

The Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District Strategic Plan

2016 – 2021



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Prepared For:

The Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District Board of Directors

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Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to outline the strategic goals the Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District (HLVRCD or District) seeks to achieve, and the appropriate strategies it should take to achieve them. The timeline for reaching the goals set forth in this plan is five years. The contents of this plan were developed collaboratively between staff, Directors, and community partners. This living document will serve as a tool for the HLVRCD to help its members conduct relevant, on-the-ground conservation work. Annual Work Plans are developed and adopted each year by the HLVRCD Board of Directors to provide specific information relative to the programs and projects intended to implement the strategies identified in this Strategic Plan. The District will monitor and evaluate progress toward meeting Strategic Plan goals and strategies on an annual basis and present these results in an Annual Report.

Background

Resource Conservation Districts are one of California's earliest grassroots conservation organizations that identify conservation needs and support local land managers in implementing solutions on a voluntary basis. The catastrophic soil losses of the dust bowl in the 1930's sparked national and state recognition that soil erosion was the greatest challenge to the country's ability to feed its people and to be a leader in agricultural production. Non-regulatory Conservation Districts were conceived by the federal government and were later sanctioned by the State of California in 1938 to provide assistance to local managers in addressing soil and resource conservation challenges.

The HLVRCD was established by a Resolution of the Lassen County Board of Supervisors on May 3, 1954, for the purpose of addressing soil and water problems in the District service area. The District covers over 2,233,711 acres within Lassen County, including the Susan River watershed, Pine Creek/Eagle Lake watershed, Long Valley Creek watershed, Smoke Creek, Madeline Plains, and North Feather River watershed.

In July 2007, the Superior Court of Lassen County delegated authority to the HLVRCD to provide watermaster services to the water rights holders of the Susan River Watermaster Service Area.

