



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

RCHCA
RIVERSIDE COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION AGENCY

RCHCA MISSION STATEMENT

The Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency (RCHCA) is a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) comprised of the cities of Corona, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Menifee, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, and the County of Riverside. Through an Agreement for Services, RCHCA activities are administered by the Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG).

The RCHCA successfully manages conserved lands for the benefit of not only the SKR but also other threatened species covered under the Western Riverside Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan. The RCHCA's mission is supported by local conservation partners, academic experts and wildlife agencies working towards species protection and regional conservation goals.

RCHCA BOARD MEMBERS

Lisa Deforest (Chair)
*Mayor Pro-Tem
City of Murrieta*

Joseph Morabito
*Mayor
City of Wildomar*

James Stewart
*Mayor Pro-Tem
City of Temecula*

Steve Manos (Vice-Chair)
*Councilmember
City of Lake Elsinore*

Cheylynda Barnard
*Councilmember
City of Moreno Valley*

Michael Vargas
*Mayor
City of Perris*

Tom Richins
*Councilmember
City of Corona*

Lesa Sobek
*Councilmember
City of Menifee*

Yxstian Gutierrez
*Supervisor, District 5
County of Riverside*

Jackie Peterson
*Councilmember
City of Hemet*

Steve Hemenway
*Councilmember
City of Riverside*



WELCOME LETTER



LISA DEFOREST

Dear stakeholders and supporters,

Welcome to the 2023 annual report of the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency. We are thrilled to share the accomplishments of the past fiscal year, propelling us closer to our mission of preserving precious habitats and protecting endangered species.

A major highlight is the successful implementation of the SKR Rangewide Management and Monitoring Plan. This comprehensive initiative establishes a robust foundation for conserving the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat, a vital species in our region. Through collaborative efforts, we've significantly advanced the survival and recovery of this unique and vulnerable creature.

Additionally, we're pleased to announce the completion of the inaugural baseline year of data collection. This milestone is a crucial steppingstone towards the full recovery of the SKR population, reflecting our commitment to evidence-based decision-making and long-term conservation strategies.

During Fiscal Year 2023, RCHCA finalized the sale of three surplus land parcels to Ecosystem Investment Partners (EIP), generating \$1.5 million in revenue. This funding will support the agency's conservation activities and long-term sustainability. EIP will restore these parcels and protect the land perpetually through a conservation easement, enhancing the Riverpark Mitigation Bank.

In addition to our conservation endeavors, our "Celebrating Endangered Species Day" educational event returned after being on hold during the Pandemic. This event raises awareness about protecting endangered species and their habitats, engaging and inspiring children to play an active role in preserving our natural heritage.

As we move forward, our commitment to protecting and conserving the unique ecosystems and endangered species of western Riverside County remains steadfast. We invite you to join us in facing the challenges and opportunities ahead. Your continued support is invaluable as we strive to create a sustainable future for our natural world.

Thank you once again for your unwavering support, and we look forward to sharing more updates on our ongoing conservation efforts.

Warm Regards,

Lisa DeForest
Chair, RCHCA Board of Directors
Mayor Pro-Tem, City of Murrieta

Steve Manos
Vice-Chair, RCHCA Board of Directors
Councilmember, City of Lake Elsinore



FASCINATING SKR FACTS

1. Stephens' kangaroo rat (SKR) is named after American zoologist Frank Stephens.
2. SKR have external fur-lined cheek pouches for carrying seeds.
3. They live in complex burrow systems that have separate chambers for specific purposes like sleeping, living and food storage. Extra collected seeds are stored in their burrows where they can absorb up to 30 percent more moisture.
4. They are nocturnal with large, sensitive eyes that allow them to see in complete darkness.
5. Although a kangaroo rat's diet mostly consists of dry seeds, they require very little liquid water. Instead,, they survive almost entirely by converting fats from the seeds into water through digestion.
6. SKRs can jump up to nine feet in a single bound, thanks to their large hind legs. This helps them escape fast and sneaky animals – even snakes!
7. Their long, rudder-like tail helps it maneuver quickly through dense brush. They can even use their tail to change direction mid-air.



