

STEPHENS' KANGAROO RAT
HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

RCHCA

2019 **ANNUAL REPORT**

RIVERSIDE COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION AGENCY

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WELCOME

THE BALANCE

Today, the once endangered gray wolf, an iconic species of the American west, roams free. The wolf population is stable and healthy thanks to conservation efforts and partnerships to recover the species.

In Western Riverside County we are on the brink of experiencing similar species recovery success with the endangered Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR). The Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency (RCHCA) was formed in 1990 with the goal to acquire SKR habitat and manage conserved lands in a manner that would allow for the species to not only make a come-back, but to flourish. Twenty-nine years later and thanks to the successful implementation of numerous land management strategies, we are seeing definitive signs that the species is recovering. Today, we are working with our partner agencies to downlist the SKR from its endangered status, an important recognition of this Agency's effort.

RCHCA's mission is to "Promote successful land management through responsible conservation, education, coordination & collaboration." This Annual Report provides an overview of the efforts RCHCA undertakes to accomplish the objectives set forth in that statement. We hope you will take some time to review this Report and learn about the many activities that have been undertaken during the last year by RCHCA.



Michael M. Vargas
*Chair, RCHCA Board of Directors
Mayor, City of Perris*



Christi White
*Vice-Chair, RCHCA Board of Directors
Councilmember, City of Murrieta*

MISSION STATEMENT

The RCHCA was formed in 1990 for the purpose of planning, acquiring and managing habitat for the federally endangered Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) and other endangered, threatened and candidate species. Its mission is to promote successful land management through responsible conservation, education, coordination, and collaboration.



RCHCA BOARD MEMBERS

There are eleven jurisdictions on RCHCA's Board of Directors. Elected officials that comprise the RCHCA board include the following:

MICHAEL M. VARGAS (CHAIR)
Mayor, City of Perris

CHRISTI WHITE (VICE-CHAIR)
Councilmember, City of Murrieta

YOLANDA CARRILLO
Councilmember, City of Corona

KARLEE MEYER
Councilmember, City of Hemet

TIM SHERIDAN
Councilmember, City of Lake Elsinore

LESA SOBEK
Councilmember, City of Menifee

DAVID MARQUEZ
Councilmember, City of Moreno Valley

MIKE GARDNER
Councilmember, City of Riverside

JAMES STEWART
Mayor Pro Tem, City of Temecula

JOSEPH MORABITO
Councilmember, City of Wildomar

JEFF HEWITT
Supervisor, County of Riverside District 5

ABOUT

THE HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

The importance of preserving rare species 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 ecosystems upon which those species depend.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is one of the lead agencies tasked with the implementation of 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 Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is a required part of the ESA for species that have been listed as endangered or threatened, and is a planning document that ensures the anticipated “take” of a listed species will be minimized or

mitigated when development occurs. It conserves the habitat upon which the species depend, thereby contributing to the recovery of the species.

