

# IT TAKES A VILLAGE (TO SAVE A RIVER)

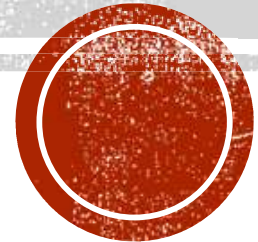
The story of how a community effort transformed the  
San Dieguito River

SAN DIEGUITO  
RIVER VALLEY



CONSERVANCY

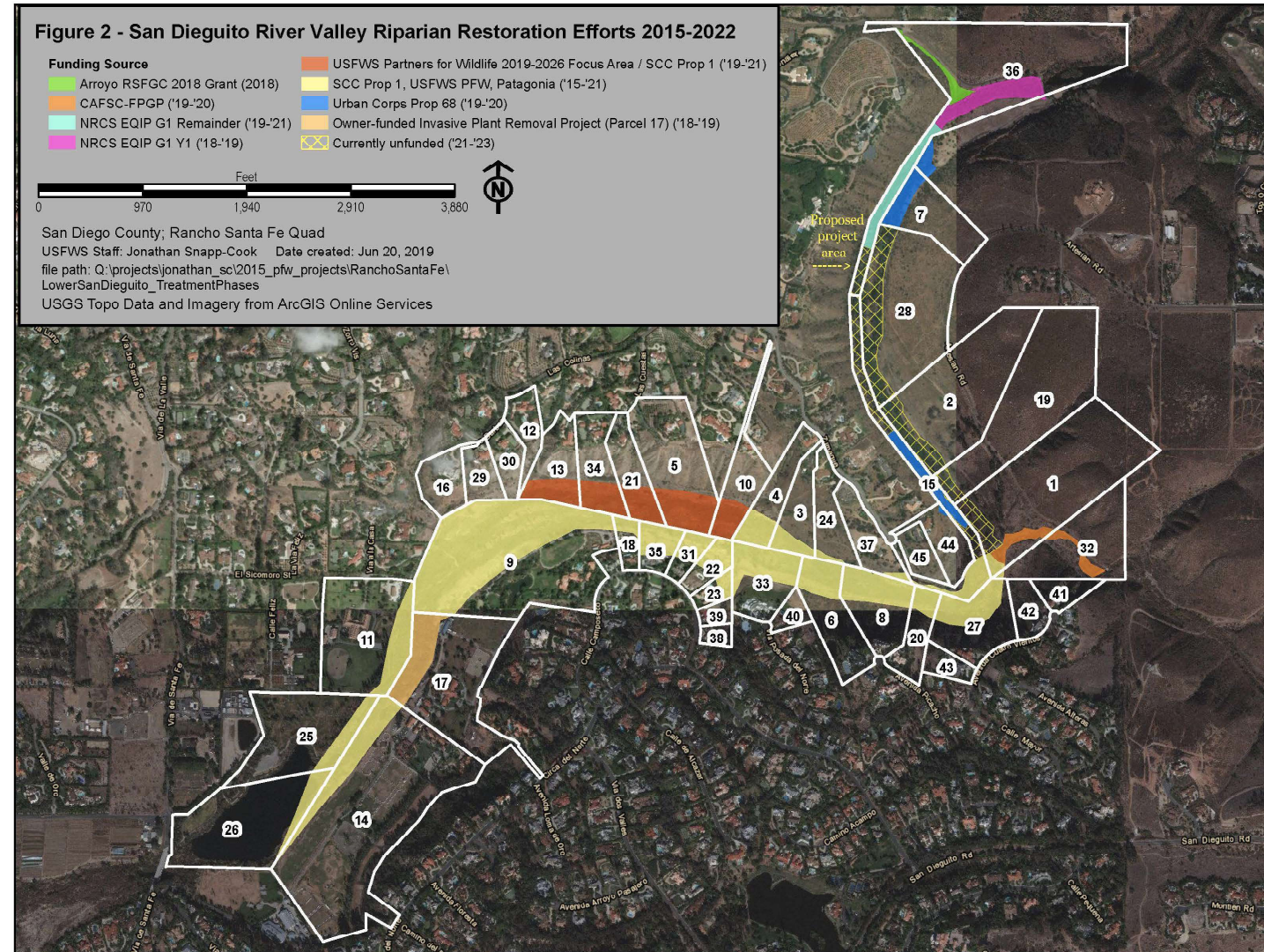
Jonathan Appelbaum & Joseph Rivera  
San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy  
CAL-IPC Annual Symposium - November 14, 2025