RCHCA STAFF

- Kurt Wilson**, Executive Director
- Brian Shomo**, Director
- Harry Sandoval**, Natural Resource Manager
- Riana Fisher**, Program Manager
- Francisco Gonzalez**, Open-space Habitat Technician
- Lizbeth Tonyan**, Open-space Habitat Technician
- Bryan Loya**, Open-space Habitat Technician
- Randy Solis**, Open-space Habitat Technician/Reserve Patrol

About the

HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN



The importance of preserving biodiversity by preventing species extinction was legally recognized in 1973 when the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was signed into federal law. The purpose of the ESA is not only to protect species listed as threatened or endangered but also to conserve the ecosystem upon which those species depend.

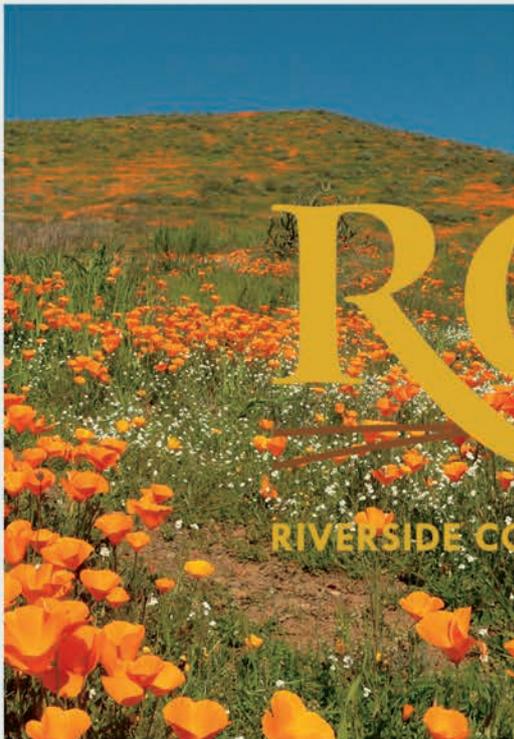
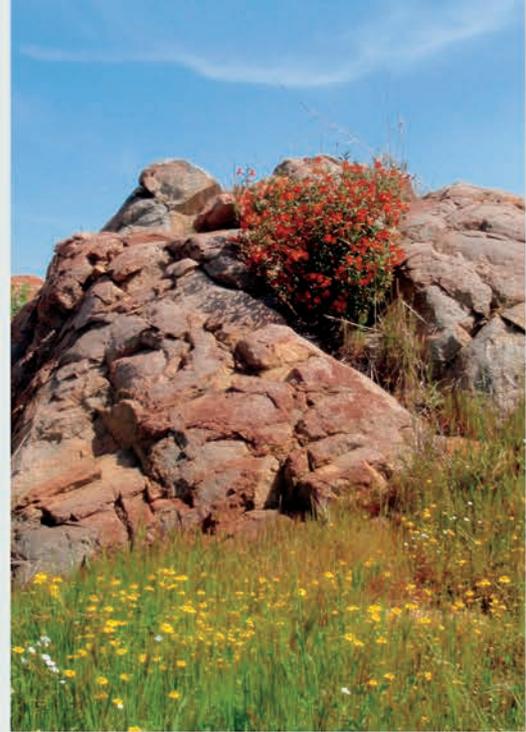
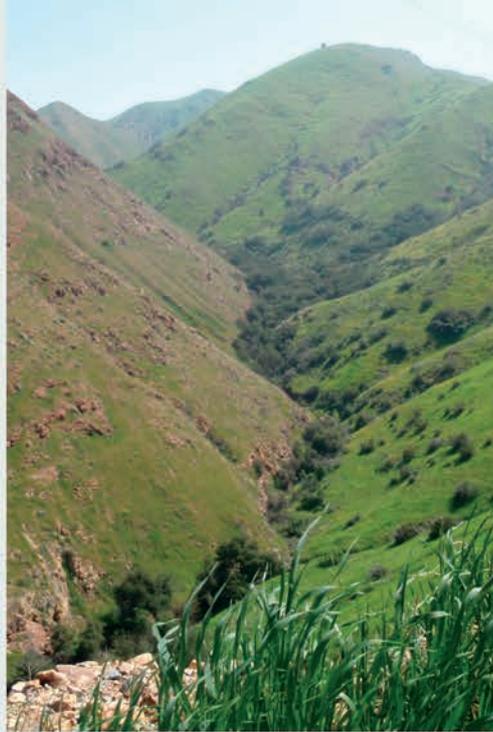
The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is one of the lead agencies tasked with implementing the ESA and is therefore responsible for regulating prohibited and allowable activities concerning endangered or threatened species. To mitigate the "taking," which refers to any attempt or action involving the harassment, harm, pursuit, hunting, shooting, wounding, killing, trapping, capturing, or collecting of any listed species, Section 10 of the ESA regulates a range of activities that affect endangered or threatened plants and animals.

