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## SITKA CASE STUDY: CALIFORNIA RCD PROJECT TRACKER

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# California RCD Project Tracker Communicates Conservation Benefits and Improves Program Transparency for Millions of Acres of Natural and Working Lands

*The RCD Project Tracker is the second instance of the open-source ProjectFirma™ Platform*

Founded in the 1940s, Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) are one of California's earliest grassroots conservation organizations. Each California county includes an RCD that is responsible for identifying conservation needs and supporting local land managers in implementing solutions on a voluntary basis. To be successful, the RCDs must establish and maintain strong working partnerships with community members, private and public landowners and managers, non-profit organizations, research institutions, and the government.



The California Resource Conservation Districts work with private citizens, businesses, and local/state/federal partners to protect and enhance millions of acres of natural and working lands. Of the 97 districts in the state of California, 18 elected to work together to make the RCD Project Tracker pilot program a reality in 2017.

In 2017, 18 California RCDs hired Sitka to build the RCD Project Tracker to help them increase the relevance, excellence, and visibility of all the conservation work being accomplished across the state. It only took a few months of development work by the Sitka team before the Project Tracker opened for business on July 1st. The short development period can be credited to the dedicated and forward-thinking RCD staff and the open-source license for the award-winning Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) Project Tracker provided by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and Sitka Technology Group.

The Project Tracker showcases the work conservation districts do to assist landowners and land managers protect and enhance millions of acres of natural and working lands across the state. RCDs administer millions of dollars of private, local, state, and federal conservation program funds in support of these efforts. This online tool, funded by individual RCDs' and the Department of Conservation's Capacity Building Opportunity, allows pilot members to cooperatively communicate the conservation benefits of their work to partners, funders, and the communities they serve.

## THE CHALLENGE

Prior to the rollout of the Project Tracker, the RCDs relied on spreadsheets since they lacked an online database for centralized project tracking and reporting. The inability to demonstrate collective and individual achievements was a critical organizational weakness, and it was one the group wanted to fix with the ProjectFirma pilot.

Additionally, the state conservation districts had been tasked with facilitating projects to address greenhouse gas reduction and carbon sequestration in both natural and agricultural landscapes. To do this properly, they needed an efficient way to calculate the resulting benefits. This need was another primary impetus for the pilot program since the Project Tracker would be able to track similar projects of varying scales across the state.

## THE SOLUTION

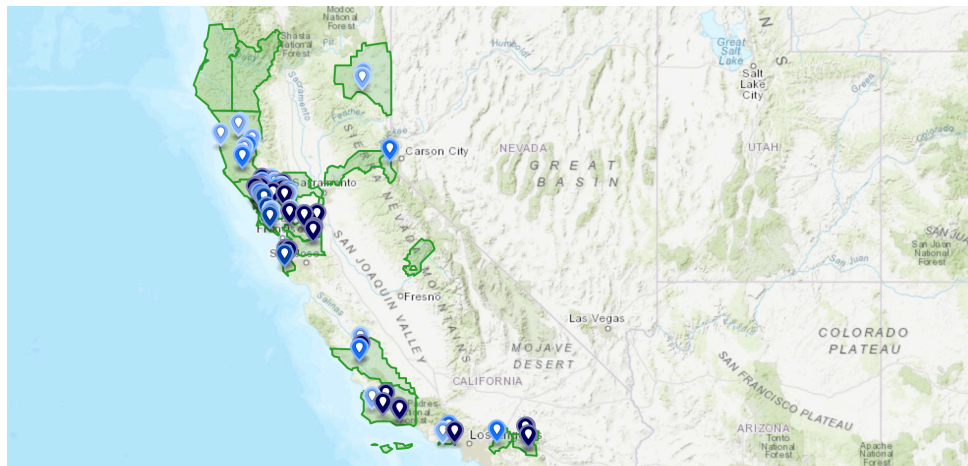
### A Representative Sample

The pilot program's primary focus was to select a small group of conservation districts that were representative of both the diverse geography and diverse size of the 97 statewide conservation districts. For instance, participants include the Tahoe RCD that has 200 employees responsible for roughly 250,000 acres as well as the Gold Ridge RCD that consists of 11 employees and spans over 134,000 acres.



