

Napa County Wildlife Conservation Commission

Grant Request – Watershed Trainees & Watershed Protectors Programs - 2026–2027

I. DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION / ELIGIBILITY

1. Type of Organization or Business

American Canyon Community & Parks Foundation (Parks Foundation), a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. ¹

2. Purpose for Which the Organization Was Formed

To connect nature and community, protect the environment, support park and trail improvements, and provide environmental education opportunities for youth and families throughout Napa County.

3. Tax Exempt Status

501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Tax ID #47-3226686.

4. Date Formed as a Nonprofit

March 2015.

5. Membership

Voluntary membership program supporting environmental education and conservation initiatives. Current membership includes approximately 48+ individuals and families. No restrictions on membership participation.

6. Names of Board of Directors and Contact Person

See attached Board of Directors list.

Contact Person:

Joy Hilton, Education Director
American Canyon Community & Parks Foundation
101 W. American Canyon Road, Suite 508-102
American Canyon, CA 94503
(707)563-3757
Joy@acparks.org

NEEDS ASSESSMENT / PROBLEM STATEMENT

1. Clear Statement of Problem

Local watersheds, wetlands, and wildlife habitats provide exceptional opportunities for environmental education and conservation. The Napa River Watershed supports a diverse array of fish, birds, amphibians, and native plant communities while serving as a critical connection between Napa County and the San

Pablo Bay ecosystem. Despite the ecological importance of these resources, many elementary school students have limited opportunities to experience local habitats firsthand or learn about fish and wildlife conservation through meaningful outdoor education.

Since 2021, the Parks Foundation has successfully developed and expanded watershed education programming to address this gap.

- 2021–2022: Served 100 students at two American Canyon elementary schools.
- 2022–2023: Expanded to serve 305 students.
- 2023–2024: Served 335 students, twelve teachers, and 40 chaperones through the full Watershed Explorers program.
- 2024–2025: Watershed programs expanded to serve 676 students, 23 teachers, and more than 50 parents and guardians.
- 2025–2026: Wildlife Conservation Commission funding supported 618 students, 19 teachers, and more than 45 parents and guardians through Watershed Explorers, Watershed Trainees, and the new Watershed Protectors pilot program. The program delivered over 2,388 hours of environmental education and resulted in the removal of more than 2,500 square feet of invasive ice plant from local wetland habitat.

The success of the Watershed Protectors pilot program demonstrated both the need and enthusiasm for continued stewardship opportunities among Napa County students. Teachers have requested expansion of programs, allowing younger students to build confidence in outdoor settings through Watershed Trainees and older students to actively improve wildlife habitat through Watershed Protectors.

Additionally, growing development pressures, invasive plant species, habitat fragmentation, and increasing human use of wetland areas continue to affect local ecosystems. Students and families must understand their role in protecting fish and wildlife habitat and be provided opportunities to participate directly in restoration and conservation efforts.

2. Specific Objectives and Specific Dollar Amount Requested

The Parks Foundation respectfully requests \$15,000 from the Napa County Wildlife Conservation Commission to support the Watershed Trainees and Watershed Protectors programs during the 2026–2027 school year.

Watershed Trainees — \$5,000

The Watershed Trainees program is an introductory environmental education experience designed for Kindergarten through 3rd-grade students throughout Napa County.

Funding will support:

- Service to approximately 12–18 K–3rd grade classrooms.
- Direct participation of 350–500 students.
- Guided wetland hikes and outdoor learning experiences.
- Trail safety education.
- Wildlife observation activities.
- Nature journaling and scientific observation.
- Family engagement opportunities encouraging return visits to natural areas.

Students learn to identify birds, insects, native plants, and wildlife while developing confidence in outdoor environments. Through age-appropriate activities and guided exploration, students begin building a lifelong connection to nature and local conservation efforts.

Watershed Protectors — \$10,000

The Watershed Protectors program builds upon foundational watershed education and engages upper elementary students in hands-on stewardship projects benefiting local wildlife habitat.

Funding will support continued development of the successful pilot program. New Students will learn about wetland ecology, invasive species, native habitats, wildlife conservation, and environmental stewardship while participating in, hands-on, habitat improvement projects.

