

SECTION 11.0

SAN BENITO RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT CONSERVATION SERVICES

11.1 Overview

The San Benito Resource Conservation District (RCD) provides services related to soil and water conservation within San Benito County. The District was likely formed in the mid-1940's when most other soil conservation districts (the predecessor districts for most RCDs) were formed in the state. The District has boundaries which correspond to the San Benito County lines. It is a public resource agency, without regulatory or enforcement authority. The District's mission is to develop and facilitate community-led programs that conserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of San Benito County.

Currently, District services are provided through staff who are housed within the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Hollister Service Center, but are employees of the Santa Cruz County RCD. The staff serves as a resource to the NRCS in identifying and prioritizing local conservation concerns. They coordinate the implementation of best management practices and conservation programs and projects within the boundaries of San Benito County as well as within the upper Pajaro Watershed. It should be noted that the Pajaro watershed includes areas within southern Santa Clara County. Other adjacent RCDs within the Central Coast area include the Loma Prieta Resource Conservation District that serves southern Santa Clara County and the Monterey County RCD.

The San Benito RCD and NRCS are highly complementary agencies, and they collaborate regularly on programs and services through the Santa Cruz County RCD. The NRCS is the leading federal agency charged with conserving natural resources on private lands. The NRCS is part of the US Department of Agriculture and is the result of the initial Soil Conservation Service authorizing legislation and the broadened perspective on resource conservation that followed. The NRCS accomplishes its mission by working directly with local Resource Conservation Districts. RCDs work to ensure that local conservation issues are addressed, while the NRCS seeks to balance specific local needs within the context of a national conservation effort.

The San Benito RCD district profile is shown in *Table 11.1*.

**Table 11.1
San Benito Resource Conservation District**

Service Area / Financial Summary	
District Office:	2337 Technology Parkway, Suite C Hollister, CA 95023 (831) 637-4360, ext. 10 / (831) 636-7643 fax
Service Area:	San Benito County
Population:	58,411 (Countywide est.)
Operating Budget (FY 2007-2008):	No budget has been adopted
Net Assets 06/30/2006:	Not available

11.2 Growth and Population Projections

The San Benito RCD serves a majority of San Benito County, including the two incorporated cities. Population within San Benito County is expected to grow at an annual rate of 1.7 percent, reaching an estimated 83,791 by 2030.¹ This growth will result in greater pressure on agriculture land uses. The demand for conservation services is expected to increase, due to water quality and water supply issues, as well as to preserve the quality of the environment within San Benito County and the greater Pajaro Watershed area.

11.3 Infrastructure Needs or Deficiencies

The San Benito RCD does not own or maintain any capital infrastructure, and none is required in order for the District to fulfill its purpose according to the Resource Conservation District Law (Public Resources Code Section 9000 et seq.). The District provides watershed management, public and landowner education and other programs, some of which are funded through grants received by the Santa Cruz County RCD. The District is able to structure the scale and scope of its programs to specifically address local or regional environmental issues, based on available funding. Because of the nature of the services provided, the District could potentially see an increased demand for its services as growth occurs within its service area.

11.4 Financing Constraints and Opportunities

Funding for certain programs offered within the Pajaro Watershed is provided through grants received and managed by the Santa Cruz County RCD. The District has limited cash reserves and no long-term debt. *Table 11.2* summarizes the financial history of the District.

¹ Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments, Projections adopted by the AMBAG Board of Directors April 14, 2004.

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Table 11.2
San Benito Resource Conservation District
Financial Summary

	FY 2004-2005 Actual	FY 2005-2006 Actual	FY 2006-2007 Projected	FY 2007-2008 Budgeted
Operating Revenues	\$6,860	not available	\$16,566	No budget adopted
Operating Expenses	\$5,835	not available	\$22,986	
Depreciation Expense	0	0	0	
Net Non-operating Revenues / (Expenses)	0	0	0	
Capital contributions	0	0	0	
Change in Net Assets	\$1,025		(\$6,420)	
Beginning Balance			\$15,801	
Net Assets, End of Year		\$15,801	\$9,381	

All of the District's operational funds are deposited with the County Treasurer's Office, which provides accounting services for the District. The San Benito RCD has not adopted a budget for FY 2007/2008, and independent financial audits have not been prepared for recent years. The District should make it a priority to ensure that financial reporting requirements are met as soon as possible.

