



2024 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

Steve Manos (Chair)
Councilmember
City of Lake Elsinore

Joseph Morabito
Mayor
City of Wildomar

James Stewart
Mayor Pro-Tem
City of Temecula

Michael Vargas (Vice-Chair)
Mayor
City of Perris

Cheylynda Barnard
Councilmember
City of Moreno Valley

Lisa Deforest
Mayor Pro-Tem
City of Murrieta

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



STEVE MANOS

Dear stakeholders and supporters,

It is with great pride that I present to you the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency's (RCHCA) Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023-2024. This past year has been marked by significant achievements in our ongoing efforts to conserve and protect the region's unique wildlife and habitats. I would like to take a moment to highlight several key accomplishments from this year, which underscore our continued commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability.

One of our most important milestones has been the completion of the first three years of Stephens' kangaroo rat (SKR) population monitoring under the SKR Rangewide Management and Monitoring Plan. I am pleased to report that the species' occupancy has remained stable compared to its baseline. This is a strong indicator that our conservation efforts are having a positive impact. Future monitoring, following our standardized protocols, will allow us to gain further insights into the status and trends of the SKR in response to environmental changes and management strategies.

We are also excited to announce that RCHCA was awarded two substantial grants from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), totaling \$1.2 million. These funds are critical in supporting our conservation goals. One grant will bolster our ongoing SKR Rangewide Monitoring efforts, ensuring the continuation of vital research and data collection. The second grant will support fuel fire reduction on our reserves, a necessary step to protect both wildlife habitats and surrounding communities from the growing threat of wildfires.

Another highlight of the year was our annual "Celebrating Endangered Species Day" event. For over 15 years, this event has been a cornerstone of our educational outreach efforts. This fall's event continued that proud tradition, engaging children and families in the vital work of preserving endangered species and their habitats. The event serves as an opportunity to inspire the next generation to take an active role in the conservation of our natural heritage.

As we reflect on the accomplishments of the past year, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated team of biologists, staff, partners, and community members. Together, we are making a lasting difference for endangered species and the habitats they rely on. We look forward to building on this success in the year ahead and continuing our mission to protect and preserve the natural beauty of our region for generations to come.

Sincerely,

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

Michael Vargas
Vice-Chair, RCHCA Board of Directors
Mayor, City of Perris



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

Collin Stratz, Natural Resource Manager

Riana Fisher, Program Manager

Nathan Herron, Open-space Habitat Technician I

Lizbeth Tonyan, Open-space Habitat Technician I

Bryan Loya, Open-space Habitat Technician I

Matthew Singer, Open-space Habitat Technician I/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.

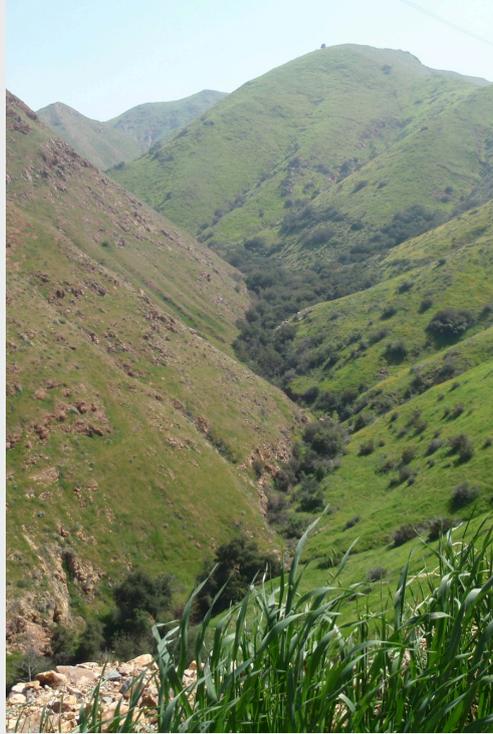
The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is one of the lead agencies tasked with implementing the ESA and is therefore responsible for regulating prohibited and allowable activities concerning endangered or threatened species. To mitigate the "taking," which refers to any attempt or action 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.

