

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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The Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District has been recognized as the 2024 Organization of the Year by the Association for Environmental & Outdoor Education (AEOE), Ten Strands, and the California Environmental Literacy Initiative (CAELI): <https://aeoe.org/news/13358474> .

One-hundred guests celebrated the award, along with the career of retiring Public Affairs Manager Diana Ruiz on Sunday, May 19. Ruiz started her career nearly 50 years ago as one of the first female conservationists with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The statewide award celebrates the innovative educational projects and programs that Ruiz planned and coordinated over several decades at the District, including the LandUse Learning Center demonstration garden of sustainable practices; the award-winning *Fresh and Local* food and farm guide and the *Environmental Learning Resources* guide; the 2016 Riverside Green Festival; and the 2019 Mayor's Monarch Challenge and Pollinator Festival.

"Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District does incredible work in their community and the surrounding region," said Estrella Risinger, Executive Director AEOE. "I've had the great pleasure of getting to know several members of their team through involvement with the Environmental Education Collaborative and their participation in AEOE's Environmental Educator Certification Program. Their dedication and commitment to providing engaging, relevant, and high-quality programming is evident."

RCRCD is a local government agency that helps conserve the natural resources (soil, water, native plants, and wildlife) of areas within western Riverside and San Bernardino counties in inland Southern California. The District provides technical advice to land users, coordinates habitat conservation projects, and conducts conservation educational programs for all. RCRCD empowers our community to be stewards (caretakers) of natural resources and fosters stewardship by providing a variety of free environmental education programs, volunteer opportunities, participatory science projects, tours/field trips, and community engagement for all ages.

RCRCD manages a native plant nursery for habitat restoration projects and numerous educational programs, including three sites, plus localized publications in English and Spanish. The District developed a one-of-a-kind demonstration garden of sustainable practices for the three main land uses of Southern California. The LandUse Learning Center near downtown Riverside is an educational tool that includes handicap accessible trails, interpretive signs, fun plant and animal treasure hunts, community science backpacks, plant IDs with plant lists, and more: <https://www.rcrcd.org/files/80c9e10c5/llcflyer2023.pdf>.

The District has developed many localized conservation publications including two books: *Wildflowers and Important Native Plants of the Inland Empire* and *Backyard Birds of the Inland Empire* (recognized with a

national award in 2002). For more information about RCRCD's extensive environmental education programs, please see the Education Programs Summary at

<https://www.rcrcd.org/files/846e03041/2023+education+program+summary+web.pdf>.

Another innovative project is RCRCD's Monarch Recovery Program that includes the creation of a 2-acre Monarch habitat at its Agricultural Greenbelt Facility in Riverside. For a summary of Monarch programs and related awards from 2019 – 2022, please see

<https://www.rcrcd.org/files/cc88913ce/City+Council+Mayor%27s+Monarch+Challenge+Implementation+Report.pdf> .

This statewide award follows a national honor in February for District Manager Shelli Lamb, who received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of Conservation Districts:

<https://www.nacdnet.org/newsroom/nacd-honors-national-award-winners-at-78th-annual-meeting/>

The **Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (AEOE)** is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to *strengthen environmental education in California by connecting providers, building professional expertise, and championing environmental literacy and outdoor learning*. As the professional association for environmental and outdoor education in California, AEOE serves as a force multiplier, convening programs and practitioners across the state to share best practices, learn from one another, and advance the field of environmental and outdoor education. Information: <http://aeoe.org> .

Ten Strands is a California-based nonprofit established in 2012. Their mission is to strengthen the partnerships and strategies that will bring climate and environmental literacy to all of California's TK–12 students. They operate with a small, diverse, and nimble staff and strategic partners throughout the state. Ten Strands utilizes the largest and most diverse institution in California—the public school system—to impact 58 county offices of education, more than 1,000 school districts, approximately 10,000 individual schools, over 300,000 teachers, and 5.8 million children. For more information, visit <http://tenstrands.org> .

The **California Environmental Literacy Initiative (CAELI)**, led by Ten Strands, works statewide with guidance from a leadership council to create systems change in support of environmental literacy with a focus on access, equity, and cultural relevance for all students. For more information, visit <http://ca-eli.org> .

The **Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District (RCRCD)** is a local government agency that works to conserve the natural resources of areas within western Riverside and San Bernardino counties in Southern California. The District provides resource management assistance to private and public land users, coordinates habitat conservation projects, and conducts free education programs about the stewardship of natural resources at its three educational sites: the LandUse Learning Center (LLC) in Riverside, the Sycamore Creek Interpretive Center (SCIC) in the Temescal Valley, and the Greenbelt Monarch Habitat in Riverside. Information: [RCRCD.org](http://rcrcd.org).

CAPTIONS:

Photo 1: The Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District was awarded the 2024 Organization of the Year by the Association for Environmental & Outdoor Education. The environmental education staff pictured in RCRCD's new "Habitat Space" includes Diana Ruiz, Erin Snyder, Jennifer Iyer, Michele Felix-Derbarmdiker (left to right).

Photo 2: From left: Ryan Mayeda (AEOE Board President), Jennifer Iyer (RCRCD Resource Educator), Diana Ruiz, and Estrella Risinger (AEOE Executive Director) at the Statewide Conference for Environmental and Outdoor Education May 4, 2024 in Orange, CA.