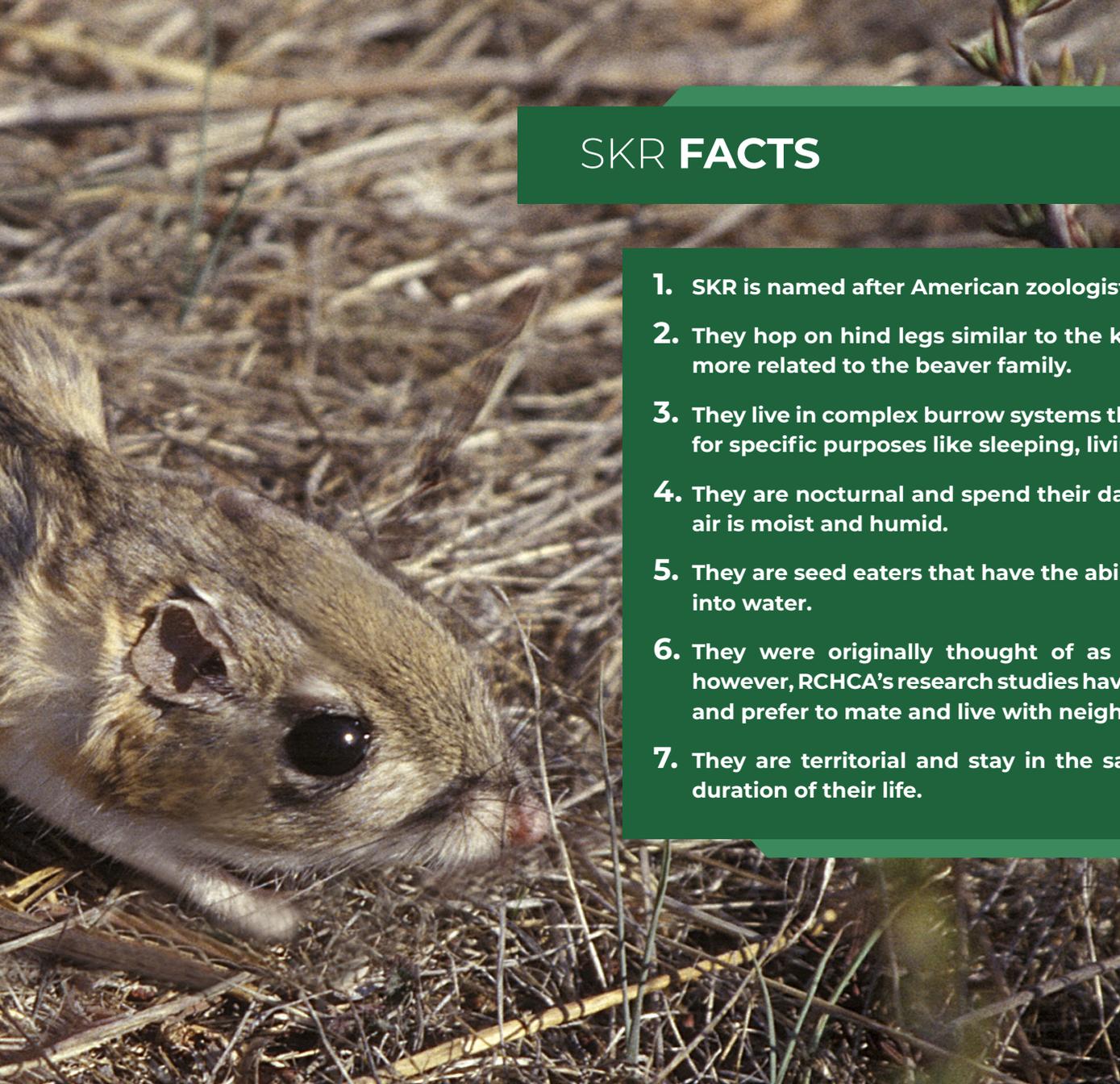
In Western Riverside County, the Stephens’ Kangaroo Rat Habitat Conservation Plan (SKR HCP) established eight permanent conserved areas consisting of over 40,000 acres which make up the SKR Reserves. The majority of these conserved areas are under public ownership. The SKR HCP also creates a reserve system consisting of thousands of acres of land to be counted towards other conservation efforts in Riverside County, such as the Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan.