Program Outcomes

Watershed Trainees

- Serve 12–18 classrooms throughout Napa County.
- Reach approximately 350–500 K–3rd grade students.
- Increase student knowledge of local birds, wildlife, and watershed ecosystems by 50%.
- Demonstrates a 60% increase in student comfort and confidence in outdoor environments.
- Students will name at least one positive benefit from spending time outdoors with family.

Watershed Protectors

- Serve approximately 80-100 fifth grade students.
 - Remove a minimum of 2,000 square feet of invasive vegetation and disperse native seeds across restoration areas.
 - Engage students in wildlife and habitat monitoring activities, documenting species observations and restoration progress at stewardship sites.
 - Increase student stewardship behaviors, with at least 90% of participants identifying three or more actions they can take to protect local fish and wildlife habitat.
 - Foster long-term stewardship and environmental leadership among participants.
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3. Anticipated Results with Timeline

Students will increase their understanding of watershed systems, fish and wildlife habitat, biodiversity, environmental stewardship, and the actions individuals can take to improve local ecosystems.

Timeline

Activity	Participant/Activity	Timeline
Program Planning & Partner Coordination	Curriculum updates, school recruitment, partner and NVUSD meetings, supply purchases	August–September 2026
Watershed Trainees	Fall school nature walks and exploration (K–3 classrooms)	September – December 2026
Watershed Protectors	Classroom presentation and activities	October - November 2026
Habitat Restoration Activities	Student invasive removal, seed collection, and dispersal	Nov – Dec 2027
Watershed Trainees Expansion	Additional Napa County schools	January – April 2027

Habitat Restoration Site Monitoring	Student stewardship projects	Feb – Mar 2027
Family Nature Events	Community engagement opportunities	March – May 2027
Program Evaluation & Reporting	Surveys, partner debriefs, final reporting	May – June 2027

4. Detailed Description of Methods Planned to Achieve the Objective

The Parks Foundation will continue working directly with Napa Valley Unified School District teachers, administrators, and environmental education partners to recruit participating classrooms and coordinate programming.

The Watershed Trainees program will provide guided outdoor learning experiences at the American Canyon Wetlands and two additional watershed locations throughout Napa County. Each class will begin with trail safety instruction followed by age-appropriate wildlife observation and exploration activities. Students will learn how to observe wildlife responsibly, identify native plants and animals, understand habitat requirements, and recognize the connection between local wetlands, the Napa River, San Pablo Bay, and the Pacific Ocean.

To reduce transportation barriers, the Foundation will continue partnerships with the Napa Resource Conservation District and other local organizations to identify additional program sites closer to participating schools. This approach has proven successful and allows more equitable access to high-quality environmental education opportunities.

The Watershed Protectors program will build on the highly successful pilot completed during 2025–2026. Students will participate in habitat stewardship activities that improve local wetland conditions while reinforcing fish and wildlife conservation concepts introduced through classroom learning. During the pilot year, students removed more than 2,500 square feet of invasive iceplant and demonstrated increased understanding of conservation and stewardship responsibilities.

Program partners will include Napa Resource Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Point Blue Conservation Science, and local conservation professionals. These partnerships provide students with opportunities to learn directly from experts and gain exposure to careers in conservation and environmental science.

5. Clear Statement of Benefit Related to Goals of the Commission

The goal of the Watershed Trainees and Watershed Protectors programs is to protect local fish and wildlife resources by developing environmental literacy, stewardship ethics, and hands-on conservation skills among Napa County youth.

The proposed project directly benefits the approved expenditure categories identified in California Fish and Game Code §13103:

A. Public Education Relating to the Scientific Principles of Fish and Wildlife Conservation

Both Watershed Trainees and Watershed Protectors provide supervised, curriculum-based environmental education focused on watersheds, wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, biodiversity, ecological relationships, and conservation science. Students participate in structured learning experiences utilizing nature study facilities, educational materials, field investigations, and hands-on scientific observation.

