The RCD Mission

“To help people protect, conserve, and restore natural resources through education, information, and technical assistance programs.”
The RCD of Greater San Diego County

• Covers nearly 3,000 square miles or 1.8 million acres.
• From the Pacific Ocean east to the Imperial County line, south to the US-Mexico border.
• Region encompasses mountains, deserts, forests, and coast.
• Includes urban, agricultural, and suburban areas.
• Densely populated with 3.32 million people living in the county as of 2016.
Our Programs

• The RCD of Greater San Diego County runs a variety of programs addressing the unique needs of our region:

  • Fire Prevention & Education
  • Storm Water Pollution Prevention
  • School Gardening Programs
  • Tijuana River Valley Community Garden
  • Milkweed for Monarchs
  • RCD Conservation Scholarships
  • District Headquarters Conservation Garden
  • Nursery & Greenhouse on Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians Tribal Land
  • Carbon Farm Planning
  • Conservation Planning
Tijuana River Valley Community Garden
Urban-Ag Interface in the Tijuana River Valley

- The garden is located in the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park, SD County managed park a few miles from the US-Mexico border.
- 100+ year history of farming – past and present.
- Multiple ecosystems and home to many sensitive plant species and migratory birds.
- The area is culturally diverse, and home to many low income communities.
Garden History

• Opened to the public in 2002 with the support of a $40,000 grant from the NRCS to build 90, 30’ x 30’ garden plots.

• In 2005 the garden expanded to 136 plots due to demand. Two more plots were added in 2016.

• Managed by the RCD though an agreement with SD County Parks.

• The largest community garden in the county, and a long waiting list demonstrates demand to expand to increase access.

• The property borders the Tijuana River, is surround by park trails, includes a community pollinator garden, a gazebo, and numerous bird houses and owl boxes.

• Garden expansion has been an ongoing and long term goal:
  • Long waitlist for plots
  • County survey of community needs
  • State support of urban agriculture opportunities (AB551)
  • Demand for green space in urban communities
  • Access to healthy produce
  • Support for new farmers and the regions farming community (San Diego has the largest number of small scale farms in the county.)
Garden Management

• Regular site visits and communication with gardeners.
• Terms of Use / Lease Agreement.
• Letter correspondence.
• Coordinating repairs, site improvements.
• Record keeping – plot condition, contact information for gardeners, volunteer hours.
Planning the expansion

• NACD grant made garden expansion a reality:
  • Provided staff time for planning and for conservation & education components.
  • Helped leverage additional funding.

• Support from many partners:
  • Department of Parks & Recreation
  • County Board of Supervisors
  • SD Community Garden Network and other community partners.
  • NRCS offered advice on irrigation and conservation planning.

• Early and long-term planning:
  • Started coordination with the County and project contractors in early 2016; lots of meetings and emails.

• Site Prep:
  • Bird nesting surveys
  • Clearing the vacant land
  • Infrastructure installation

• Worked to coordinate volunteer and gardener support.
  • Community work days, new gardener orientation meetings, volunteer fence installation days.
Expansion details

- 72 new 30x30 plots = **210** garden plots.
- 6 quarter-acre plots / urban ag incubator plots.
- Create space for learning and demonstration.
- New water meter – we will have to pay for some of our water use.
- All new gardeners will be on micro-irrigation.
- Improved compost system.
- LOTS of education and outreach with new and existing gardeners.
- Habitat renewal - hedgerow and other native plantings.
- Storage container for equipment and tools library.
- Help Park Rangers with trail maintenance.
- New garden sign & interpretive signage.
- Translation for garden signs, events, and documents.
Challenges & Opportunities

- Paying for water while maintaining equal access for all.
- Distance from RCD office.
- Unforeseen problems led to delays.
- Contacting people on waitlist uses a lot of staff time.
- Language barriers.
- Ongoing repairs and maintenance.
- Theft.
- Green waste management and storm water regulation.
- Managing expectations and communicating change.
- Keeping the site weed-free and clear of trash.

- Site has great potential - multigenerational, multicultural community with a wealth of farming/ gardening knowledge to share!
- Creating greater food security and access to green space.
- Potential to share / sell produce
- More staff time = opportunity to get really good gardening practices in place.
- Further build the garden community through more events, meetings, workdays, and collaboration.
- Partnership opportunities – continued collaboration with neighboring farms, schools, and local organizations.
- Create a space for demonstration.
Community Building

- **Education** - Providing opportunities for gardening success, e.g. sustainable composting and irrigation techniques.

- **Creating ownership in communal space** – meeting neighbors, garden meetings, potluck events, sharing info & success in the quarterly garden newsletter, beautification projects, creating seating and gathering spaces.

- **Consistency** – events, staff visits, and protocols.

- **Utilizing gardener skill sets** by building opportunities for sharing.
Community Impact

• The expansion project allowed us to offer educational opportunities for the greater community. So far this year, approximately 90 people have participated in workshops at the garden.

• Soil Shindig ~ November 2016 – Around 500 people attended the event and nearly 300 attended a workshop during the event.

• Fall and Spring Garden Cleanup Days – Community cleanup events hosted in partnership with I Love a Clean San Diego. 275 volunteers attended a garden cleanup day this year.

• Engagement with local youth-based organizations: Scout Troops, Eagle Scout Projects, and WiLDCoast, a partner organization working on conservation and youth education across the US-Mexico border.

• Involvement and volunteer support from students at Southwestern College.
Work in progress...

- Develop a protocol and rental process for the quarter acre plots.
- Continue to fill remaining garden plots.
- Review of garden management structures.
- Shipping container to serve as office, tool library, and storage.
- Find ways to keep garden rental costs accessible.
- Reduce overall garden water use.
- Maintain staff position(s) to support increased garden management and maintenance.
- Continue to seek funding to sponsor a garden education program.
- Continued planning to effectively manage the garden’s green waste - upscale our compost efforts.
- Installation of hedgerow and other native plantings.
Thank you!

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