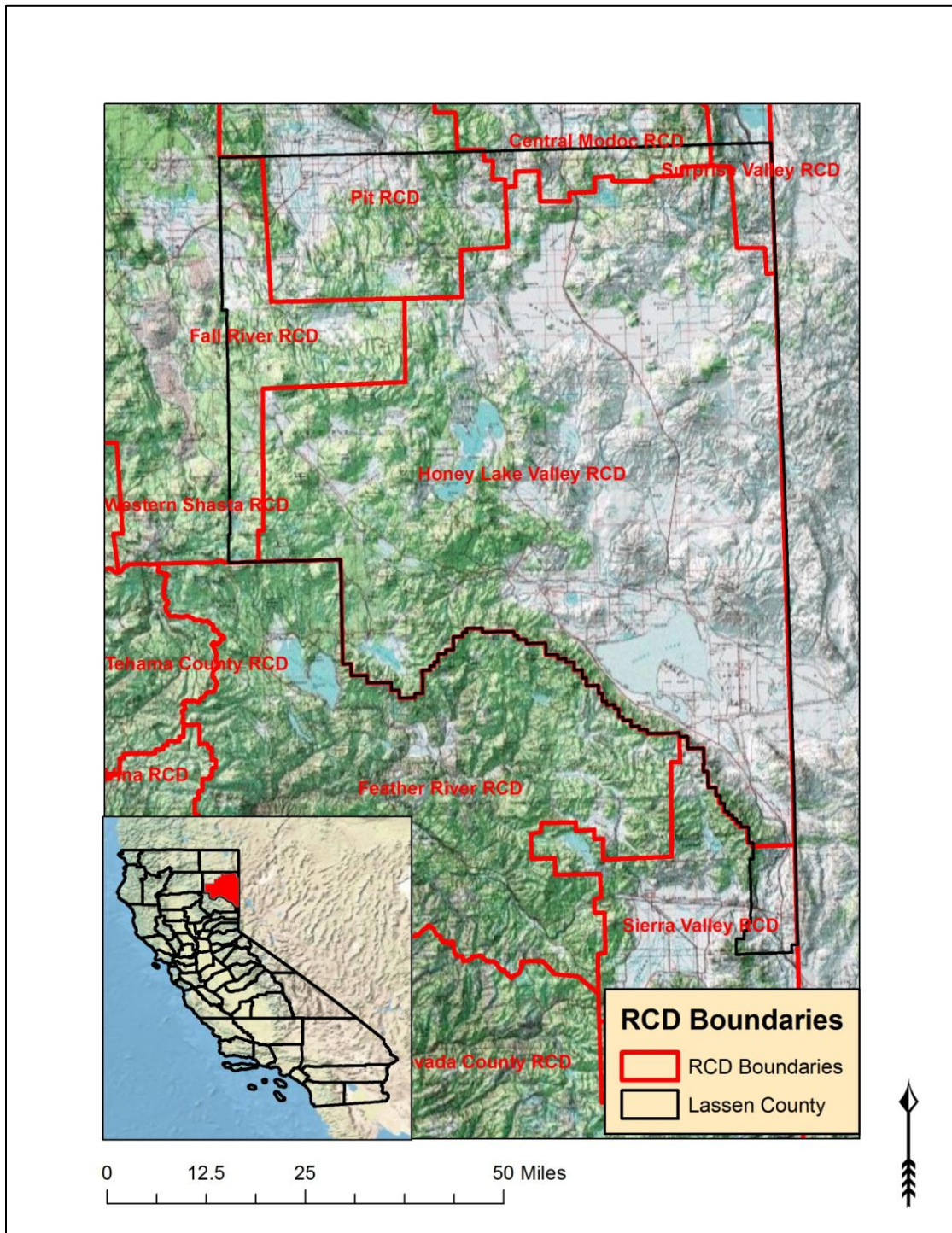
Leadership and Governance

Leadership and governance of the HLVRCD is provided by a five-member volunteer Board of Directors, which consists of local landowners with diverse backgrounds and interests. The roles of the Directors are to establish priorities, set policies and guidelines, and oversee general operations. However, due to the District's limitations, it is not unusual for a Director to actively engage in program/project planning or implementation. Currently, day to day management is conducted by a part-time District Manager. The work of the District is performed by the District Manager, a full-time watermaster technician, and part-time administrative professional.

The District is involved in projects that provide significant benefits to the environment and all members of society. We work closely with the local community to steward our natural resources, support agriculture, and act as the Watermaster for the Susan River Watermaster

Service Area. Our staff provides expert technical assistance for projects designed to restore the land and improve production. The HLVRCD is proud to offer these services and seeks to make positive change in the local, regional, and greater community of California.

Our mission is to conserve, restore, and sustain local agricultural and natural resources for those who live, work, or visit the service area to foster a viable economy by seeking and coordinating technical, educational, and financial resources.



Preplanning Analysis

The HLVRCD has an important and diverse mission that requires significant support to complete. A strategic plan for implementing programs and projects, funding, and staffing that fulfills the mission requires significant thought and involvement from interested parties. The District Manager organized a strategic plan work group comprised of a diverse cross section of community organizations, individuals, and government agencies in addition to board members and staff. The District held a workshop, open to the public, for the work group to develop the strategic issues defined in this plan. The notes from the strategic planning workshop are filed at the District's office in Susanville.

The work group used a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to identify HLVRCD strengths and weaknesses, opportunities available to the District, and threats facing the District. The resulting information was used to identify the strategic issues, goals, and strategies addressed in this plan.

Strategic Issues

The HLVRCD and partners identified several strategic issues that must be addressed in order for the District to meet its mission now and into the future. These issues, listed below, were identified through the analytical step of this planning effort. The topics are important because they inform all aspects of our organization and determine our success.

1. Build HLVRCD leadership and organizational capacity.
2. Stay relevant to the conservation needs of the community.
3. Capture conservation opportunities, as appropriate.