E. Improvement of Fish and Wildlife Habitat

The Watershed Protectors program engages students in habitat improvement activities including invasive vegetation removal, restoration monitoring, native seed dispersal, and stewardship projects that directly improve local fish and wildlife habitat. These activities align with Fish and Game Code provisions supporting habitat enhancement and vegetation management.

Project Objectives

- Objective 1: Deliver environmental education to 350–700 Napa County students.
 - Objective 2: Provide Watershed Trainees programming to 12–18 K–3rd grade classrooms.
 - Objective 3: Provide Watershed Protectors participation to three 5th-grade classes.
 - Objective 4: Increase understanding of fish and wildlife conservation principles.
 - Objective 5: Connect students with local wetlands, watersheds, and wildlife habitats.
 - Objective 6: Increase family engagement with local natural areas.
 - Objective 7: Provide exposure to environmental science and conservation careers.
 - Objective 8: Support long-term habitat stewardship and restoration activities benefiting local wildlife.
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6. Describe How You Intend to Determine if the Proposed Activity is Successful

Program evaluation remains a critical component of both Watershed Trainees and Watershed Protectors.

The Parks Foundation will utilize:

- Student pre- and post-program surveys.
- Teacher evaluations.
- Student observation data.
- Facilitator reports.
- Restoration activity records.
- Participant attendance tracking.
- Community participation metrics.

Past evaluation data demonstrates significant gains in environmental understanding among participating students. During previous Watershed Programs, student understanding of watershed concepts increased by 75%, including understanding what a watershed is, why watersheds are important for local communities and the environment. Additionally, when asked how they could help protect the watershed and local wildlife habitat, only 23% of students could provide an accurate response prior to participation, compared with 93% following program completion. These results demonstrate the program's effectiveness in increasing environmental literacy, stewardship awareness, and understanding of fish and wildlife conservation principles.

For Watershed Protectors, restoration outcomes will also be measured through documentation of stewardship activities, habitat improvements, and observations of restoration sites. Building on the successful 2025–2026 pilot, the Foundation will continue tracking habitat enhancement outcomes alongside educational achievements.

Teacher feedback, partner evaluations, and student reflections will help ensure the programs remain relevant, effective, and aligned with both educational standards and the goals of the Napa County Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Funding Requested: See attached document

Watershed Trainees Program: \$5,000

Watershed Protectors Program: \$10,000

Total Request: \$15,000

	Item	Rate/hour	Units/ Description	# of School Groups	Matching Funds	Total Budget	Description
	Personal/Staffing						
Protectors	Personnel 1(\$46/h)	\$46.00	60	3	\$3,500.00	\$8,280.00	\$4,780.00
	Personnel 2(\$43/hr)	\$43.00	40	3	\$1,800.00	\$5,160.00	\$3,360.00
	Personnel 3(\$31/h)	\$31.00	10	3	\$70.00	\$930.00	\$860.00
Trainees	Personnel 1(\$45/h)	\$46.00	4	14		\$2,576.00	\$2,576.00
	Personnel 2(\$40/hr)	\$43.00	3	14		\$1,806.00	\$1,806.00
	Personnel 3(\$31/h)	\$31.00	1	14		\$434.00	\$434.00
Totals:					\$5,370	\$19,186	\$13,816
Program Expenses							
	Nature Journals (Pack of 30)	\$40.00	5	1	200	\$200.00	\$0.00
	Cart wagon	\$400.00	1	1	400	\$400.00	\$0.00
	science Supplies	\$50.00	5	1	250	\$250.00	\$0.00
	bags	\$35.00	2	1	70	\$70.00	\$0.00
	gloves	\$50.00	4	1	200	\$200.00	\$0.00
	hand sanitizer	\$10.00	2	1	20	\$20.00	\$0.00
	printing	\$30.00	3	1	90	\$90.00	\$0.00
	misc	\$68.00	1	1	68	\$68.00	\$0.00
	Sign Printing	\$50.00	4	1	200	\$200.00	\$0.00
	Scavenger Hunt Printing	\$25.00	14	1	350	\$350.00	\$0.00
	penciles	\$8.00	14	1	\$112.00	\$112.00	\$0.00
	Student Snacks	\$80.00	2	3	480	\$480.00	\$0.00
	Administration	\$2,877.90	1	1	1693.45	\$2,877.45	\$1,184.00
	Cost for supplies					\$4,717.45	
	TOTAL PROJECT COST:					\$23,903.45	\$15,000.00