# INTRODUCTION

- Location
  - San Dieguito (not San Diego) River
  - Northern Central San Diego County
  - Santa Fe Valley / Del Dios Gorge
- 181 Total Acres
- 43 Discrete Parcels w/in 2 HOAs
- 90% Private Property
- 10% County Park





# S.D. RIVER VALLEY HISTORY

- 1918 Lake Hodges Dam Constructed
- 1980 El Nino Floods
- 2007 Witch Creek Fire
- 2014 Bernardo Fire

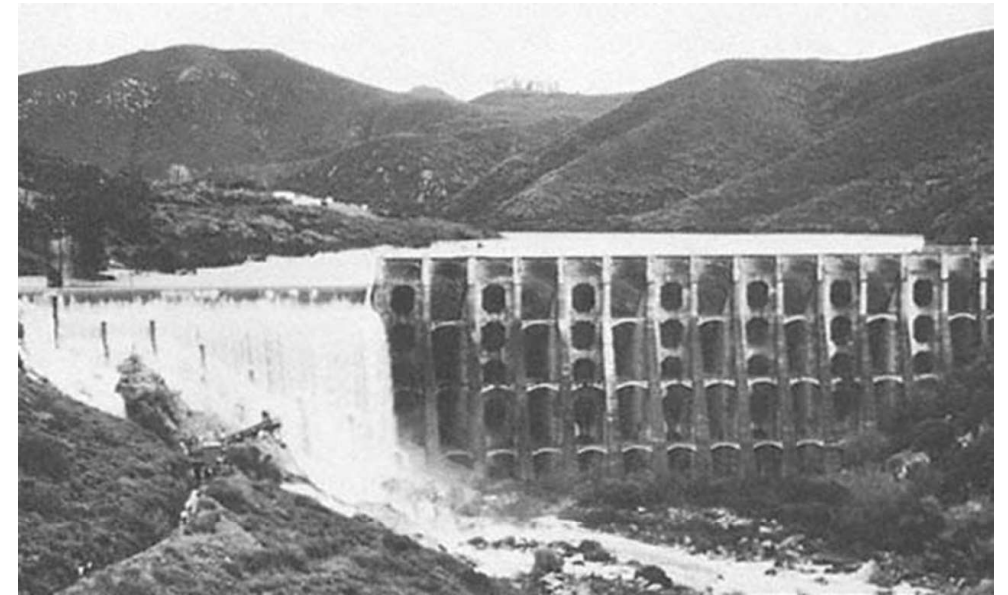
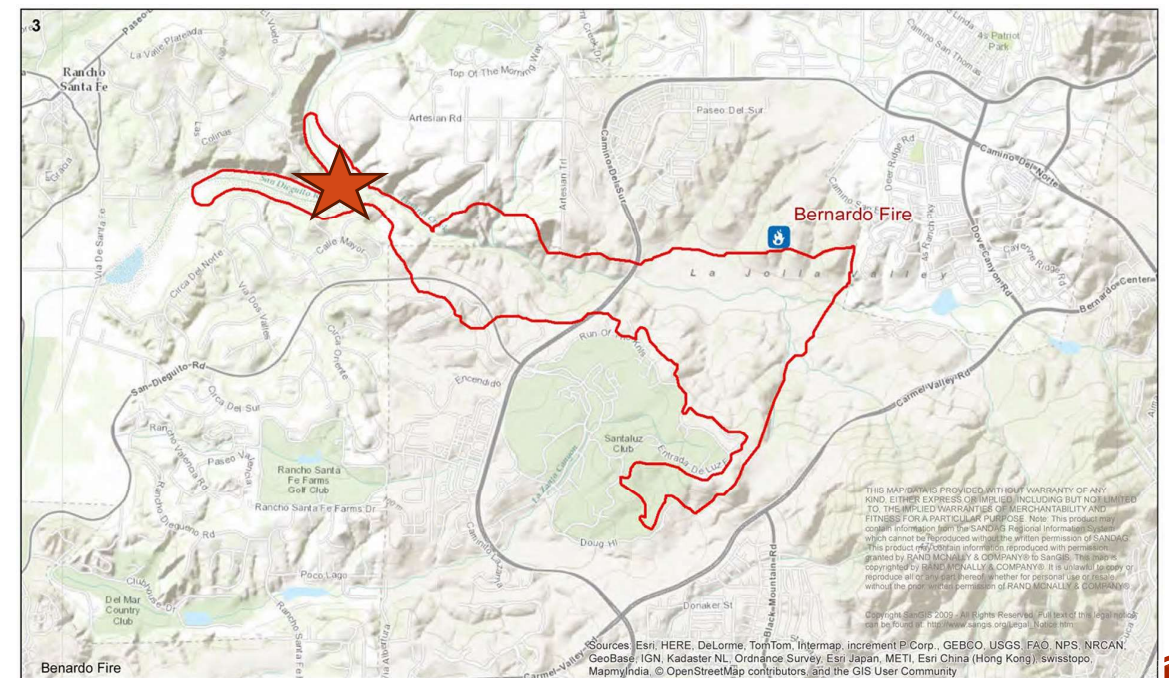
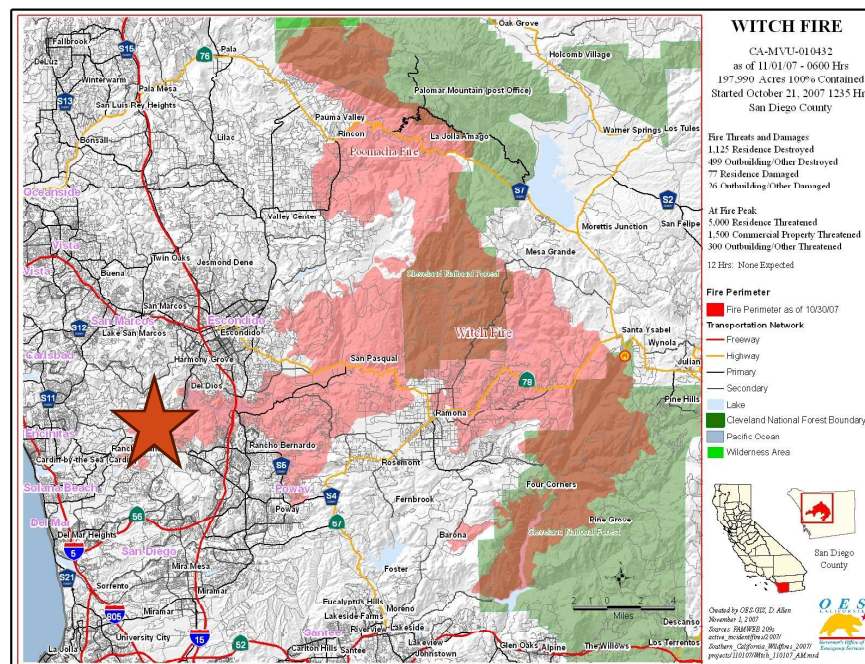