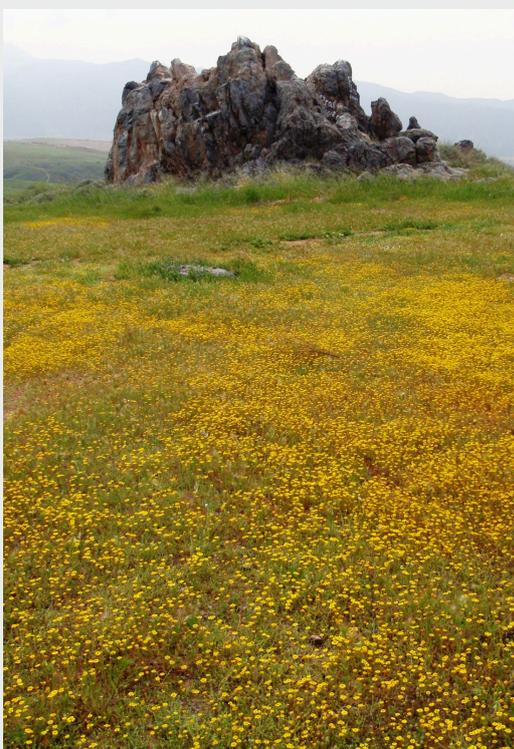
Under the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat Habitat Conservation Plan (SKR HCP), eight permanent SKR core reserves were established that today total 51,280 acres. Within the Core Reserves, there are 15,000 acres of occupied SKR habitat. No suitable or SKR-occupied habitat has been acquired, and no occupied SKR Habitat has been disturbed within the Core Reserves during Fiscal Year 2023-2024.