A crucial component of the ESA is the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). This planning document aims to balance economic development with the protection of listed species by permitting limited and unintentional "take" during lawful activities.

The HCP serves the dual purpose of conserving the habitat essential for listed species, contributing to their recovery, and promoting biological diversity and ecosystem stability. Concurrently, it facilitates future economic growth and development within member agency jurisdictions. This is achieved through an efficient and streamlined regulatory process, enabling development to proceed smoothly.

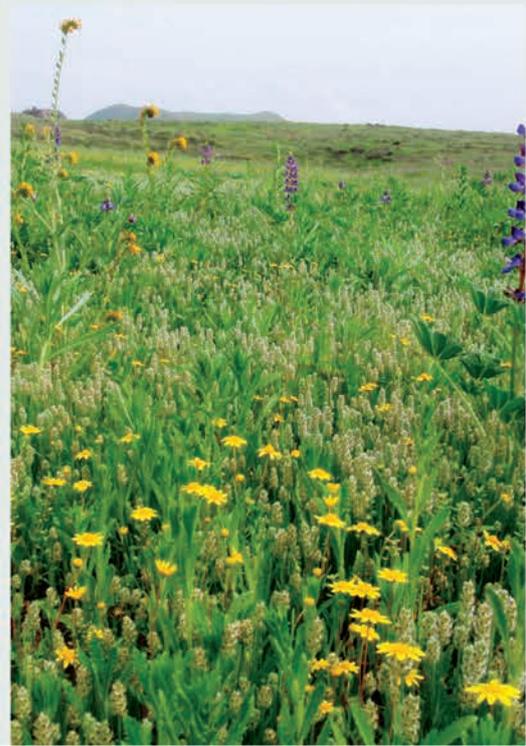
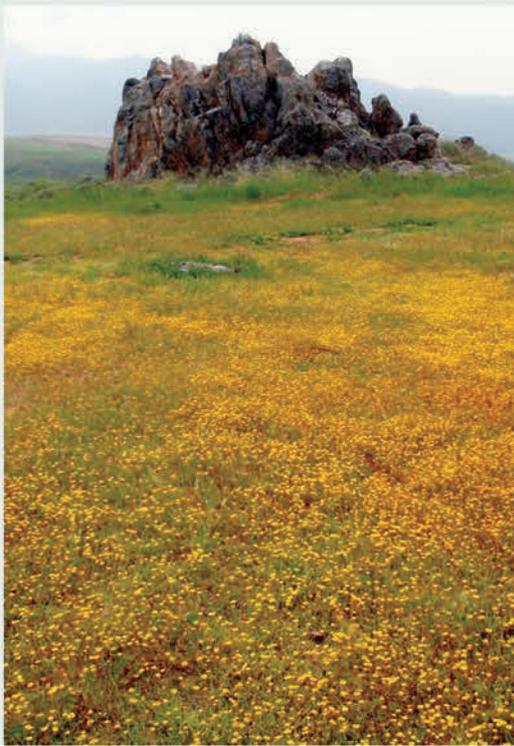
Under the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat Habitat Conservation Plan (SKR HCP), eight permanent SKR core reserves were established that today total 51,280 acres. Within the Core Reserves, there are 15,000 acres of occupied SKR habitat. No suitable or SKR-occupied habitat has been acquired, and no occupied SKR Habitat has been disturbed within the Core Reserves during Fiscal Year 2022-2023.