Timeframe

The timeframe to achieve the goals outlined in this plan and achieve these strategic issues is five years, through June 20, 2021. This plan is intended to be a living document and will be updated as significant changes occur. By June 30, 2021, all the action items should be completed or sustaining. If not, or if items are completed and goals not realized or new issues arise, further assessment will occur and goals reconsidered. The HLVRCD will conduct future planning to update this document and set a new timeline for implementation.

Through the implementation of Annual Plans, the HLVRCD will generate and operate programs, projects, and services consistent with this Strategic Plan.

Goals and Strategies to Address Strategic Issues

Strategic Issue 1: Build HLVRCO leadership and organizational capacity.

To increase the ability to successfully meet its mission, the HLVRCO must build its leadership and organizational capacity. Three new Directors joined the District Board of Directors in 2015. The new Directors are new to RCO business. With the current District organization, the amount of work that gets planned and implemented is small. Prior to midyear 2015, the HLVRCO contracted for District Manager and Watermaster skill and expertise. The resource conservation work planned and completed was predicated upon the successful award of funding from outside organizations. Some Directors are involved in actual District work. The Watermaster services utilize a disproportionate amount of District resources, leaving insufficient resources to conduct District natural resource conservation responsibilities.

Goal 1.1: The HLVRCO Board of Directors actively, knowledgeably, and effectively leads the District and its employees in the District's mission.

Strategies:

- Seek diversification of interests and skill sets among Directors.
- Implement existing District policies, update and improve them as needed, and develop new policies and procedures as needed to improve operations and transparency. Specific policies and procedures for evaluation and update include: personnel, procurement, fiscal, and volunteers.
- Improve ability to see the big picture and take a longer range, broader business perspective, focus on the "why" not just the "what" and "how" (strategic thinking).
- Increase the District's visibility.
- Improve ability to understand, interpret, and use the District's financial information to improve the business (financial acumen).
- Build cross-functional knowledge and perspective.
- Leverage opportunities to develop, coach, and grow employees.
- Collaborate with community leaders and neighboring RCOs.
- Conduct community outreach.
- Participate and support the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCO) in efforts to strengthen RCOs state-wide.

Goal 1.2: The HLVRCO is comprised of a fully functioning staff with the capacity to increase program development and delivery from 2015 levels.

Strategies:

- Sustain a full-time District Manager by 2017.
- Sustain a full-time Project Manager by 2020.
- Maintenance of a full-time Watermaster Technician and part-time Executive Secretary.
- Staff training and collaboration.

- Develop and implement appropriate programs to further HLVRCD mission.
- Implement existing District policies, update and improve them as needed, and develop new policies and procedures as needed to improve operations and transparency. Specific policies and procedures for evaluation and update include: personnel, procurement, fiscal, and volunteers.
- Increase District's visibility.
- Conduct community outreach.
- Increase partnership capacity.
- Network and collaborate with other RCDs.
- Create an electronic database to track the history of the District's past, current, and future projects, programs, outcomes, and participants.

Goal 1.3: Diverse and sustainable funding exists.

Strategies:

- Identify and implement fee for service opportunities.
- Identify and implement fundraising activities.
- Track and seek funding opportunities that are appropriate for implementing District programs.
- Evaluate funding diversity.

Goal 1.4: The watermaster services are professionally provided.

Strategies:

- Implement the various water decrees.
- Provide necessary training to watermaster technician.
- Build relationships and networks with water users, partners, and peers.
- Review and update the Watermaster Rules and Regulations.
- Reduce the number of appeals.
- Maintain an active Water Advisory Committee.

Strategic Issue 2: Stay Relevant to the Conservation Needs of the Community.

For the HLVRCD to stay relevant to the conservation needs of the service area (community), it must focus resources on priority natural resource conservation issues. District operations and staff are currently limited and financial resources are scarce. In order to utilize our resources most effectively and efficiently, we must focus attention on priority conservation needs identified by the community. At our Strategic Planning Workshop in December 2015, seven issue categories were identified by participants. Knowing of the District's current limited ability to address all of these issues, and knowing where partnerships were already or could be formed, two natural resource issue categories on which the District should focus were identified.