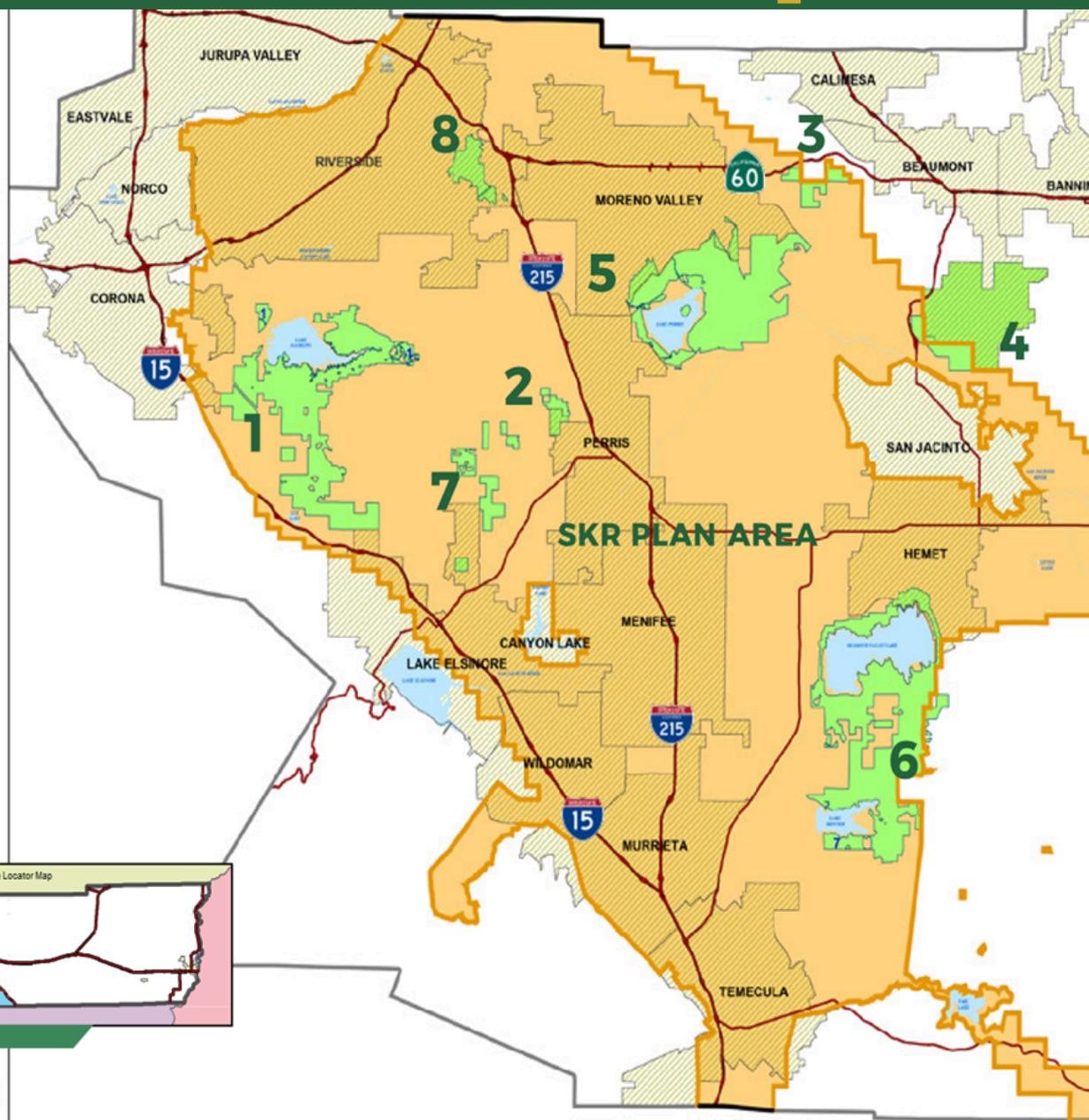




RCHCA

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 2023/2024



RANGEWIDE MONITORING OF SKR



RCHCA biologists have completed the first three years of SKR population monitoring under the SKR Rangewide Management and Monitoring Plan. Surveys covered habitat across the SKR's range with 73 randomly selected sites sampled in 2024. Results suggest that populations are stable, especially where RCHCA performs active habitat management.

BLM GRANT AWARDS



RCHCA was awarded two grants totaling \$1.2 million from the Bureau of Land Management to support the Rangewide Management and Monitoring Plan Implementation and to reduce flashy fuel loads within the reserves. The fuels grant is a five-year grant that will enable staff to purchase land management equipment and cover staff time.

ENDANGERED SPECIES DAY EVENT



In fall of 2024, RCHCA continued 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 range wide monitoring effort.
- Assisting the RCHCA with the 2024 SKR Rangewide monitoring sites.
- Sharing information about invasive species in the area and common invasive species control practices.
- With this year's occurrence of wildfires, discussing habitat management techniques and timing.





RESERVE MANAGER'S TOOLBOX

2071

ACRES
Burned



1955

ACRES
Sheep
Grazed



792

ACRES
Mowed



9

ACRES
Herbicide
Treated



28

ACRES
Weed
Abated



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

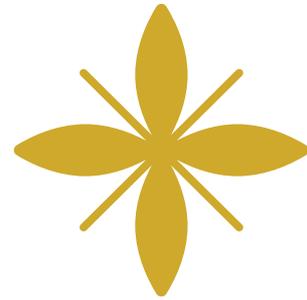
HERBICIDE IS USED TO TREAT INVASIVE WEED POPULATIONS , SUCH AS STINKNET, MUSTARD AND TAMARISK.