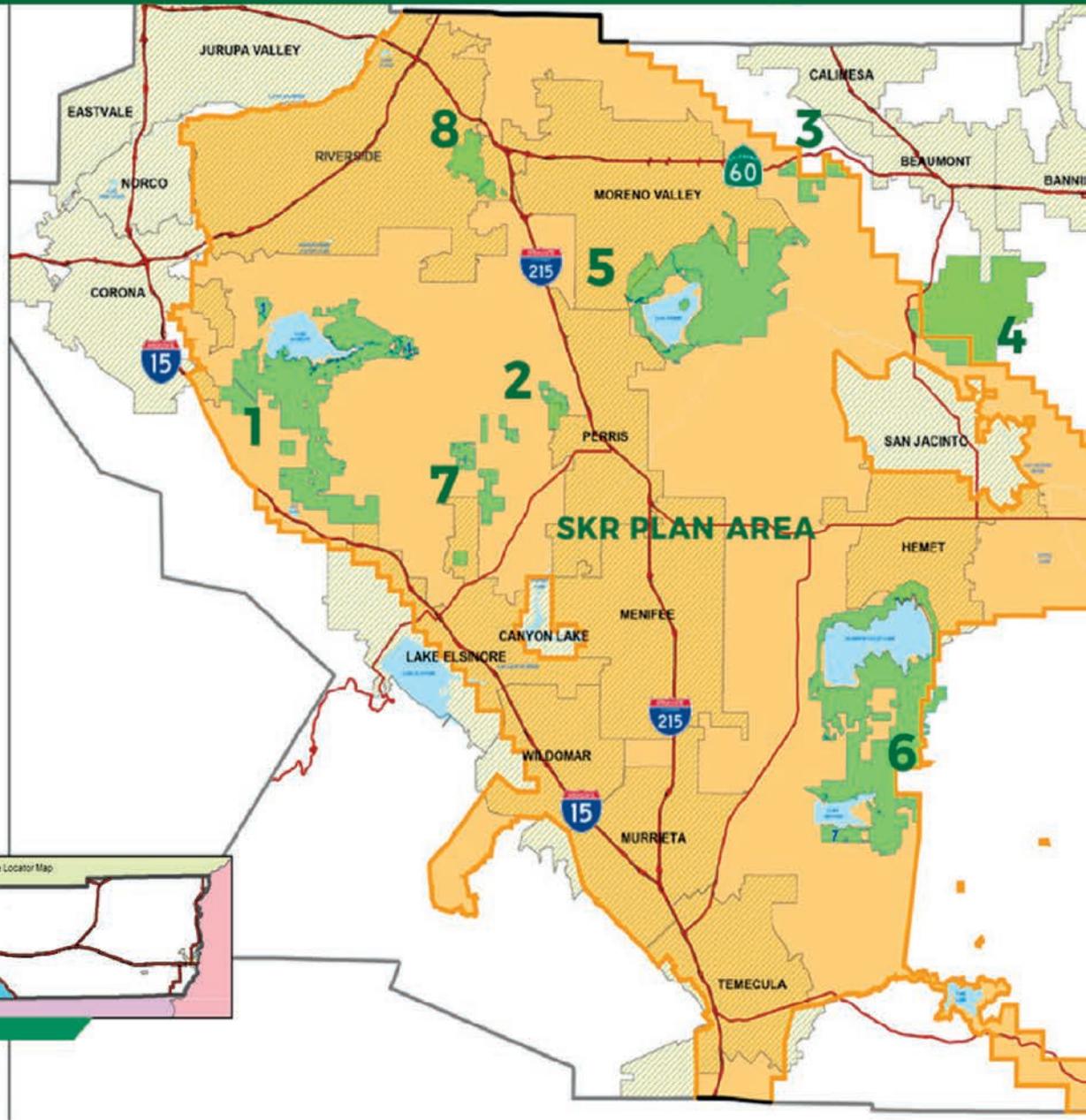




RCHCA

RIVERSIDE COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION AGENCY





These Eight Core Reserves designated for SKR conservation are jointly owned and form the nucleus of multi-species habitat conservation efforts in Riverside County.