Goal 2.1: The HLVRCD contributes to improved and restored health conditions of forested lands within the District, with a focus on the issues of fuel hazard, insect and disease infestations, invasive weeds, conifer encroachment, tree density, and species composition.

Strategies:

- Seek technical, educational, and financial resources.
- Coordinate technical, educational, and financial resources.
- Strengthen the Special Weed Action Team.
- Participate with others in programs or on projects complementary to the District’s mission.
- Provide technical and educational support to landowners, agencies, and others.
- Conservation education.
- Expand partnerships with owners/managers of public and private land (e.g., individual landowners/managers, Lassen National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Lassen County Department of Parks & Recreation, Lassen Land and Trails Trust, California Department of Fish & Wildlife, California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection, City of Susanville and others) to assist in conservation planning to meet their resource management goals.
- Develop and analyze metrics to monitor and evaluate the success of the RCD at reaching this goal.

Goal 2.2: The HLVRCD contributes to improved water quality and quantity conditions within the District.

Strategies:

- Seek technical, educational, and financial resources.
- Coordinate technical, educational, and financial resources.
- Water measuring devices.
- Participate with others in programs or on projects complementary to the District’s mission.
- Support to others.
- Conservation education.
- Support NRCS in efforts to provide conservation planning assistance and implementation of Farm Bill and other resource conservation and protection projects.
- Develop and analyze metrics to monitor and evaluate the success of the RCD at reaching this goal

Strategic Issue 3: Capture conservation opportunities, as appropriate.

While the HLVRCD focuses on achieving two natural resource goals during this planning period, the District will align itself in order to capture conservation opportunities, as appropriate. Many priority natural resource conservation issues exist, too many for the HLVRCD to address. At the Strategic Planning Workshop in December 2015, seven natural resource issue categories

were identified by participants. Significant District resources will be used to focus on two categories:

- Improved and restored health conditions of forested lands within the District (Goal #2.1)
- Improved water quality and quantity conditions within the District (Goal #2.2)

The District will implement projects within the other five categories should resources become available (e.g., landowner or government agency willing to pay for a technical service). These five categories include:

- Agricultural Land Conversion
- Climate Change
- Range Health
- Soil Health
- Wildlife

Goal 3.1: The HLVRCD acts on opportunities in the following areas when resources can be effectively used or obtained to assist others (landowner, partner, organization, agency, etc.): agriculture land conversion, climate change, range health, soil health, and wildlife.

Strategies:

- Take advantage of technical, educational, and financial resources that become available to capture opportunities in the five additional areas when primary program work is not compromised.
- Coordinate technical, educational, and financial resources when primary program work is not compromised.
- Provide technical support to landowners, agencies, and others when primary program work is not compromised.
- Develop and analyze metrics to monitor and evaluate the success of the RCD at reaching this goal.

Strategic Plan Implementation

Annual Work Plans are developed and adopted each year by the HLVRCD Board of Directors to provide specific information relative to the programs and projects intended to implement the strategies identified in this Strategic Plan. The District will monitor and evaluate progress toward meeting Strategic Plan goals and strategies on an annual basis and present these results in an Annual Report. To implement the programs and achieve our mission, funds are primarily sought from State and Federal grant programs or agreements with local and regional government agencies, with the goal articulated herein of also utilizing fee for service agreements with for-profit and non-profit organizations and general fundraising.

Current revenues are dwindling and implementation of the strategies identified in this plan requires revenue far beyond what is currently assigned to the District. Priority work for the District in the first year will be to update policies, build Board and staff capacity, acquire funding, implement conservation projects, increase District visibility and partnerships, and strengthen the Special Weed Action Team.