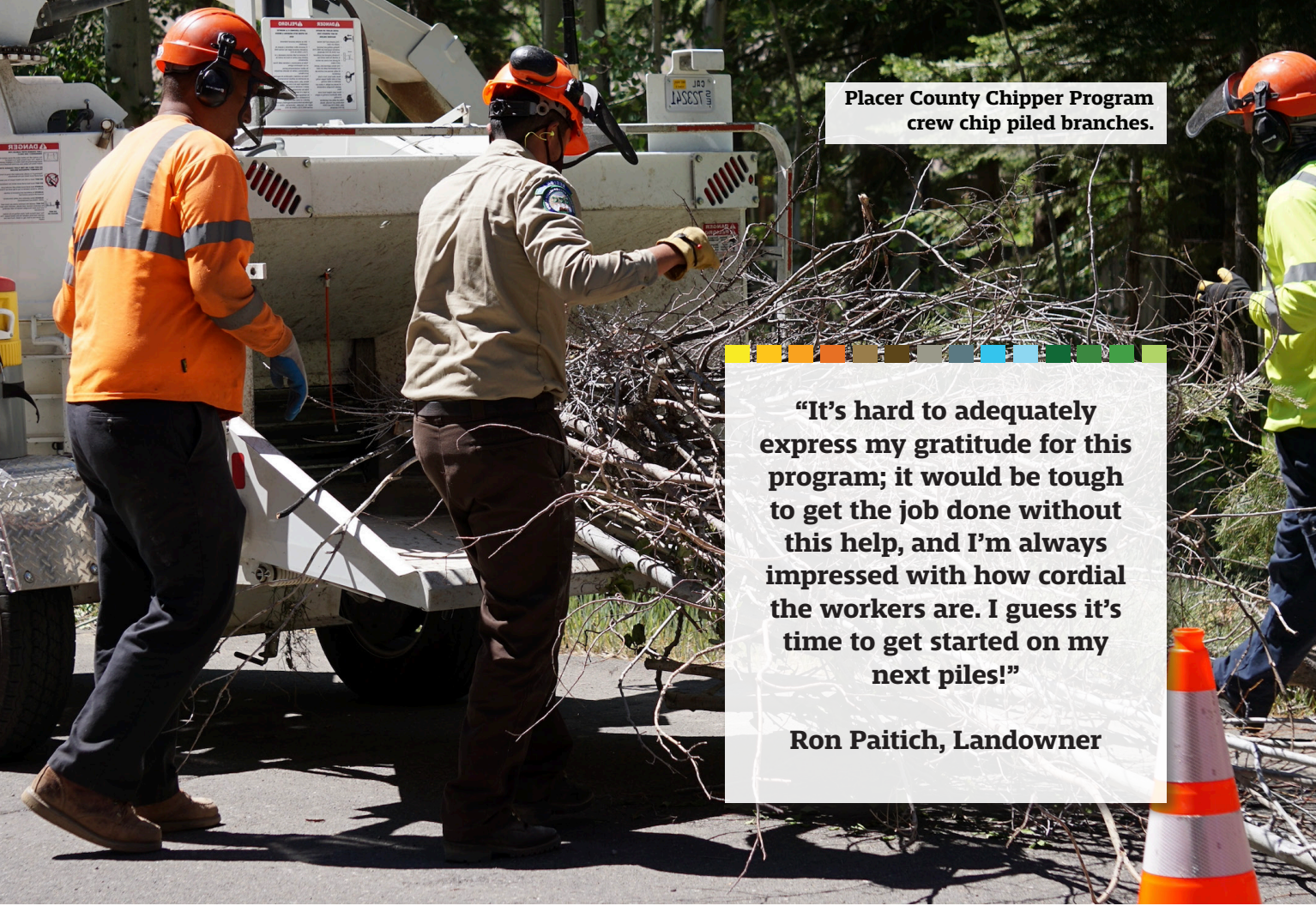
## North Fork American River Shaded Fuel Break Phase II

The North Fork American River Shaded Fuel Break Phase II is an 850-acre fuels reduction project located in the wildland-urban interface between the densely vegetated North Fork American River canyon and the adjacent communities along the I-80 corridor. The project went out to bid in January 2024, a contractor was selected, and boots hit the ground in March. In just 10 weeks, with multiple crews deployed, 455 acres were successfully completed. Treatment methods included hand work, pile burning, and mastication. This fuel break will help protect communities such as Colfax and Weimar from wildfire by reducing fire intensity and speed, and creating improved access for firefighters and first responders.



North Fork American River Shaded Fuel Break Phase II  
Treatment Completed and Planned

4  
NORTH



Placer County Chipper Program crew chip piled branches.

“It’s hard to adequately express my gratitude for this program; it would be tough to get the job done without this help, and I’m always impressed with how cordial the workers are. I guess it’s time to get started on my next piles!”

**Ron Paitich, Landowner**

## Placer County Chipper Program

For over 20 years, Placer RCD has operated the Placer County Chipper Program in partnership with Placer County and CAL FIRE. This vital Program provides residents with an affordable curbside chipping service, encouraging them to manage their vegetation and create defensible space. Approximately half of the Program’s annual costs are funded by Placer County, which also provides labor for the chipper crews through the Placer County Probation Department’s Alternative Sentencing Program. The Program’s model effectively meets public demand by offering year-round service and accommodating repeat requests without restrictions on job duration or pile sizes. Recent improvements, including the introduction of an online request and payment system, have significantly enhanced administrative and

operational efficiency. Crews worked especially hard in response to the severe 2023 winter storms, which caused widespread tree falls and damage across the county. This year, the program provided over 1,100 chipper services, resulting in approximately 4,800 tons of processed material.