Photo Credit: G Kuhn, UC Press



# IN THE LINE OF FIRE



2007 Witch Creek Fire



2014 Bernardo Fire





# THE BAD GUYS

- Red River Gum Eucalyptus
- Acacia
- Arundo
- Tamarisk
- Canary Island Date Palm
- Mexican Fan Palm
- Pampas Grass
- Brazilian Pepper





# FUR, FEATHERS, FINS, FLOWERS, & MORE

- Wildlife

- CAGN
- LBV
- Ridgway's Rail
- Steelhead Trout?
- Wildlife Corridors (mountain lion, badger, etc.)
- Yellow Breasted Chat
- Rufous Crowned Sparrow
- Monarch Butterfly

- Plants

- San Diego Marsh Elder
- San Diego Barrel Cactus
- California Adolphia
- Nuttall's Scrub Oak
- Torrey Pine





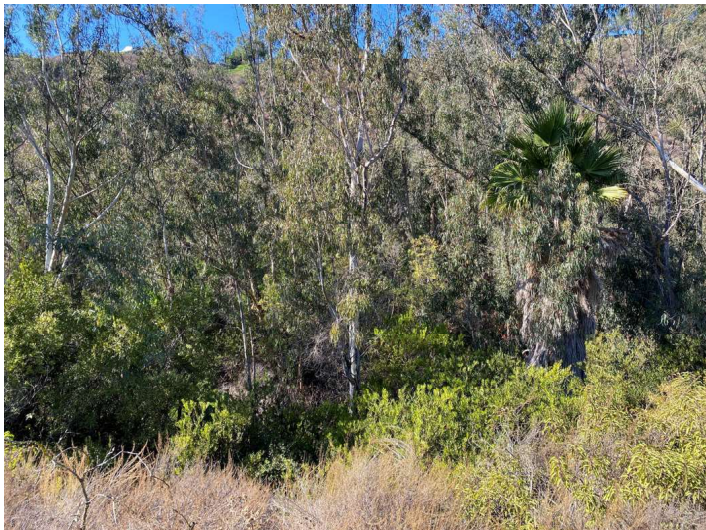
# PRIMARY & SECONDARY PROJECT BENEFITS

- Community Wildfire Protection
- Wildlife Habitat Quality Enhancement
  - T&E Species Recovery
- Coast to Crest Trail User Experience
- Streamflow Enhancement
- Workforce Development
- Beneficial Reuse of Wood Biomass





# BEFORE PHOTOS





# PROJECT TIMELINE

- 2009 – CEQA (Programmatic MND) Completed
- 2015 – Initial Funding and Technical Support from USFWS Partners Program. CDFW LSAA Issued.

## Rancho Santa Fe – Fairbanks Ranch Managed Fuel Reduction Projects



### Rancho Santa Fe Association Owned Property

2007	Witch Creek Fire
2017	RSF Garden Club \$7,300
2018	RSF Garden Club \$7,300
2018	USDA NRCS \$83,303
2019	RSF Garden Club \$10,000
2018	USDA NRCS \$83,303
2019	SD Urban Corps \$53,500
2019	Urban Corps/Tree SD \$275,000
2022	NEW! USDA NRCS \$25,000

### Rancho Santa Fe Covenant (Private Landowners, entry rights)

2019 State Coastal Conservancy Prop 1 \$71,000

**RSF Total: \$532,403**

### Lusardi Creek County Preserve

2014	Bernardo Fire
2018	CA Firesafe Council \$18,664
2018	Fairbanks Private Fundraiser \$25,000

**Total: \$43,664**

### Fairbanks Ranch (Private Landowners, entry rights)

2015	U.S. Fish & Wildlife \$55,300
2015	CA Wetlands Recovery Project \$23,000
2018	Private Contributions \$38,000

- 2024 – 2027 WCB Grant “Arroyo Phase I” - \$1,500,000





# PARTNERS & FUNDERS



# WORKFORCE

- WCA
- SDCL
- Urban Corps
- CCC
- ACE
- RSFA
- SWCA
- CNPS Volunteers!



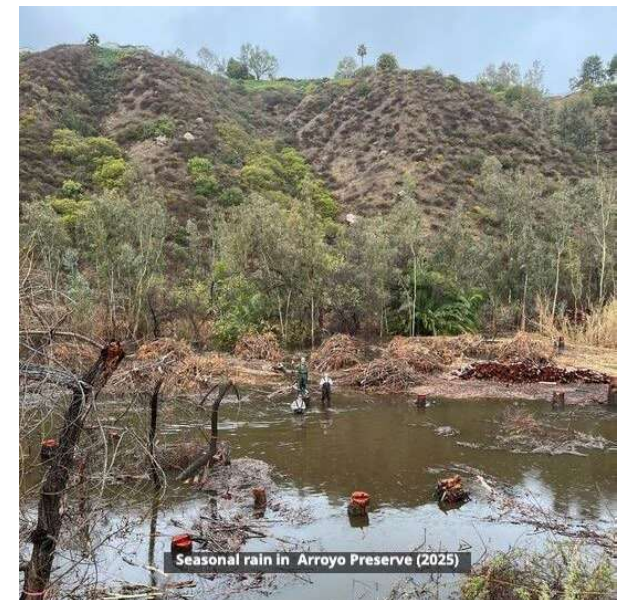
CALIFORNIA  
NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY





# ADAPT & OVERCOME - A FEW CHALLENGES

- Funding
- Capacity
- Community Opposition (Rancho Santa Fe ❤️ Eucalyptus)
- Herbicide 'Limitations'
- LSAA Restrictions on Heavy Equipment, Nesting Season, etc.
- Land Ownership & ROE Permitting
- Covid-19
- Lake Hodges Seismic Issues
- Biomass Management





# METHODS: TRIED & TRUE

- Eucalyptus / Acacia / Tamarisk – Cut stump / drill & kill
- Date Palm – drill & kill
- Arundo – cut and spray resprouts
- Biomass – chipping, brush pile ‘habitat structures’, etc.





# WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU GOT?

- Helicopters!
- Drones!!





# BEFORE > AFTER PHOTOS





# BEFORE > AFTER PHOTOS





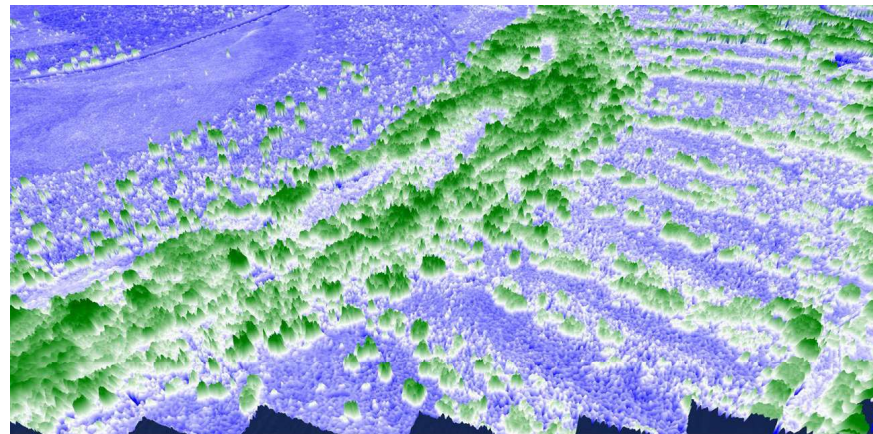
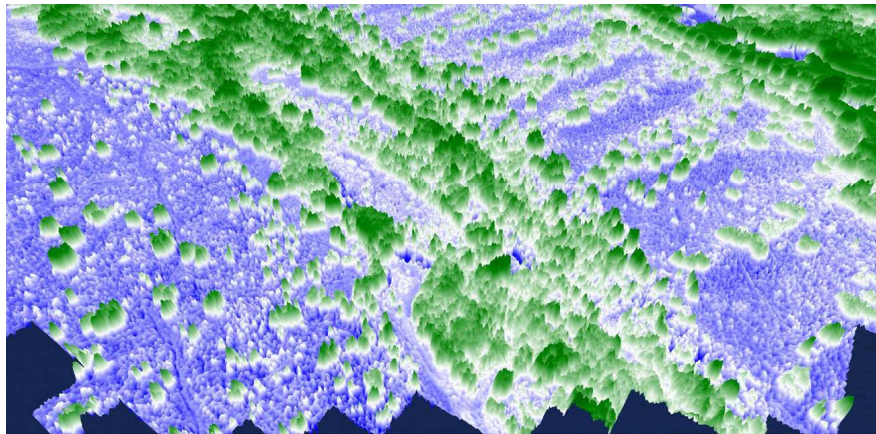
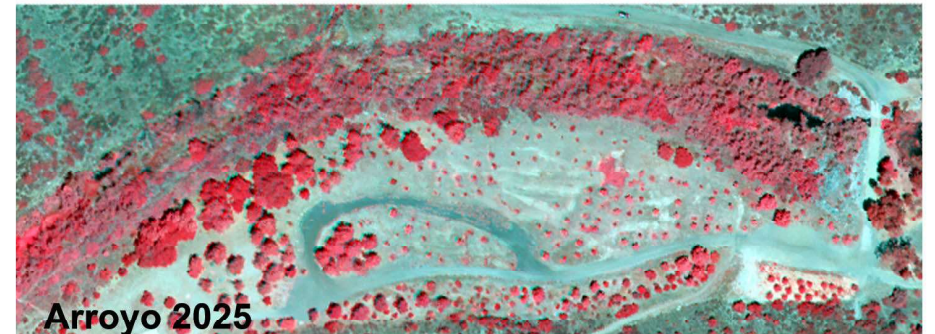
# DEDICATION!





# HOW ARE WE DOING? MONITORING & MORE

- Multispectral Imaging
- “Stacked Cube” – LBV Habitat Structure
- CRAM
- Ongoing Wildlife Surveys
  - E-Bird Transects
  - Herp Surveys
  - Wildlife Cameras





# NEXT STEPS

- Remove approximately 50 remaining trees
- Treat resprouts (again)
- Clean up our mess!
  - More helicopters!!!
  - Pile Burns?
- Monitor & Maintain