SKR CONSERVED LANDS

- 1 LAKE MATHEWS / ESTELLE MOUNTAIN RESERVE
- 2 MOTTE RIMROCK
- 3 POTRERO ACEC
- 4 POTRERO RESERVE
- 5 SAN JACINTO / LAKE PERRIS
- 6 SOUTHWESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTI-SPECIES RESERVE
- 7 STEELE PEAK
- 8 SYCAMORE CANYON

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

FISCAL YEAR 2022/2023



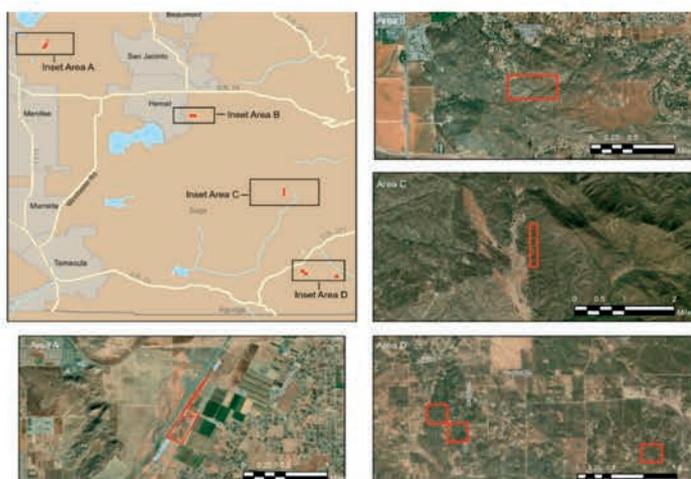
RANGEWIDE MONITORING OF SKR



With the completion of the SKR Rangewide Management and Monitoring Plan, RCHCA is delighted to report the successful conclusion of the inaugural baseline year of rangewide monitoring data collection, representing a significant milestone in bolstering the comprehensive recovery efforts for the SKR population. After two years of collecting data, the baseline will be used to determine future population density and trends.

SURPLUS LAND SALE

RCHCA divested three surplus land parcels located in Lakeview/Nuevo, bringing in additional revenue this fiscal year. The successful transaction with Ecosystem Investment Partners yielded a total of \$1.86 million. These lands are now poised to undergo ecological restoration and will be perpetually safeguarded through a conservation easement, thoughtfully incorporated into the Riverpark Mitigation Bank



ENDANGERED SPECIES DAY EVENT

In fall of 2022, RCHCA was able to resume its outdoor educational event, "Celebrating Endangered Species Day." This event raises awareness about the importance of protecting endangered and threatened species and their habitats, following Next Generation Science Standards.



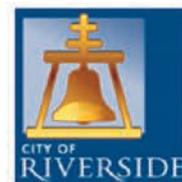
RESERVE MANAGERS COORDINATING COMMITTEE

The RMCC is a group whose primary mission is to promote coordination of SKR management throughout the core reserve system and address regional management issues of importance to species persistence in the HCP area. RMCC members are made up representatives from entities that have responsibilities for management of lands within SKR core reserves. Representatives from the following agencies make up the RMCC :

YEAR IN REVIEW

During the current reporting period, the RMCC met two times. Notable items that were presented and discussed during the RMCC meetings included the following:

- Reviewing preliminary results from the first range wide monitoring effort.
- Assisting the RCHCA with the 2023 SKR Rangewide monitoring sites.
- Sharing information about invasive species in the area and common invasive species control practices.
- With this year's unprecedented rainfall amount, discussing habitat management techniques and timing.