### By The Numbers

<b>1,100 Chipper Services</b>	<b>4,800 Tons of Material</b>
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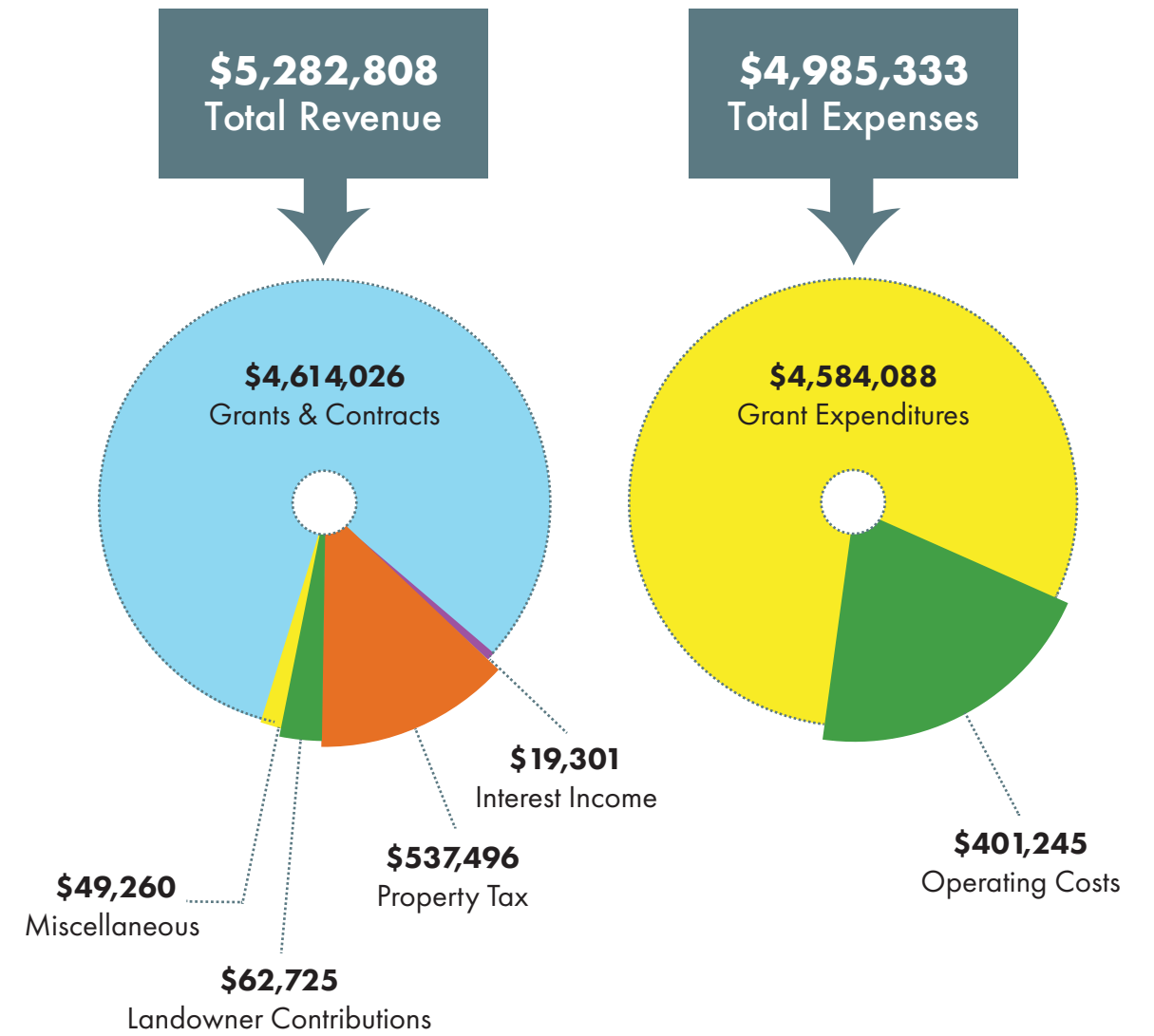


A workshop participant learns chainsaw skills as part of a Prescribed Burning on Private Lands educational opportunity.

# Our Partners



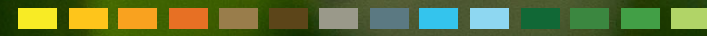
# Financial Summary



Financial data represented is unaudited. To view Placer RCD's Annual Financial Statements and Audit Reports visit: <https://placerrcd.org/about-us/transparency/>



# Looking Forward



Conservation is not just about preserving the natural world; it is deeply connected to the well-being of communities. From indigenous knowledge that sustains ecosystems to local stewardship of natural resources, people and nature maintain a delicate balance. True conservation recognizes that when communities thrive, ecosystems are safeguarded, creating a cycle of mutual support.

Looking ahead, Placer RCD will continue to strive to meet the needs of the communities we serve by tailoring our projects and adapting our programs to support conservation initiatives such as the Placer Prescribed Burn Association, Placer County Community Garden Network, and Placer County Chipper Program. Our success relies on the active participation and feedback of our constituents. By engaging with the community, we aim to build collaborative and supportive relationships, enabling us to achieve even more together.



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