

# The Escondido Creek Conservancy Blueprint for Environmental Education 2025-2029

## Purpose of the Blueprint

The 2025-2029 blueprint for the Escondido Creek Conservancy builds on its predecessor, [Education Strategic Plan 2016-2020](#), refining and expanding its educational mission. It directly aligns with the four main impact goals of [The Escondido Creek Conservancy Strategic Plan Framework 2022-2026](#).

Developed through a 3-tiered planning process with input from stakeholders, advisors, and internal committees, the plan reaffirms a commitment to environmental stewardship and community engagement. It provides a clear framework to enhance partnerships, enrich programs, streamline operations, and strengthen financial sustainability while prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The plan envisions a future where every watershed resident values and supports the natural world. Through strategic collaboration, innovative programs, and financial resilience, the Conservancy aims to inspire generations of stewards to protect the Escondido Creek watershed and beyond.



Students engage in place-based lessons using the Conservancy's 3D watershed model to explore their local environment and understand how their actions affect the natural world.

## The Escondido Creek Conservancy's Mission & Vision Statements

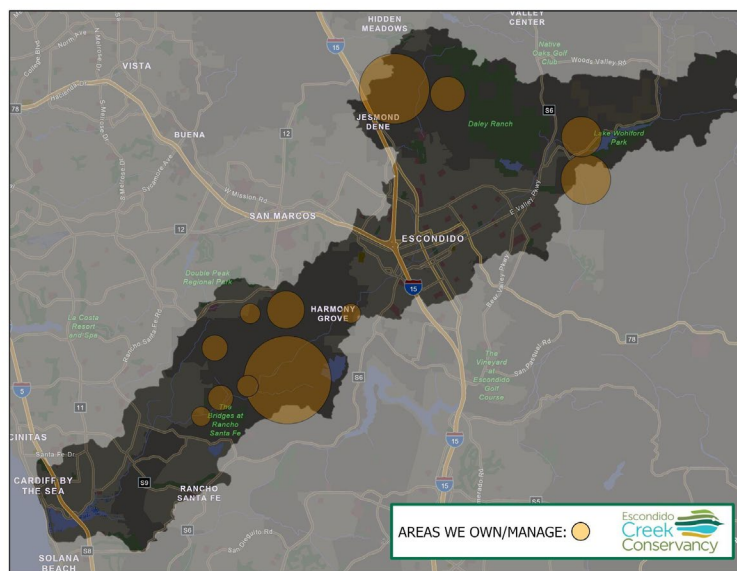
Mission: To preserve and restore the Escondido Creek watershed.

Vision: Through the Conservancy's leadership, the Escondido Creek watershed will become a model of vibrant urban communities and viable natural ecosystems thriving together.

### **Education Department Mission & Vision Statements**

Mission: To provide access to environmental education and experiences that foster stewardship of the Escondido Creek watershed and beyond.

Vision: Through educational opportunities, we will cultivate an appreciation for nature locally that inspires and activates generations of stewards to preserve and restore the Escondido Creek watershed in perpetuity.



### **What is a Watershed?**

A watershed is an area of land where all water—such as rain or snow—flows into a common body of water like a river, lake, or ocean. It includes not only the water sources, streams, and groundwater, but also the plants, animals, and even man-made structures within its ecosystem. This interconnected system plays a vital role in maintaining environmental health by managing water flow, supporting biodiversity, and filtering pollutants. Understanding watersheds highlights the complex relationships between natural and human-made elements in sustaining the health of our ecosystems.

The Escondido Creek watershed in northern San Diego County spans 26 miles, from Bear Valley to the San Elijo Lagoon, blending natural beauty with urbanized stretches. The Conservancy's programs strive to reveal the watershed's ecological importance and inspire community appreciation for its vital role.

### **Why Environmental Education?**

Environmental education in San Diego County is crucial due to the region's unique ecological diversity and the growing challenges posed by urbanization and climate change. With its rich natural landscapes, from coastal ecosystems to inland watersheds, the area faces increasing pressure from development, pollution, and resource depletion. Educating the community about the importance of environmental stewardship fosters a sense of responsibility and connection to the land, which is crucial for the preservation of these ecosystems. By providing equitable, accessible, and relevant educational opportunities, we empower individuals to take action to safeguard the region's natural resources for future generations.

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## Who We Serve

**"When we talk about the word 'equity,' it's about recognizing the playing field is not level and correcting it."**

Kamala Harris

- **Local Community:** Primarily serving residents within the Escondido Creek watershed, including students, families, and other community members, with a focus on making educational programs accessible to a wide range of demographics.
- **Underrepresented Groups:** The Conservancy places a particular emphasis on reaching underserved populations, ensuring programs are inclusive and accessible, especially to bilingual and ESL students.
- **Partnerships with Schools:** Through collaboration with the Escondido Union School District and other educational institutions, the Conservancy engages local students, teachers, and administrators in its programs.
- **Broader Audiences:** The Conservancy has opportunities to expand its reach to diverse audiences, including seniors, high school and college students, and residents from surrounding areas, as it grows its programs.
- **Indigenous Communities:** Collaborating annually with multiple local Indigenous tribes, the Conservancy helps to foster connections between their youth, cultural heritage, and natural resources in need of protection.



A student explores the 'Wingspan' exhibit along the trails of the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve, learning about the unique adaptations of native birds to thrive in their natural habitats

## How We Teach



**"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."**

Benjamin Franklin

- **Project-Based Learning:** Empowering students to engage in long-term projects that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and hands-on learning, while addressing real-world environmental issues.



