With a few exceptions, autumn and early winter sees the RCD staff frequenting the office more than the field. There is data to be analyzed, reports to be written, budgets to be reviewed, and projects to begin preparing for the spring field season. Another activity currently underway involves potential collaboration with other RCD’s in the Sacramento Valley area. In the next couple of months, we will be meeting and discussing possible areas where RCD’s might better achieve organizational needs and conservation project objectives collectively and cooperatively as opposed to individually. Examples might include such things as securing a consistent, dependable revenue source or addressing common resource issues that cross RCD boundaries such as salmon enhancement or invasive species eradication. As always, we are also reaching out to our vitally important project partners. These partners work closely with us in the development and implementation of new projects and assist us in review of how past projects fared. Looking ahead, if you are interested in meeting our partners - or becoming one - consider attending our next Day in the District in May 2018. Or if you can't wait that long, drop by the office and we’ll be happy to share our experience with you. In the meantime, enjoy the changing weather and, if possible, make it rain.
Featured Project: Mitigation
Written by Veronica Orosz

For the Project Coordinator responsible for mitigation, fall and early winter isn’t all cozy sweaters and pumpkin spice lattes! Fall signals a transition from summer maintenance mode to fall survey mode. You may spot a Project Coordinator surveying mitigation sites like Willow Pond. How can you tell if a survey is being conducted? Clipboards, survey tapes, a Trimble, and a camera are usually being juggled between hands and coordinators.

What is mitigation and what is a Project Coordinator?
Mitigation projects are intended to offset, minimize, or compensate for impacts to the natural environment. The WSRCD frequently manages mitigation projects that are intended to compensate for habitat affected by the development of a bridge or roadway. Most of the projects are designed to enhance or create riparian habitat along streams and riverbanks. That is accomplished by planting trees, shrubs, and ground covers specific and suitable to a chosen area. Those sites are then intensively managed for up to 10 years, or until they can survive on their own. Project Coordinators are employees of the WSRCD. They work for Project Managers. Coordinators manage all aspects of the projects, including coordinating efforts with partners, prepping sites for planting, supervising field crew, managing sites for their duration, conducting annual surveys, and preparing and submitting reports.

What are our coordinators looking for when they conduct a survey? They note whether or not a plant has been impacted by insects, been grazed on, suffered sun damage, suffered flood or drought damage. Some sites require that plant height and canopy diameter also be measured. Finally, coordinators tally up the number of healthy plants, unhealthy plants, and dead plants. All of this data is then built into an annual report which determines whether or not success criteria has been achieved for that year.

In addition to looking at the plants, the Project Coordinator also determines if additional maintenance is needed. Frequently, protective wire cages need to be resized to accommodate the summer growth. Irrigation lines are drained and prepped for the winter. A to-do list for the upcoming season may also be started. It often includes notes about potential soil and mulch needs, whether or not shade cloths will need to be placed before the next summer’s heat, and of course, what species need to be ordered for replanting efforts.

Sometimes, in spite of our best efforts, things just run amok. The recent five year drought and record breaking heat, including this past summer – posed a long term challenge to many of our sites. This past winter presented the opposite problem as one of California’s wettest on record. Several of our mitigation sites were severely flooded. And sometimes, it isn’t nature that is the issue. Several of our sites have been heavily affected by vandalism and grazing.

Despite these challenges, our Project Coordinators and mitigation crews have met all adversities with positivity and creative solutions. Partner agencies have also gotten creative to ensure the success of these projects. Sometimes that creativity manifests as both teams harvesting acorns to replace dead oak saplings in the spring. Sometimes it means acknowledging that weather isn’t something we can control and reworking definitions of success. Strong partnerships are vital to these projects. Thanks to our tenacious Project Coordinators, supportive Partners, and hardworking mitigation crews, it is shaping up to be another successful year for mitigation.
Having grown up in California and Asia, Analia’s interest in ecology was fostered as being witness to the challenges of coexistence between urban living and the natural environment. After receiving a B.S. in Biology from Eastern Connecticut State University, Analia worked with NRCS-Connecticut before returning to California, promoting the importance of conservation and restoration through education and outreach, and working with farmers, landowners, legislators, educators, and conservationists. Analia has a passion for travel and encourages others to experience the diverse landscape of the earth. Aside from travel, her interests include disc golf, hiking, snowboarding, brewing, and roller derby.

Analia’s duties with the RCD are diverse. She assists District Manager Chester Anderson with the mitigation and FEMA projects and Project Manager Gary Lauben with fuels reduction and forest health projects. Additionally, she frequently writes grants to secure funding for the RCD.

**Employee Highlight: Project Coordinator Analia Bertucci**

Written by Veronica Orosz

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**Project Updates**

Written by Chester Anderson

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**Wetland and Riparian Habitat Mitigation**

Analia Bertucci and Kelli England are busy with field staff prepping and planting our 8 acre project at Jelly’s Ferry for Caltrans. Our other mitigation sites have been put to rest for the winter. Thanks to wonderful leadership by Terry Plunk, plant mortality from the exceptional heat and dryness of the summer was kept at a minimum.

**Fisheries**

Harmony Gugino and Jan Raether are busy working with stakeholders to design and permit our latest side-channel project South of Cypress Avenue. Unfortunately, our mercury abatement and gravel project in lower Clear Creek was nixed by the CDFW; there were too many logistical issues that had not been addressed in the original funding request.

**Conservation Easements**

Sara Letton is detailing how we might move forward with offering conservation easements on properties that local and larger land trusts are not interested in. With this we may be able to protect smaller parcels that also have wildlife or agricultural value. Sara is also working with the Stewardship Council to draft baseline documents for easements that we will hold or will be held by the U.S. Forest Service.

**Water Quality and Erosion Control**

Gary Lauben is detailing our scope of work for road inventory and erosion control in Battle Creek and Tessa Blevins will be returning from maternity leave in a month to start projects in Chappie-Shasta and the Bagley area. Ross Perry just completed road inventory and assessments in the Buckhorn area.

**Forests and Fuels’ Management**

Gary Lauben is finishing up a fuel break around City of Shasta Lake and is near completion on our Shingletown Ridge fuel break. Gary also received funding from the County Title III funds to create a Firewise Community near Shingletown and he is working with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to complete a more in-depth forest management project near Shingletown. Ross Perry amended a funding agreement with the BLM to complete some fuels management in the Chappie Shasta area.