American Canyon Community and Parks Foundation
2026 Board List

No Board Members Receive Compensation

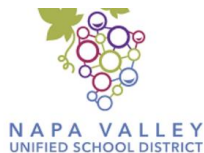
Charlie Plummer- President	The Vineyard House, Global Director of Sales
Cathy Margolati - Vice President	Teacher, Napa Valley Unified School District
Gladys Milligan – Treasurer	Bank Manager, Redwood Credit Union
Sarah Minahen - Secretary	County of Napa
Raffi Boloyan	Community Development Director, City of Dixon
Sean Hughes	Engineer – Testing Engineers
Christine Barnett	American Canyon Orthodontics, Business Owner
Elmer Andrei-Manaid	Local Business Owner
Andre Crisp	Legend Napa Valley, Winery Owner, Vintner
Ed Pingol	Ed Pingol Photography
Hazel Evans	Napa Global Institute
Dr. Joesph Carillo	Retired Pediatrician

Additional Funding Sources 2026 – 2027

Watershed Trainees & Watershed Protectors

Watershed programs are supported by a variety of other funding sources. Private fundraising, grants, events, and corporate sponsorships all contribute to ongoing programs' costs.

- Napa Valley Community Foundation – annual program grants funding youth education programs
- Private fundraising – annual Foundation membership drive and general donors
- Sierra Club Redwood Chapter – annual program grant funding for environmental education (in process)
- Whale Tail Grant, California Coastal Commission– two-year grant funding watershed education (ends April, 2027)
- Mennen Environmental Foundation – annual grant funding watershed education (in process)



Donaldson Way Elementary School

American Canyon, CA 94503
707-644-4486 or 707-253-3524 – Fax: 707-253-6290
Website: dwes-nvUSD-ca.schoolloop.com/



Dear Napa County Wildlife Conservation Commission,

Please accept this letter of support for the American Canyon Community and Parks Foundation's application to expand watershed education and conservation programs.

The Foundation provides important hands-on watershed education opportunities and has been a leader in bringing these programs to schools in American Canyon. As a valued partner in our community the Foundation takes curriculum concepts in biology, watershed science, and ecology and offers hands-on learning and field days for youth. These experiences support student learning and create real life meaning for our science curriculum. In addition to providing a deep learning experience, Foundation programs create memorable experiences that expose kids to careers in science and conservation.

Last spring for the first time our Donaldson Way 2nd grade classrooms were able to bring the Mobile Classroom to our site for a day of learning! Our students loved the hands-on learning and exploration. One memorable experience was observing specimens in the microscopes, animal and plant prints and learning about nature journaling; they were so excited to bring home their own journal to share with their family and continue their observations past that day.

As an educator, I believe in the importance of conserving the Napa River and its watersheds as a source of education, recreation, and enjoyment for our community. We are grateful to have leaders in our community that take the initiative to support environmental education, and support expansion of these efforts.

We appreciate your consideration of this grant proposal and fully support programs and initiatives of the Foundation. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Cathy Margolati
2nd Grade Teacher
Donaldson Way Elementary

Dear Napa County Wildlife Conservation Commission,

Please accept this letter of support for the American Canyon Community and Parks Foundation's (Foundation's) application to expand watershed education and conservation programs.

The Foundation provides important hands-on watershed education opportunities and has been a leader in bringing these programs to schools in American Canyon. As a valued partner in our community, the Foundation takes curriculum concepts in biology, watershed science, and ecology and offers hands-on learning and field days for youth. These experiences support student learning and create real-life meaning for our science curriculum. In addition to providing a deep learning experience, Foundation programs create memorable experiences that expose kids to careers in science and conservation.