RESERVE MANAGER'S TOOLBOX

530

ACRES

Burned



2300

ACRES

Sheep
Grazed



910

ACRES

Mowed



300

ACRES

Herbicide
Treated



32

ACRES

Restored



PREScribed BURNS, GRAZING AND MOWING ARE USED TO CONTROL GRASS, INVASIVE WEEDS AND MAINTAIN THE RATIO OF AT LEAST 50% GRASSLAND TO BARE DIRT.

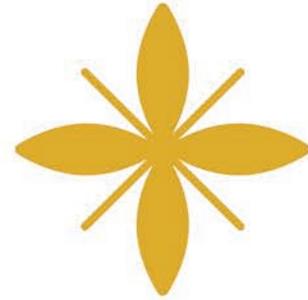
HERBICIDE IS USED TO TREAT INVASIVE WEED POPULATIONS , SUCH AS STINKNET, MUSTARD AND TAMARISK.

ONCE LAND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES ARE IMPLEMENTED, TREATED AREAS ARE **RESTORED** BY TYPICALLY BROADCAST SEEDING WITH NATIVE SKR PREFERRED SEEDS.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON RMCC ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING MEETING MINUTES AND MAPS OF AREAS MANAGED, PLEASE VISIT [HTTPS://RCHCA.US](https://RCHCA.US)

A Year's Overview

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS



As a JPA, the Joint Powers Agreement requires that full books and accounts be maintained for the RCHCA in accordance with practices consistent with those utilized by the Controller of the State of California.

RCHCA contracts with a certified public accountant to make an annual audit of the accounts and records of the Agency.

OPERATING REVENUES

<i>SKR Mitigation Fee Collections</i>	\$394,856
<i>Interest Earned on Endowments</i>	\$565,201
<i>Contractual Services Revenue</i>	\$131,539
<i>Net proceeds from Land Sale</i>	\$1,485,202
<i>Lake Mathews Endowment</i>	\$244,385