11.5 Cost Avoidance Opportunities

The San Benito RCD avoids costs by collaborating with the Santa Cruz County RCD and the NRCS to carry out programs managed by those agencies. As noted above, the three agencies collaborate on a number of projects, and their goals and objectives are highly complementary. The staff that provides services within San Benito County are employees of the Santa Cruz County RCD due in part to funding received that targets conservation efforts throughout the Pajaro Watershed area, which extends from Santa Cruz/Monterey Counties into San Benito and southern Santa Clara County.

11.6 Opportunities for Rate and Fee Restructuring

Resource conservation districts are authorized to charge reasonable fees for services. The San Benito RCD provides services and informational materials at no charge. This approach is common among resource conservation districts, as they are resource agencies with a primary purpose of disseminating information to landowners and the general public.

11.7 Opportunities for Shared Facilities

The San Benito RCD leverages staff resources through the Santa Cruz County RCD. The District regularly collaborates with other agencies and programs, including private landowners, to enhance and promote conservation practices in order to leverage resources to meet regional goals and objectives for conservation. The staff is also implementing conservation practices with San Benito County and the Pajaro Watershed. For example, the staff assigned to the San Benito RCD is implementing the Livestock and Land Program within San Benito County and southern Santa Clara County. This effort complements similar efforts in the Pajaro Watershed that lies within Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

11.8 Evaluation of Management Efficiencies

The San Benito RCD is operating with local staff, who receives programmatic oversight from the RCD of Santa Cruz County. The San Benito RCD has an appointed seven-member Board of Directors. This Board is instrumental in setting priorities for the conservation practices which are implemented by staff.

Per the requirements of Public Resource Code Division 9, the District is required to adopt a Long Range Conservation Plan that guides District programs and activities. Division 9 requires that RCDs develop a strategic plan that identifies “all resource issues within the district for local, state, and federal resource conservation planning.” The plan must cover a minimum five-year period and include a framework for setting annual priorities (annual plans) as outlined in the long-range plan. In addition, the plan must also include a means for conveying ideas contained in the plan to the public and other public agencies. Lastly, the plan must include a basis for evaluating progress made toward goals and objectives outlined in the plan. The Annual Work Plan should specifically identify projects and efforts for the upcoming year, and be used to evaluate results. This provides a means for the District and the public to monitor progress, and the District’s Board is able to redirect efforts as necessary. The District has a Long-Range Conservation Plan, based on issues for water quality, water supply, and urbanization, which has been approved for adoption by the appointed Board of Directors.

11.9 Government Structure Options

The San Benito RCD is authorized to provide a broad range of conservation-related services that provide benefit throughout the District’s service area. The District’s boundaries are coterminous within the County but services often spread beyond county boundaries to address multi-county conservation concerns. It is noted that currently the staff of the San Benito RCD is working to build the capacity of the District and to establish a stronger presence within the community. Since the Santa Cruz RCD is currently providing staff and some oversight for the local programs

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of the San Benito RCD service area, this could potentially present some efficiencies and cost savings, as well as highlighting the essential work of the District. Another possible option (dissolution of the District) is not viable at this time as no other public agency could provide all of the services the District is authorized to provide. Given the District's ability to fully leverage programs originating with the Santa Cruz County RCD, there is benefit from the conservation services provided. It is anticipated that there will be an increased need for these services due to urbanization, land use changes, water supply constraints, and water quality conditions.

11.10 Local Accountability and Governance

The San Benito RCD is an independent special district, and the Public Resources Code requires that the District be governed by a Board of Directors with members elected at large or appointed by the County Board of Supervisors through a public process. Due to lack of staff support, the District's Board experienced an interval of inactivity for several months; however, as new staff was hired in April 2006, monthly District Board meetings resumed and have been continuous since August 2006. Board activities include regular public meetings, adoption of a budget, and other activities as required in the Public Resources Code as well as other applicable state laws, including adherence to the Ralph M. Brown Act. The governance is summarized in *Table 11.3*.

