



National Association of  
Conservation Districts

## **FORESTRY CASE STUDY:**

# **California Resource Conservation Districts – Enhancing Forest Health and Fire Resilience**

# California Resource Conservation Districts – Enhancing Forest Health and Fire Resilience

In response to the devastating wildfires in California’s North Bay Counties in 2017, the Napa Resource Conservation District (RCD) collaborated with regional partners to create the North Bay Forest Improvement Program (NBFIP). This case study explores how the NBFIP, in partnership with Mendocino RCD, Sonoma RCD, Clear Lake Environmental Research Center (CLERC), and Rebuild North Bay Foundation, addresses wildfire risks and enhances forest health through a collaborative, regionally tailored approach.

## Background

California faced severe wildfires in 2017, prompting local partners to initiate the NBFIP. The program primarily targets private non-industrial small forestland owners and managers, aiming to incentivize non-commercial forest improvement activities.

## Program Objectives

- Promote forest health and wildfire resilience;
- Incentivize activities like thinning, planting, pruning, and fuel hazard reduction;
- Draw inspiration from CAL FIRE’s California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP) and NRCS’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

## Partnerships

The NBFIP partnership involves Napa RCD, Mendocino RCD, Sonoma RCD, Clear Lake Environmental Research Center (CLERC), and Rebuild North Bay Foundation. The collaboration focuses on private forested landowners, covering parcels from 5 to 500 acres.

## Funding

In 2020, NBFIP secured a \$1.5 million grant from CAL FIRE’s Proposition 68, providing a three-year funding base. In 2022, additional funding was received through a block grant from CAL FIRE’s Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force’s Small Private Landowner Working Group.

## Project Scope

The NBFIP aims to support at least 100 projects across Sonoma, Mendocino, Napa, and Lake Counties, treating over 1,500 acres of land. Treatments include planting site preparation, tree planting, forest thinning, pruning, and woody fuels reduction. The program also aims to create 40 forest management plans to guide sustainable practices.

## Regional Outreach

- RCDs play a crucial role in day-to-day outreach, technical assistance, and project oversight within their service areas.
- Collaborative efforts extend to the Department of Conservation’s Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program.

## Efficiency of Scale

- Collaborative structure with neighboring RCDs proved instrumental in navigating challenges and maximizing fire management impact.
- Napa RCD's role in the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program demonstrates efficiency in block grant administration.
- Block grants offer an opportunity for efficiency of scale, making districts more competitive for larger state and federal grants.

## Lessons Learned

- Ali Blodorn, Napa RCD Principal Program Manager Forestry, highlights the success in building regional plans and collaborative structures.
- Emphasizes the importance of reaching out to state agencies, making connections, and engaging in conversations.

## Achievements and Impact

- Successes underscore the value of sharing experiences, avoiding duplications, and maximizing regional engagement opportunities.
- The initiatives not only address wildfire risks but also lay the groundwork for sustainable forest management practices.



## Recommendations

- Encourage districts to collaborate with state agencies, funders, and neighboring districts.
- Advocate for block grants to enhance efficiency of scale and competitiveness.
- Emphasize the importance of a regionally tailored approach for long-term success.

## Conclusion

The NBFIP and Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program showcase the effectiveness of collaborative, regionally tailored initiatives in addressing wildfire risks and promoting sustainable forest management. The lessons learned from Napa RCD provide valuable insights for other districts considering similar efforts, emphasizing the significance of partnerships, funding flexibility, and a regionally tailored approach. The success of these initiatives serves as a model for enhancing forest health and fire resilience across California.

To learn more about Napa Resource Conservation District, their regional collaboratives, and ongoing work, please visit their website at [naparcd.org](https://naparcd.org). Read more about this project on [NACD's blog](#).