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

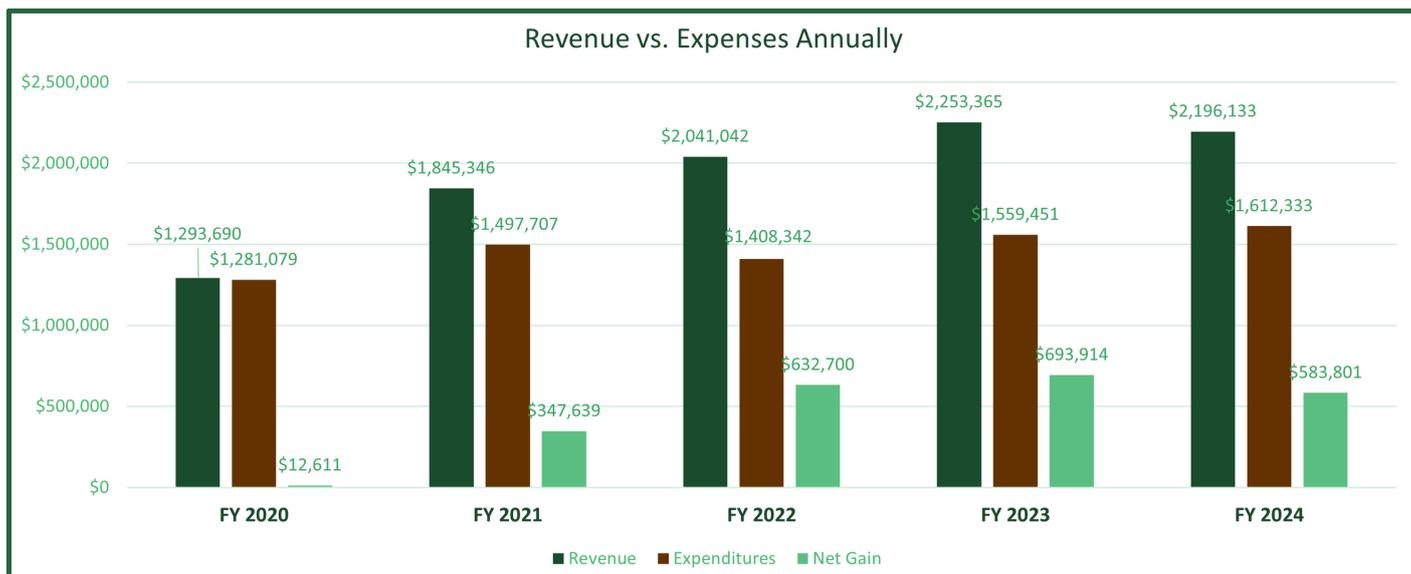


As a JPA, the Joint Powers Agreement requires that full books and accounts be maintained for the RCHCA in accordance with practices consistent with those utilized by the Controller of the State of California.

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

REVENUES	
<i>SKR Mitigation Fee Collections</i>	\$762,602
<i>Interest Earned</i>	\$974,014
<i>Contractual Services Revenue</i>	\$459,518
TOTAL REVENUES	\$2,196,133
EXPENSES	
<i>Operating</i>	\$775,342
<i>Administrative Services</i>	\$836,991
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1,612,333

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 23-24
City of Menifee	\$333,355
City of Perris	\$249,466
City of Wildomar	\$49,010
City of Riverside	\$43,201
City of Moreno Valley	\$36,007
Riverside County	\$30,000
City of Murrieta	\$16,705
City of Lake Elsinore	\$3,359
City of Hemet	\$0
City of Temecula	\$0
City of Corona	\$0
Total Fees Collected	\$762,602

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.

RESERVE	ENDOWMENT PRINCIPAL	FUND BALANCE (AS OF JUNE 30, 2024)	INTEREST EARNINGS	DOLLARS EXPENDED IN FY 2023/2024
Lake Mathews (RCHCA)	\$6,500,000	\$2,718,113	\$178,310	\$374,945
Lake Skinner (SWMSR)	\$500,000	\$586,660	\$31,317	\$0
Lake Skinner (RCHCA)	\$500,000	\$785,870	\$41,952	\$0
Motte Rimrock	\$601,200	\$805,152	\$43,043	\$1,052
Sycamore Canyon	\$1,000,000	\$1,174,950	\$62,722	\$0
Steele Peak	\$1,000,000	\$1,065,807	\$48,625	\$0

CONSERVATION COORDINATION EDUCATION COLLABORATION