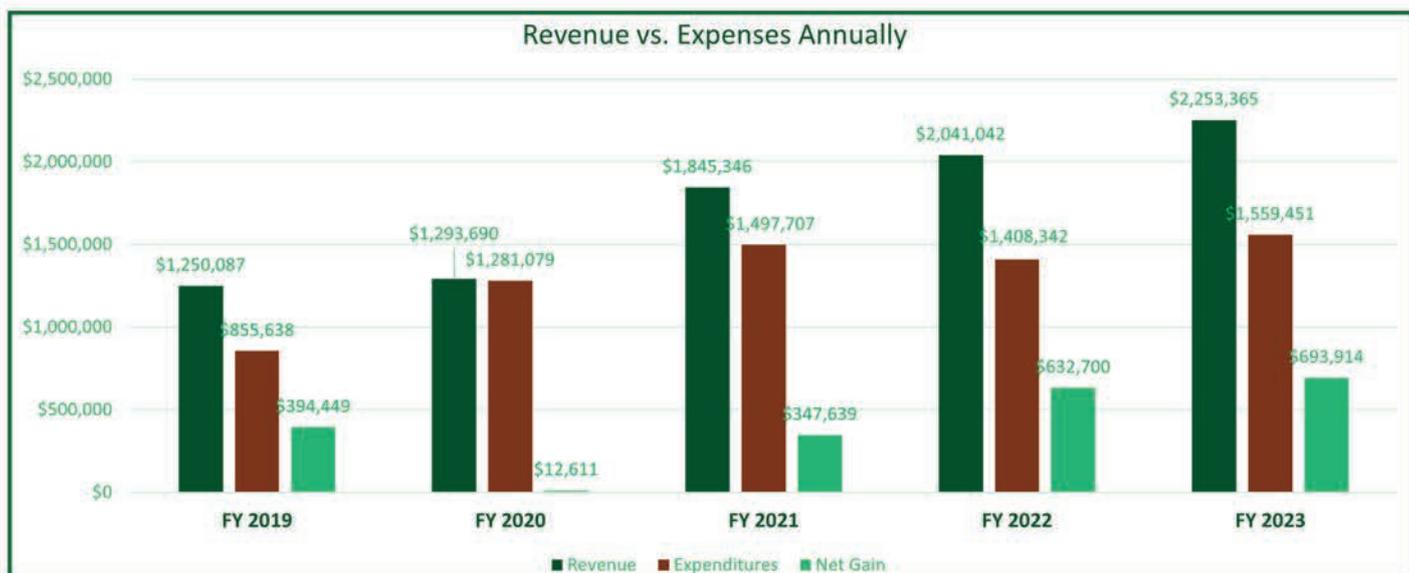
TOTAL REVENUES \$2,253,365

OPERATING EXPENSES

<i>General Operations</i>	\$1,075,931
<i>Lake Mathews Reserve</i>	\$483,520

TOTAL EXPENSES \$1,559,451

Our auditor's opinion states the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the retrospective financial position of the governmental activities and the major fund of the Agency. There are no findings to report in relation to the audit and the Agency received an "unmodified opinion," which is the highest level of assurance.