STEPHENS' KANGAROO RAT

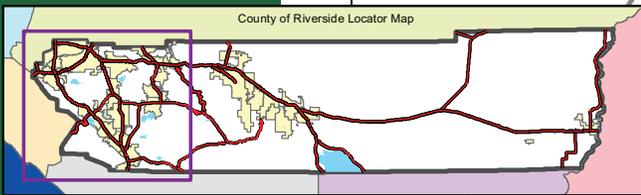
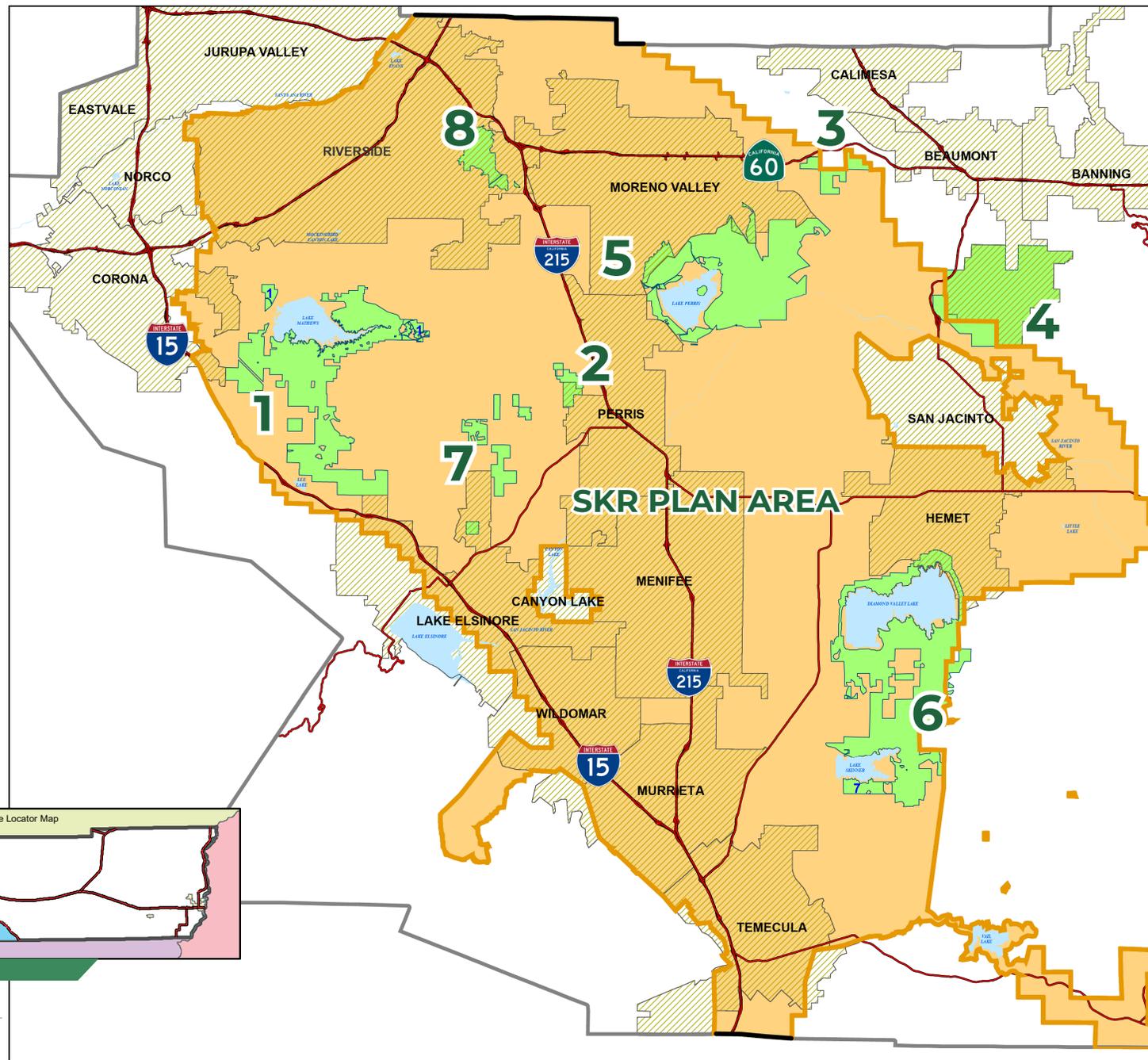
The Stephens Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys stephensi*) is a species of rodent in the Heteromyiade family endemic to the Southern California region of the United States, primarily in Western Riverside and Northern San Diego Counties. Its natural habitat is comprised of sparse grassland and coastal sage scrub, which has been threatened by habitat loss largely as a result of development. SKR was listed as endangered on the ESA in 1988. The species weighs about 2.4 ounces and has the ability to leap a distance of 6 feet at speeds up to almost 10 feet/second and can quickly change direction between jumps.