**Table 11.3
San Benito Resource Conservation District**

Date Formed:	(not known)		
Statutory Authorization:	Resource Conservation District Law (Public Resources Code §9000)		
Board Meetings:	monthly on the last Thursday of the Month		
Member	Title	Term Expires	Compensation
Joe Conconi	President	11/30/2008	None
Dale Coke	Director	11/30/2008	
John Gregg	Director	11/30/2010	
Paul Hain	Director	11/30/2008	
Mark Dickson	Director	11/30/2008	
Robin Pollard	Director	11/30/2010	
Ted Thoeny	Director	11/30/2010	

11.11 Determinations

11.11.1 Growth and Population

Purpose: To evaluate service needs based upon existing and anticipated growth patterns and population projections.

The San Benito RCD serves the entire county. Land use within the District's boundaries includes both rural and urban; demand for resource conservation services is expected to increase as land use intensifies, water quality issues become increasingly more critical, and watershed management plans are implemented.

11.11.2 Infrastructure Needs or Deficiencies

Purpose: To evaluate the infrastructure needs and deficiencies in terms of supply, capacity, condition of facilities, and service quality.

The San Benito RCD does not own or maintain any infrastructure and is able to structure its programs based on available funding. The District should make it a priority to ensure that financial reporting requirements are met as soon as possible.

11.11.3 Financing Constraints and Opportunities

Purpose: To evaluate a jurisdiction's capacity to finance needed improvements and services.

The District has not adopted a budget for FY 2007/2008 and financial audits have not been completed for recent years.

11.11.4 Cost Avoidance Opportunities

Purpose: To identify practices or opportunities that may help eliminate unnecessary costs.

The San Benito RCD is avoiding costs through the use of staff from the Santa Cruz County RCD.

11.11.5 Opportunities for Rate and Fee Restructuring

Purpose: To identify opportunities to impact rates positively without decreasing service levels.

The San Benito RCD does not charge fees for its services. However, the District has the option to charge nominal fees to cover the costs of educational programs, workshops, and conferences;

the District may want to consider adopting a fee structure if needed to carry out its annual work plan.

11.11.6 Opportunities for Shared Facilities

Purpose: To evaluate the opportunities for a jurisdiction to share facilities and resources to develop more efficient service delivery systems.

The San Benito RCD leverages staff resources available through the Santa Cruz County RCD along with the programs that are initiated and managed by the Santa Cruz County RCD and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

11.11.7 Evaluation of Management Efficiencies

Purpose: To evaluate the internal organizational structure of the jurisdiction.

The San Benito RCD is operating under the oversight of staff from the Santa Cruz County RCD. The District has adopted a Long Range Strategic Plan (2002 – 2012) and annual work plan (August 2006) in accordance with the Resource Conservation District Law. The District annually gathers data – both community interest and concern, and technological facts and records – from local residents. That data is subsequently put together for a viable program of work which increases the practicability of the District.

11.11.8 Government Structure Options

Purpose: To consider the advantages and disadvantages of various government structures to provide public services.

The San Benito RCD is authorized to provide a broad range of conservation related services that provide benefit throughout the District's service area. It is anticipated that there will be an increased need for these services due to urbanization, land use changes, water supply constraints, and water quality conditions. Two government structure options were identified:

- 1) **Reorganize the District with the Santa Cruz County RCD:** This could have some efficiencies and cost savings, particularly since the Santa Cruz RCD is currently providing staff and directing programs for the San Benito RCD service area.
- 2) **Dissolve the District:** There is benefit from the conservation services provided, and no other public agency could provide all of the services the District is authorized to provide. Disadvantages of this option include a loss of funding for conservation programs.

11.11.9 Local Accountability and Governance

Purpose: To evaluate the accessibility and levels of public participation associated with the agency's decision-making and management process.

The San Benito RCD has an active Board of Directors, with that body having resumed a regular meeting schedule. All Board meetings are noticed to the public. There are no vacancies on the Board of Directors currently. Staff continues to work to bring stability and long range planning efforts to strengthen the work of the District.