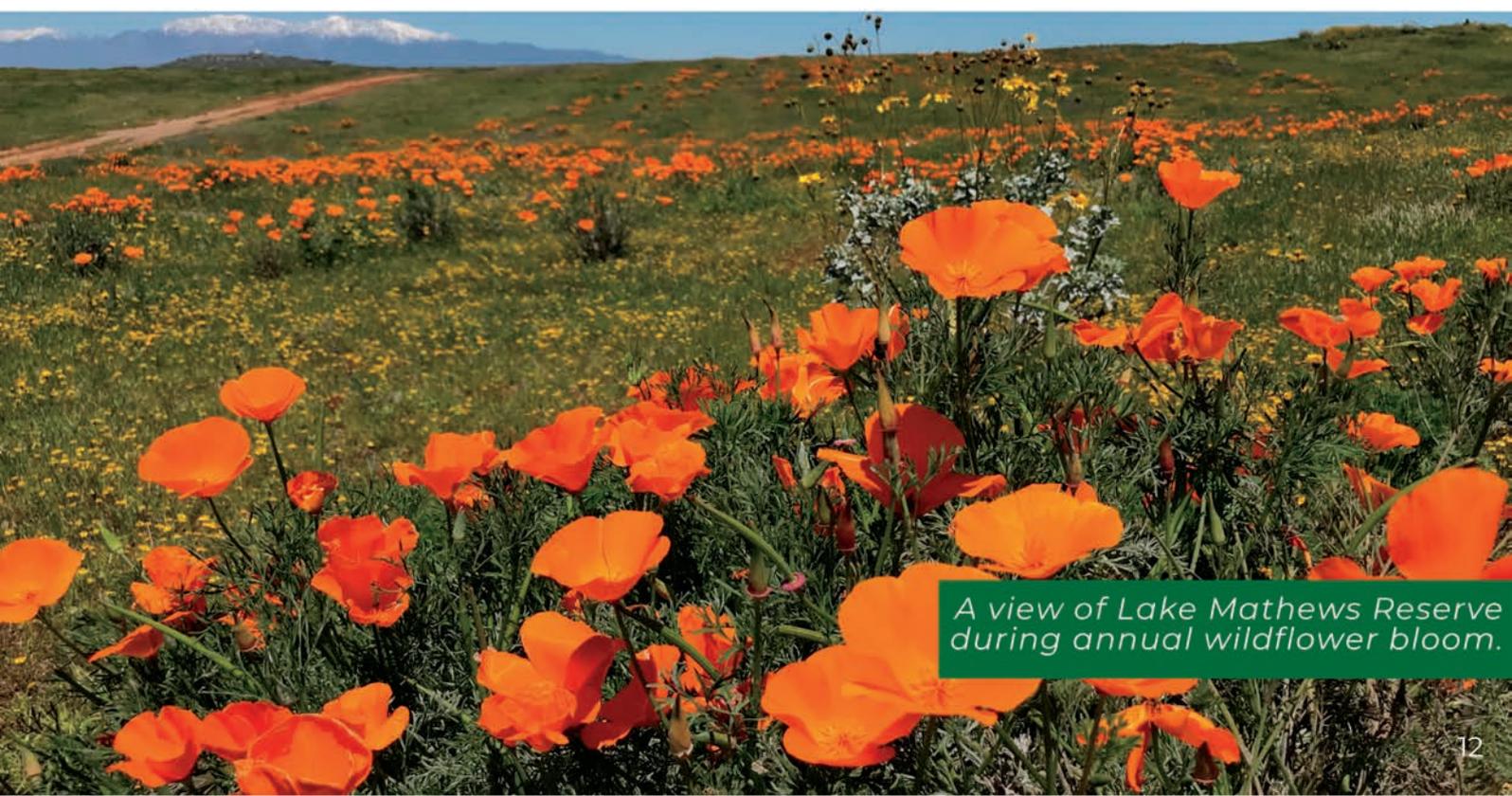


The budget for the RCHCA is divided into two main parts: General Operations and Lake Mathews Reserve Operations.

The General Fund revenue comprises transfers of SKR mitigation fees from member agencies, assessed on development projects within the SKR fee area, interest earned, and other general revenue earned through contractual agreements.

The Lake Mathews Reserve Operations is financed by endowment and contractual agreements, which provide support for Reserve staff salaries and benefits, land management activities, biological surveys, research programs, and community outreach.

General Fund expenses include administrative salaries and benefits, general operations, land management for RCHCA-owned lands, and educational outreach and program improvements that are not covered by endowment funds.



A view of Lake Mathews Reserve during annual wildflower bloom.

SKR MITIGATION FEE COLLECTIONS

The RCHCA has a Section 10A permit granted by US Fish and Wildlife Service for SKR. This permit allows for "take" of SKR as part of development activity. "Take" is defined by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as any attempt to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct as it relates to SKR. As individual projects are proposed and approved in the SKR Plan Area, public and private land developers are required to pay a SKR mitigation fee for land that is developed and removes habitat of SKR.

Developers benefit from the streamlined process in the SKR Plan Area because projects within this area do not require individual review and approval by the wildlife agencies.

For more information on SKR Mitigation Fees, please refer to the ordinance adopted by the Member Jurisdiction where the project is located.

JURISDICTION	SKR MITIGATION FEES COLLECTED FOR FY 22-23
County of Riverside	\$128,650
City of Perris	\$81,168
City of Riverside	\$73,163
City of Moreno Valley	\$59,550
City of Murrieta	\$16,429
City of Menifee	\$14,655
City of Lake Elsinore	\$9,850
City of Corona	\$0
City of Hemet	\$0
City of Temecula	\$0
City of Wildomar	\$0
Total Fees Collected	\$383,466

STATUS OF RESERVE ENDOWMENTS

In 1990, the RCHCA began assembly of a Reserve System to protect SKR. There are eight reserves encompassing approximately 50,000 acres. Endowments were established to provide funding to support land management. The principal amount of the endowment remains intact while the interest income is available for use on Reserves that have an existing management plan to support of SKR recovery efforts.

CORE RESERVE	ENDOWMENT PRINCIPAL	FUND BALANCE (AS OF JUNE 30, 2023)	INTEREST EARNINGS	DOLLARS EXPENDED IN FY 2022/2023
Lake Mathews (RCHCA)	\$6,500,000	\$2,914,748	\$182,761	\$244,385
Lake Skinner (SWMSR)	\$500,000	\$610,685	\$21,394	\$0
Lake Skinner (RCHCA)	\$500,000	\$743,918	\$28,659	\$0
Motte Rimrock	\$601,200	\$763,162	\$29,416	\$179
Sycamore Canyon	\$1,000,000	\$1,112,228	\$42,848	\$0
Steele Peak	\$1,000,000	\$1,017,182	\$16,072	\$0

EMPOWERING NATURE'S RESILIENCE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