SKR **FACTS**

- 1. SKR is named after American zoologist Frank Stephens.**
- 2. They hop on hind legs similar to the kangaroo; however, they are more related to the beaver family.**
- 3. They live in complex burrow systems that have separate chambers for specific purposes like sleeping, living and food storage.**
- 4. They are nocturnal and spend their days in the burrow where the air is moist and humid.**
- 5. They are seed eaters that have the ability to convert the dry seeds into water.**
- 6. They were originally thought of as generally solitary animals; however, RCHCA's research studies have shown they are neighborly and prefer to mate and live with neighbors instead of strangers.**
- 7. They are territorial and stay in the same burrow system for the duration of their life.**



SKR CONSERVED LANDS

The SKR Plan Area consists of all or part of the RCHCA's member jurisdiction's boundaries. In total, there are eight areas of conserved lands for SKR in which some are outside of the SKR Plan Area. The conserved and jointly-owned lands form the nucleus of SKR and other species conservation efforts in Western Riverside County.

- 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



LAND MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

To coordinate SKR habitat management activity and biological monitoring among the individual Reserves, RCHCA established the Reserve Managers Coordinating Committee (RMCC). The primary mission of the RMCC is to promote coordination of SKR management throughout the Reserve system and address regional management issues of importance to species conservation.

The RMCC meets quarterly and membership consists of one representative from each entity having responsibility for management of SKR conserved lands. Existing land managers currently include:

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

CITY OF RIVERSIDE, PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE

METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT

RCHCA

RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL PARKS AND OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

STATE OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION (LAKE PERRIS STATE RECREATION AREA)

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE



- This year, the RMCC focused on:
- Ongoing cooperative management efforts
 - Weed abatement
 - Invasive vegetation control
 - Finalization of Management and Monitoring Plans
 - Research Data Collection

Reserve management activities are dependent on environmental factors such as precipitation and the conserved area's habitat and land management plans that specify the management activities allowed.

623 ACRES BURNED to control grass and to maintain the ratio of at least 50% grassland to bare dirt

1,200 ACRES GRAZED using sheep

57 ACRES MOWED

HERBICIDE TREATMENT for invasive weed populations

Once land management techniques are implemented, treated areas are restored by typically broadcast seeding with native SKR preferred seeds.

Reserve managers also provide information to other agencies responsible for land management on land management techniques and any beneficial or destructive impacts that have occurred on the reserves during the reporting period.

For more information on RMCC activities including meeting minutes and maps of areas managed please visit www.wrcog.us

Grazing on RCHCA lands helps control non-native grasses.



2017/2018 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

ADVOCACY

In recognition of the SKR recovery efforts that have occurred in Western Riverside County, RCHCA has initiated advocacy efforts in pursuit of changing the SKR species status listing. Meetings have occurred with officials representing affected wildlife agencies, and RCHCA staff and Board members have met with congressional members to provide updates on these efforts. 2019 will see a continuation of these activities with additional visits with state and federal elected officials, and touchstone meetings with local partners at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for guidance. Discussions are focused on demonstrating species recovery in Western Riverside County and the inclusion of existing conserved areas in northern San Diego County.



EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH PROGRAM

RCHCA's commitment to environmental education includes hosting events such as the "Celebrating Endangered Species" Event. In 2018, over 800 students from local school districts visited SKR-conserved lands at Lake Skinner and Sycamore Canyon, where they learned about endangered species and the importance of conserving natural resources. In addition, in 2018 RCHCA hosted high school seniors from the Nature Conservancy's LEAF Program. These students participated in research activities and experienced a typical day in the life of field biology.



INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL

Conserving RCHCA lands isn't as easy as just "leaving them alone." Many lands that have been acquired are in an altered state and must be restored to native, or near native conditions in order for these lands to support species recovery. The intrusion of non-native invasive vegetation can affect reserve areas by compromising or even destroying habitat for the SKR.

A working group comprised of land management agencies research and identify treatment options, dispersal characteristics and develop regional mapping in order to assist in the control of invasive species.



