



Meet Julia Richards Executive Officer for the San Diego River Conservancy

Julia's role is to lead the strategic vision of the San Diego River Conservancy whose mission is to conserve land, protect and provide for recreational opportunities, open space, wildlife species and habitat, wetlands, water quality, natural flood conveyance, educational opportunities, and help preserve historical, tribal and cultural resources. The Executive Officer, in collaboration and cooperation with the Conservancy's Governing Board is responsible for planning, organizing, directing, and administering the functions of the Conservancy.

What fire related projects is your organization currently working on and/or partnering in?

The Conservancy is working with its partners, Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County, San Diego Canyonlands, City of Santee, Barona Band of Mission Indians, Lakeside's River Park Conservancy, Cleveland National Forest, Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy, City of El Cajon, County of San Diego, Department of Parks and Recreation, and San Diego State University Research Foundation/Soil Ecology Restoration Group to help reduce the risk and intensity of fires in San Diego County, focusing on the San Diego River area and watersheds in south county. Through Senate Bill 85, Budget Act of 2020, the Conservancy was awarded \$12M for projects that support California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan. (<https://www.fire.ca.gov/media/ps4p2vck/californiawildfireandforestresilienceactionplan.pdf>). Senate Bill 85 provides short- and long-term funding for wildfire, climate, watershed, and forest health, as well as to implement modern-day vegetation, forest management, equipment to mitigate or suppress fires, to strengthen protection of communities and a build a fire resiliency workforce.

What do you believe the future of wildfire in San Diego County looks like?

Wildfire seasons may be longer and more extreme, with warming temperatures, drier soils and vegetation and less frequent rains.

San Diego area needs collaboration and efficiency working across local, state, tribal nations and federal agencies. The fire departments play an important role being first responders. After the catastrophic 2003 Cedar Fire that destroyed over 75% of the San Diego River

watershed, many changes were made in San Diego to enhance wildfire suppression efforts.



How do you believe our community can be a part of wildfire prevention?

Communities can promote hazardous fuels treatment inside and around the community on public and private lands. This means the landscape can experience wildfire (small and manageable wildfires or prescribed burns) and its benefits without the threat of catastrophic wildfire.

Community members can make sure to provide for defensible space around structures by removing flammable fuels like leaf piles, unmown dry grass, and wood piles, and dead or dying trees near the home. This defensible space provides a fuel buffer for the structure and a place for firefighters to defend residential areas.

I believe the U.S. Forest Service states it best, *"Fire mitigation activities can help communities adapt to wildfire, before fires start. Fire adaptation means communities take mitigation actions so they can live with wildfire without harm and without extensive wildfire suppression efforts. A key component of community fire adaptation is that there isn't one silver bullet that reduces risk; there are many tools that, when used together and strategically, reduce risk. And it's not the responsibility of one agency or group to mitigate; it's the responsibility of everyone who lives and works in the community. Fire adaptation happens when local multi-jurisdictional stakeholders work together to identify risk, mitigate it, and maintain the work over time."*