As a 5th-grade teacher at Napa Junction Elementary, my students and I had the privilege of participating in this program firsthand. The impact was immediate and profound. Through the Foundation's engaging curriculum and field activities, I watched my students shift from passive learners to active stewards, demonstrating a genuine care and responsibility for the environment right in their own backyard.

As an educator, I believe in the importance of conserving the Napa River and its watersheds as a source of education, recreation, and enjoyment for our community. We are grateful to have leaders in our community that take the initiative to support environmental education, and support expansion of these efforts.

We appreciate your consideration of this grant proposal and fully support programs and initiatives of the Foundation. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely yours,

[Heather Feinberg](#)

5th Grade Teacher, Napa Junction Elementary School

hfeinberg@nvusd.org

Dear Napa County Wildlife Conservation Commission,

Please accept this letter of support for the American Canyon Community and Parks Foundation's (Foundation's) application to expand watershed education and conservation programs.

The Foundation provides important hands-on watershed education opportunities and has been a leader in bringing these programs to schools in American Canyon. As a valued partner in our community the Foundation takes curriculum concepts in biology, watershed science, and ecology and offers hands-on learning and field days for youth. These experiences support student learning and create real life meaning for our science curriculum. In addition to providing a deep learning experience, Foundation programs create memorable experiences that expose kids to careers in science and conservation.

This past year 5th grade students at Napa Junction were included in the expanding program of watershed education. 5th grade students were able to have their science standards included in the program by identifying and understanding the native ecosystem of the wetlands. Students were then able to see and interact with human impacts on the ecosystem and take actionable steps to remove invasive ice plants and then document native plant and insect populations returning. We look forward to continuing this work, giving students a hands-on opportunity to build their science skills and have an impact on their community.

As an educator, I believe in the importance of conserving the Napa River and its watersheds as a source of education, recreation, and enjoyment for our community. We are grateful to have leaders in our community that take the initiative to support environmental education, and support expansion of these efforts.

We appreciate your consideration of this grant proposal and fully support programs and initiatives of the Foundation. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely yours,

Brett Brown

Napa Junction Magnet Elementary School

brett_brown@nvusd.org



Where Nature and Community Flourish Together

2024 – 2025 Grant Report

Watershed Explorers & Watershed Protectors Program Development

Amount Awarded: \$15,611

The American Canyon Community and Parks Foundation (Parks Foundation) requested \$18,000 in funding from the County Wildlife Commission. Of this \$18,000 request, \$15,611 was awarded. With this funding, the Parks Foundation met the grant's goals and successfully expanded Watershed Explorers by partnering with the Napa Resource Conservation district and serving 55 4th grade students from Shearer Elementary School in Napa, 27 high school students from Valley Oak High School, and 34 AP Environmental Science students from American Canyon High School. During the 2024/2025 school year, the existing, expanded, and new programs served a total of **676 students** in Napa County. Parks Foundation staff developed the new Watershed Protectors pilot program and secured participation with three 5th-grade classes at Napa Junction Elementary School, beginning in fall 2025,

With the support of the Wildlife Commission grant the Parks Foundation delivered over **2,500 hours** of environmental and wildlife education to more than **315 fourth graders** in American Canyon as well **116** new students in Napa, and **245 K-3rd graders** from American Canyon. Additionally, over 50 parents and guardians participated in programs to learn about the local wetlands and the Napa River Watershed. Wildlife Commission funding supported the delivery of the full Watershed Explorers program to every school in American Canyon, new pilot programming in K-3rd graders at Napa Junction Elementary, the expansion of programming with partners up valley, and the development of the new Watershed Protectors program being piloted in the fall of 2025.

During the Watershed Explorers Program, students participated in a three-part series that protects the watershed by getting them involved in hands-on learning. Session 1 is a one hour in class presentation about the Napa River Watershed, it's connection to the San Pablo Bay, and the unique wildlife habitats that exist there. Students learned about the American Canyon Wetlands and its attributes as a filter for the entire water system, reclamation, and biodiversity. Students learned how to make scientific observations, formed hypotheses, and utilized a nature journal to lead into the field day. During the second session students participated in a three-hour field day at the Wetlands trails. There they get hands on and rotate through four 30-minute stations from program partners including Suscol Intertribal Council, Napa Solano Audubon, Napa Resource Conservation District, and City of American Canyon Water Reclamation services. The third session brought the Outdoor Connection mobile classroom to the school allowing student to continue making scientific observations in their nature journals utilizing microscopes and nature specimens as well as learn hands on about the watershed with the water table.

