

# Our Water, Our Creeks, Our Home



How the RCD can help improve water availability & reliability for you, your neighbors, and wildlife.

## Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District

The Gold Ridge RCD is one of two special districts in Sonoma County working to conserve natural resources for the benefit of county residents and our environment. Formed in 1941 by Sonoma County farmers, the Gold Ridge RCD provides technical and financial assistance to landowners and residents of our district for resource conservation projects carried out on a strictly voluntary basis. Projects include water supply enhancement and water conservation; soil and road erosion control; water quality improvement; range, and forest management; conservation education; and riparian and instream habitat enhancement. You can learn more about our programs by visiting [www.goldridgercd.org](http://www.goldridgercd.org).

### Some of Our Partners:

- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation*
- Natural Resources Conservation Service*
- California Department of Water Resources*
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife*
- California Wildlife Conservation Board*
- California State Coastal Conservancy*
- State Water Resources Control Board*
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*
- Sonoma County Water Agency*
- Sonoma County Fish and Wildlife Commission*

## Background

The primary goals of the Gold Ridge RCD's water conservation programs are to increase the amount of water flowing in our streams during the summer dry season and to assist landowners in developing more secure and reliable water supplies. We achieve these goals by partnering with landowners on projects that provide alternatives to drawing water from creeks and shallow, near-stream wells during the summer.

To date the RCD has designed and built a number of projects to address water demand for livestock watering, crop and garden irrigation and other outdoor, non-potable uses.\*

With the past three years of record drought, additional funding will soon be available that is intended to assist landowners with efforts to make their water supplies more secure.



*5,000-gallon tanks storing rainwater for dry season irrigation in Bodega.*

\* The County of Sonoma does not currently grant building permits to construct alternative water systems for potable purposes.

## Project Types

**Rainwater catchment** has been the most common type of project implemented by GRRCD, with 15 rainwater systems built so far and several others in design. Projects have ranged in size from 9,000 to 39,000 gallons for residential and small agricultural systems, and from 57,000 to 1.4 million gallons for ranch and dairy operations. All of our rainwater projects are designed to collect their target water volume even during a severe drought.



**Off-channel water storage** projects draw water from a stream or other water source (such as a spring or well) during the wet season and store water in tanks or ponds for use during the summer.

**Water conservation, including irrigation efficiency:** The RCD helps landowners identify and install measures to conserve water, including improved irrigation strategies for low-demand irrigation. Water conservation measures may be installed in conjunction with rainwater or off-channel storage projects.



## Process

- 1) Consultation.** The RCD consults with the landowner to agree on water uses to be addressed and to outline a project. We calculate the amount of water that will be required.
- 2) Design.** Generally the RCD has grant funding to design projects, and design is contracted to reputable, experienced local design consultants.
- 3) Construction.** The RCD works with grant funders in consultation with the landowner to secure construction funding, and construction is carried out by licensed, experienced local contractors.
- 4) Ownership.** Once the project is constructed, it is the property of the landowner.



*Completed rainwater system, with 5,000-gallon water storage tanks at right and water conveyance downspout and first flush diverter on the house at left.*

## Landowner Responsibilities

**Agreement.** We work with the landowner to compose and sign an agreement that identifies the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved in the project. It spells out:

- 1) The purpose the water is intended to serve.
- 2) The period of use for the water (generally summer-fall of each year).
- 3) The water collection period (generally winter-spring).
- 4) Maintenance responsibilities.
- 5) The term of the agreement (generally 15-20 years).

The agreement is between the RCD and the landowner—no other entities are involved. It is recorded on the property title and runs with the land in the event of a change in ownership.

**Water Use.** The most significant responsibility of the landowner is to agree to refrain from using water from the original, extractive source (creek, well, etc.) and to instead use the water made available by the project, for the agreed uses, during the declared period of use over the term of the agreement.

## Water Rights

Collection and storage of rainwater is something anyone can do in California without a water right or any involvement of the state government.

Water is not under state jurisdiction until it is flowing in a natural channel.

For projects that change the timing of water extraction from a stream (drawing water in the winter to be stored for use in the summer) an appropriative water right is required. This MAY also be true for projects that use spring or well water. The State Water Board is supportive of projects that conserve water and alter the timing of water extraction, and has been willing to streamline the water right permitting process to facilitate project development. The RCD works with the landowner in navigating the process of securing a water right, should the project require one.

## Local Permitting

The RCD will acquire the necessary permits for water supply and conservation projects.

If water storage tanks are being constructed or installed, a building permit is required for any tank exceeding 5,000 gallons in capacity. Any number of 5,000-gallon or smaller tanks can be installed without a building permit.

Projects that involve earthmoving over a defined amount require a grading permit from Sonoma County. Pond construction requires permits from the county, but the RCD has an exemption from grading permit requirements for conservation projects. Grant funds cover all permit costs.

## Costs

**Design.** The RCD has grant funding to complete project designs.

**Construction.** There are many ways to cover the cost of construction, and this is determined on a case-by-case basis.

Agricultural landowners and producers are encouraged to apply for NRCS EQIP funding to assist with project construction costs.

Our goal is to cover most construction and permit costs with grant funding allocated to water and drought-specific projects.

We generally ask the landowner to cover up to 10% of the construction cost, but this amount can be negotiated if resources are limited.



**Consultations are available with Gold Ridge RCD staff, free of charge. (707) 823-5244**