Trout in the Classroom focuses on raising trout in the classroom from eggs to fry, giving students the opportunity to learn about water quality, conservation, and environmental stewardship. It aims to foster an appreciation for wildlife and habitat conservation while promoting scientific inquiry and environmental awareness.

- **Collaborative Approach:** The Conservancy emphasizes a bottom-up engagement method, working closely with community stakeholders, including school districts and non-profit organizations, to create effective educational partnerships.



Collaborative training of outdoor educators from Escondido Creek Conservancy, Nature Collective, and Coastal Roots Farm workshopping inquiry-based teaching techniques during their annual partnered professional development training before facilitating programs for the Escondido Union School District's 3rd - 5th grade students.

- **Inquiry-Based Learning:** Programs are designed to be hands-on and inquiry-based, encouraging critical thinking and exploration. This approach helps students engage deeply with environmental topics and challenges them to find their own solutions.



Students learn about the water quality of Escondido Creek while figuring out if conditions are suitable for the Southern Steelhead trout by making observations and claims, conducting water quality testing, and coming to conclusions as a team

- **Adaptable and Flexible:** The educational offerings are adaptable to meet the diverse needs of various age groups and audiences, ensuring that programs are responsive to community interests and evolving needs.



Adena Boxer-Capitano speaking on Co-Existing with Coyotes at the Conservancy's Conservation Conversation lecture series, a free quarterly event for community members of all ages.

- **Experiential Learning:** The Conservancy makes use of its conserved lands and outdoor classrooms, providing real-world lessons and opportunities for students to connect directly with nature through field experiences on lands being actively restored.



Students head out on a hike to explore local habitats and the plants and animals adapted to live in each one in the Conservancy's 3rd grade Habitats program.

## What We Teach



**"The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it."**

Robert Swan

- **Environmental Stewardship:** Central to the Conservancy's mission is teaching students and community members about the importance of caring for the environment. The aim is to inspire stewardship of the Escondido Creek watershed and surrounding natural areas.
- **Ecological Literacy:** Curriculum covering fundamental concepts of ecology, watershed health, biodiversity, and the impact of human activity on natural resources, helping learners understand their role in preserving the environment.
- **Local Natural History:** Programs incorporate the local flora, fauna, and geography of the Escondido Creek watershed, fostering a deeper connection to the region's unique ecosystems.
- **Cultural Connections:** Providing meaningful opportunities for local Indigenous youth to engage with their reservation lands through interactive, hands-on activities that explore local habitats, native plants, and endangered species. These experiences aim to inspire environmental stewardship, celebrate cultural heritage, and deepen connections to the natural world.
- **Sustainability Practices:** Focusing on practical, actionable environmental practices, such as conservation, sustainable land use, and climate change awareness, encouraging individuals to apply what they learn to their everyday lives.



Students participate in outdoor lessons, engaging with nature to explore local ecosystems and enhance their environmental understanding.

## **Impact Goals**

### **Goal 1: Enhance Partnerships and Community Engagement**

This goal emphasizes cultivating strong relationships with current partners and actively seeking new collaborations. It directly supports the Conservancy's second impact goal, which states that **all residents of our watershed have opportunities to experience and benefit from nature**. By broadening our outreach and fostering deeper connections with community members, we aim to elevate awareness of our educational offerings and promote greater involvement in environmental stewardship. We are particularly committed to engaging underrepresented communities, ensuring that our programs are inclusive and accessible to all.

### **Goal 2: Streamline Internal Operations and Build Capacity**

This goal targets streamlining internal processes to improve team effectiveness and responsiveness. It aligns with the Conservancy's support and operations goal that states **the Conservancy has the team, financial resources, and systems needed for mission success**. By formalizing volunteer and internship programs and improving operational efficiencies, we will ensure that our department is well-equipped to meet the growing needs of our community while supporting our mission. While focusing on the fact that a diverse workforce strengthens our ability to serve the entire community.

### **Goal 3: Expand and Enrich Educational Programs**

Designed to broaden our educational offerings, this goal ensures that our programs are accessible and relevant to diverse audiences. It directly contributes to the overarching aim that **people in our region value nature and provide lifelong stewardship and advocacy for it**. By enhancing educational experiences and promoting inclusivity, we will inspire a greater appreciation for nature and empower individuals to become advocates for environmental protection. We will work to incorporate diverse perspectives and culturally relevant content into our programs to reflect our community as a whole. Additionally, we are committed to implementing long-term evaluation of program participants to assess the lasting impact of outdoor and environmental education, from youth through adulthood.

### **Goal 4: Strengthen and Diversify Funding Sources**

Acknowledging the critical role of financial sustainability, this goal aligns with the overarching support and operations commitment to ensuring that **the Conservancy has the necessary resources for mission success**. By strengthening our grant writing and fundraising strategies, we will build a solid financial foundation to support our strategic plan and community outreach. This includes a balanced approach to funding that expands outreach to historically marginalized populations while diversifying income through contributions from watershed residents who can help fund programs.

## **Conclusion**



Together, these four goals provide a roadmap for our education department's efforts over the next five years. By fostering strategic partnerships, enhancing program excellence, and securing diversified funding, we aim to create a sustainable future where the health of the Escondido Creek watershed is prioritized, and all residents can engage with and appreciate the natural world. This blueprint reaffirms our commitment to fostering deeper community connections and empowering individuals to care for and advocate for the environment, inspiring future generations to continue our mission to preserve and restore the Escondido Creek watershed.