In May 2024 teachers from Willow Elementary School in Napa contacted Parks Foundation staff to request participation in the Watershed Explorers program. A modified, two-part education program was developed and scheduled as a pilot expansion into Napa schools. Unfortunately, Willow Elementary could not secure busing to the American Canyon Wetlands and had to cancel the program for the 2024/2025 school year. Wanting to bring watershed education up the valley, the Parks Foundation partnered with the Napa Open Space District to bring 55 4th graders from Shearer Magnet School to Skyline Wilderness Park. Foundation staff also worked with the Napa RCD on a high school program, assisting with watershed education at Skyline Wilderness Park for 27 students from Valley Oak High School, and 35 AP Environmental Science students from American Canyon High School.

Wildlife Commission funding also supported the development of a 4-part Watershed Protectors program that will empower students with the knowledge and skills needed to actively participate in the restoration of wetlands, fostering a sense of responsibility for their local environment and encouraging lifelong stewardship of natural resources. Three 5th grade teachers at

Napa Junction Elementary Magnet School have signed on to pilot the program in the fall of 2025. The breakdown of the new plan is as follows.

Program Title: Watershed Protectors

Program Objective:

To engage students in hands-on learning experiences that promote environmental stewardship by actively participating in the restoration of wetlands habitats through invasive plant removal and the planting of native species.

Target Audience: Ages 5th grade

Duration:

3 to 4 week program

Program Components:

1. **Introduction to Wetlands/ Invasive Species Education in class presentation**
 - o **Understanding Wetlands**
 - ♣ Definition and importance of wetlands
 - ♣ Overview of wetland ecosystems and their role in biodiversity
 - ♣ Introduction to the concept of ecosystem services
 - o **Invasive vs. Native Plants**
 - ♣ Identifying common invasive species in local wetlands
 - ♣ Understanding the impact of invasives on native ecosystems
 - ♣ Discussion of local biodiversity and conservation efforts
 - ♣ Benefits of planting native species
 - ♣ Identifying and selecting appropriate native plants for the area
 - ♣ Discussion of local plant nurseries and resources
2. **Fieldwork Training (In-class, by the teacher showing her class a short video created by Parks Foundation Staff)**
 - o **Session 3: Field Safety and Techniques**
 - ♣ Safety protocols for fieldwork
 - ♣ Techniques for invasive Ice plant identification and removal
 - ♣ Proper use of tools and equipment for restoration tasks
3. **Hands-On Invasive Removal**
 - o **Session 4: Invasive Plant Removal**
 - ♣ Field trips to local wetlands
 - ♣ Practical experience in removing invasive plants (iceplant)
 - ♣ Documentation of work done (e.g., mapping and measuring areas cleared)
 - ♣ Create a plant monitoring plot to track restoration progress
4. **Planting Native Species**
 - o **Session 5: Hands-On Planting**
 - ♣ Field trips for planting native species in previously cleared areas
 - ♣ Techniques for planting and caring for new plants
 - ♣ Monitoring and maintaining the newly restored areas, collecting data

Reflection and Assessment (done by teacher, with guidance from parks foundation staff)

- **Final Session: Reflection and Impact**
 - o Group discussion on experiences and lessons learned
 - o Assessment of the ecological impact of their efforts
 - o Presentation of findings and personal reflections through creative mediums (e.g., posters, videos)

Community Involvement:

- Collaboration with local environmental organizations and experts
- Involvement of parents and community members during field days
- Opportunities for students to lead community awareness (e.g.. students make posters about invasive ice plant)