“The existence of a shared online data management system significantly enhances our ability to showcase our relevance as ‘go-to’ hubs for natural resource conservation.”

*Brittany Jensen, Executive  
Director, Gold Ridge Resource  
Conservation District*



*Participating RCDs include Alameda, Cachuma, Coarse Gold, Contra Costa, Gold Ridge, Honey Lake, Humboldt, Inland Empire, Marin, Mendocino, Napa, Placer, San Mateo, Santa Monica Mountains, Sonoma, Tahoe, Trinity, Upper Salinas-Las Tablas, and Yolo.*

Worth noting, the Project Tracker is able to share and report on project information by both RCD and legislative boundaries. By adding in state representative districts, program information can be collected and reported by political boundaries, too. This aids funding requests by showing progress being made towards statewide and regional resource conservation efforts. It also enables data to be collected and reported out in more meaningful ways to the general public.

### Performance Measures

Being the second ProjectFirma customer, the RCDs were able to see how Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) and the Clackamas Partnership had set up their individual Project Trackers. “When we started building out our ProjectFirma instance, we were able to look and adapt how other organizations use the system for our own needs,” shared Brittany Jensen, Executive Director for Gold Ridge RCD. “For instance, we adopted some of the terminology and performance measures that TRPA uses.”

### Staying Relevant

With the general public being more and more interested in how public funds are being spent to protect the state’s natural resources, RCDs realized they must increase the transparency of their collective work to remain relevant. By building a publicly-accessible Project Tracker, the RCDs would be able to easily communicate with the public and partners about the work being done.

Every component of the online platform was carefully thought out by the RCDs and Sitka to ensure it provided useful information that was easily accessible and easily understood. Avoiding overly technical jargon, the Project Tracker successfully captures the breadth of the work being done and shares it in meaningful ways.



All pilot program participants helped develop the initial set of 33 performance measures, including Fish Passage Barrier Treatment, GHG Reduction, and Stream Corridor Restored.



“We were able to get the Project Tracker up and running in just a couple of months. Sitka understood exactly what we needed and were always available to provide guidance to help our decision making.”

*Patricia Hickey | Former  
Executive Director, Mendocino  
County RCD*

## THE RESULTS

Since launching the Project Tracker, members have been pleased that they can:

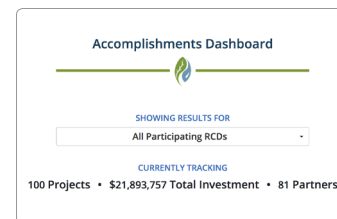
- Track expenditures and accomplishments by individual project and funding source.
- Report on project tracking and performance analysis with limited effort.
- Improve storytelling and connection with communities and partners.
- Streamline funding requests across the state.
- Easily onboard new RCDs.

Since all of the California RCDs are primarily grant funded, all tracked projects in the design phase represent all of the projects that need funding state-wide. With the Project Tracker, it is easy to see how much funding has been received to date and how much is still needed.

In June of 2018 – a little less than a year post launch – the Project Tracker achieved a significant milestone: 100 projects and over \$21.8 million in investment being tracked.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Avoid overly technical jargon** when pitching the Project Tracker to initial participants and partners.
- **Consistently engage with internal and external stakeholders** to make sure the Project Tracker meets everyone's needs.
- **Start small** but be mindful of long-term vision.
- **Enlist teammates with complementary skills** to ensure a robust and meaningful tool.



The Accomplishment Dashboard provides a dynamic, high-level view of RCD accomplishment being tracked in the system.

## GET STARTED

For organizations interested in getting a detailed assessment of their current data management practices and systems, please contact us at **1.800.805.6740** or **sales@sitkatech.com**. For more information, please visit: **[www.sitkatech.com/ProjectFirma](http://www.sitkatech.com/ProjectFirma)**