AERIAL VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

RCHCA actively explores new technologies to assist in land management operations. Staff is using drone technology to assist with weed mapping to eradicate and control invasive plants. In addition, public outreach works to inform the community about the impacts of invasive species and how to curtail further spreading.



FISCAL

RCHCA AGENCY BUDGET IS BALANCED AND TRANSPARENT.

In 2018, after two successful years of administered oversight provided by the Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG), the RCHCA Board of Directors approved a full consolidation of RCHCA staff and agency activities into WRCOG. This merger successfully streamlines governmental activity while reducing duplicative efforts.

In Fiscal Year 2017/2018, RCHCA presented a fiscally sound budget. The Agency's financial audit also yielded positive results, garnering an unmodified opinion from the Agency's auditors, the highest form of assurance an auditing firm can provide to its client. The finding means that the audit and associated Agency financials are both in good form and the accounting practices are solid.

OPERATING REVENUES

<i>SKR Mitigation Fee Collections</i>	\$1,018,423
<i>Interest Earned on Endowments</i>	\$156,588
<i>Reimbursement for Contractual Service Agreements</i>	\$75,076

TOTAL Revenues **\$1,250,087**

OPERATING EXPENSES

<i>General Operations</i>	\$585,753
<i>Lake Mathews Reserve Endowment</i>	\$269,884

TOTAL Expenditures **\$855,638**



WRCOG and RCHCA staff at Lake Mathews reserve surrounded by California Poppies during this year's wildflower super bloom.

SKR MITIGATION FEE COLLECTIONS

RCHCA is financially supported by an SKR Mitigation Fee imposed on new development projects occurring in the member jurisdiction boundaries of the SKR Plan Area. The fee is beneficial because RCHCA's permit with USFWS allows for a streamlined permitting process for developers while supporting land management activities in the conservation areas. In some instances, only a portion of the member jurisdiction boundary is included in the SKR Plan Area.

SKR MITIGATION FEES COLLECTED DURING 2017/2018

<i>City of Corona</i>	\$0
<i>City of Hemet</i>	\$495
<i>City of Lake Elsinore</i>	\$28,968
<i>City of Menifee</i>	\$64,558
<i>City of Moreno Valley</i>	\$104,843
<i>City of Murrieta</i>	\$44,325
<i>City of Perris</i>	\$109,890
<i>City of Riverside</i>	\$230,176
<i>City of Temecula</i>	\$18,540
<i>City of Wildomar</i>	\$23,745
<i>County of Riverside</i>	\$392,883

STATUS OF RESERVE ENDOWMENTS

Many of the SKR-conserved lands have established endowments for some of the Core Reserves. Principal amount of the endowment remains intact while the interest income is available for use to support land management activities. The conservation areas listed below are able to request funding for SKR-related projects.

CORE RESERVE	ENDOWMENT PRINCIPAL	FUND BALANCE (as of June 30, 2018)	INTEREST EARNINGS (as of June 30, 2018)	DOLLARS EXPENDED (as of June 30, 2018)
<i>Lake Mathews (RCHCA)</i>	<i>\$6,500,000</i>	<i>\$4,938,310</i>	<i>\$17,392</i>	<i>\$269,884</i>
<i>Lake Skinner (SWMSR)</i>	<i>\$500,000</i>	<i>\$693,746</i>	<i>\$2,420</i>	<i>\$3,696</i>
<i>Lake Skinner (RCHCA)</i>	<i>\$500,000</i>	<i>\$517,889</i>	<i>\$1,807</i>	<i>\$ 0</i>
<i>Motte Rimrock</i>	<i>\$601,200</i>	<i>\$712,083</i>	<i>\$2,484</i>	<i>\$836</i>
<i>Sycamore Canyon</i>	<i>\$1,000,000</i>	<i>\$1,037,217</i>	<i>\$3,618</i>	<i>\$ 0</i>



3390 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, SUITE 450
RIVERSIDE, CA 92501
(951) 405-6700
rchca.us
@rchcainfo