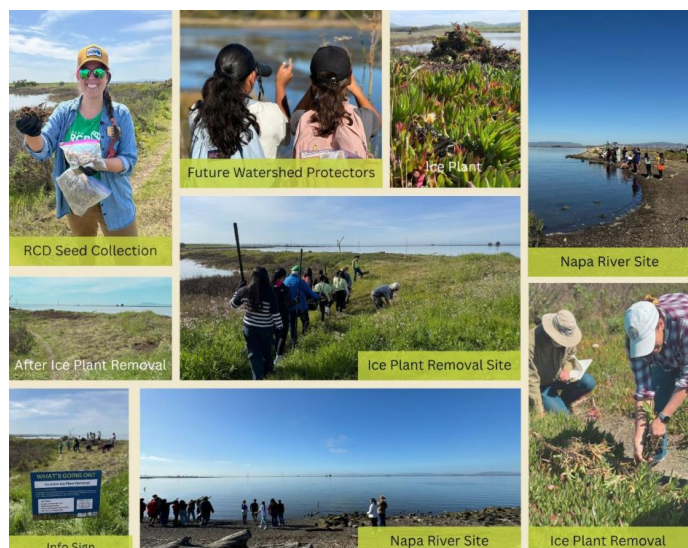
Outcomes:

- Increased understanding of wetlands and their ecosystems
- Development of practical skills in ecological restoration
- Enhanced teamwork and leadership abilities
- Greater awareness and commitment to environmental stewardship



Watershed Explorers

Watershed Protectors Site:



2025 – 2026 Grant Report

Watershed Explorers & Watershed Protectors Program Development

Amount Awarded: \$8,900

Summary

The American Canyon Community and Parks Foundation (Parks Foundation) requested \$20,000 in funding from the Napa County Wildlife Conservation Commission. Of this \$20,000 request, \$8,900 was awarded. By securing additional funding sources and the NCWC funding, the Parks Foundation met most of the grant goals successfully.

With the support of the Wildlife Conservation Commission. grant, the Parks Foundation delivered over 2,388 hours of environmental and wildlife education to more than:

- 311 Watershed Explorers
- 112 new students in Napa
- 85 Watershed Protectors
- 110 Watershed Trainees

Additionally, over 44 parents and guardians participated in programs to learn about the local wetlands and the Napa River Watershed. Wildlife Conservation Commission. funding supported the delivery of the full Watershed Explorers program to every school in American Canyon, the new Watershed Protectors 5th grade pilot program at Napa Junction Elementary, and the expansion of programming with Napa RCD up valley.

Program Description and Implementation

During the Watershed Explorers Program, students participated in a three-part series that protects the watershed by getting them involved in hands-on learning. Session 1 is a one hour in-class presentation about the Napa River Watershed, its connection to the San Pablo Bay, and the unique wildlife habitats that exist there. Students learned about the American Canyon Wetlands and its attributes as a filter for the entire water system, reclamation, and biodiversity. Students learned how to make scientific observations, formed hypotheses, and utilized a nature journal to lead into the field day.

During the second session, students participated in a three-hour field day at the Wetlands trails. There they get hands on and rotate through four 30-minute stations from program partners including Suscol Intertribal Council, Napa Solano Audubon, Napa Resource Conservation District, and City of American Canyon Water Reclamation services. The third session brought the Outdoor Connection mobile classroom to the school, allowing students to continue making scientific observations in their nature journals utilizing microscopes and nature specimens as well as learn hands on about the watershed with the water table.

New Program Highlight

Wildlife Conservation Commission. funding also supported the launch of a four-part Watershed Protectors program, designed to equip students with the knowledge and hands-on skills needed to actively engage in

wetland restoration. Three 5th-grade teachers at Napa Junction Elementary Magnet School participated in the pilot during fall 2025 and spring 2026, integrating the program into their classroom learning.

The Watershed Protectors program is designed as a multi-session, inquiry-based experience that blends classroom learning with hands-on environmental stewardship. Students begin with an in-class introduction to wetlands, where they explore the definition, ecological importance, and role of these ecosystems in supporting biodiversity and providing essential ecosystem services. Building on this foundation, students learn to distinguish between native and invasive plant species, identify common invasive plants in local wetlands, and understand the impacts these species have on ecosystem health.

Following classroom presentation and preparation, students receive fieldwork training through teacher-led instruction supported by a short video developed by Parks Foundation staff and Teen WILD Volunteers. Students then participate in field experiences at local wetlands where they remove invasive iceplant, collect and disperse native seeds, and document their restoration efforts by mapping and measuring cleared areas. Subsequent monitoring sessions allow students to return to the site to observe plant regrowth, assess soil and habitat conditions, and record the presence of insects and wildlife. Community engagement is an integral component of the program, with local environmental organizations, experts, and family members participating in field days.

Original Program Goals

The Parks Foundation sought to deliver environmental and wildlife education across American Canyon and Napa County, expand access to hands-on watershed learning, and strengthen partnerships with local environmental organizations. A key goal was to continue implementation of the Watershed Explorers program while expanding programming opportunities and reaching approximately 300 Napa County students through the Watershed Trainees program. The development of new programming pathways, including increased stewardship opportunities, was also a priority.

Program Challenges and Adaptation

During the 2025–2026 school year, the Watershed Trainees program faced unexpected challenges that significantly limited the ability to reach the planned audience of 300 Napa County 2nd-grade students. Recent changes to Napa Valley Unified School District’s field trip approval process resulted in the cancellation of participation from three multi-class cohorts.

Despite active outreach and coordination, these administrative barriers constrained program delivery and reduced overall student access during this cycle. In response, the Foundation adapted its approach and successfully implemented the program with one new cohort, serving 110 3rd-grade students at Canyon Oaks Elementary School. While this represents a meaningful impact, it falls short of the intended reach.

Moving forward, the Parks Foundation is collaborating closely with teachers, school administrators, the district, and fellow environmental education partners to better navigate and inform the revised field trip approval system, with the goal of removing participation barriers and expanding access in the 2026–2027 school year.

Outcomes

With the support of Wildlife Conservation Commission. unding, the Parks Foundation delivered over **2,388 hours of environmental education** and reached **618 students** and **44 community members**. The Watershed Explorers program was successfully implemented across all schools in American Canyon, ensuring broad access to watershed education.

The Watershed Protectors pilot program resulted in meaningful environmental and educational outcomes, including the removal of more than **2,500 square feet of invasive iceplant**. Students demonstrated a strong sense of pride in their accomplishments and developed a deeper sense of responsibility for their local environment. One student remarked, "Who knew 11-year-olds could do this? We made a big difference!"

Family and community engagement also increased during this grant period. The Foundation supported family nature visits by providing take-home wetlands maps and nature journals and offering free, family-friendly educational opportunities and conservation days outside of school hours. These efforts extended learning beyond the classroom and encouraged continued exploration and connection to the Napa River Watershed within the broader community.

Program Quality and Sustainability

The programs continue to provide high-quality, hands-on, inquiry-based learning experiences that connect students to their local watershed and wildlife habitats. Partnerships with organizations such as Napa Resource Conservation District, Napa Solano Audubon, Suscol Intertribal Council, and the City of American Canyon strengthen program delivery and enrich student learning.

The success of the Watershed Protectors pilot program demonstrates strong potential for long-term sustainability. Teachers have already committed to continuing the program in the 2026–2027 school year, pending land use approval by the California State Lands Commission. The program aligns with California Science Content Standards and supports ongoing stewardship and environmental literacy.

Acknowledgment and Future Plans

The Parks Foundation acknowledges the support of the Napa County Wildlife Conservation Commission.. This funding was essential in delivering environmental education programming and in supporting the launch of the Watershed Protectors pilot program, a key advancement in student stewardship opportunities.

Looking ahead, the Parks Foundation plans to expand the Watershed Protectors and Watershed Trainee programs to additional classrooms, increase student participation in Napa County, and continue working with school districts and partners to address access challenges. These efforts will build on current successes and further strengthen opportunities for students to engage in meaningful watershed and habitat conservation work.

The program was awarded \$8,900 by the Napa County Wildlife Commission, with the remaining funding gap covered through additional support from the Napa Valley Community Foundation, the Whale Tail Grant, and the Napa Sierra Club.

