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CONTACT:

**TISH WARD**

**North Coast Resource Conservation & Development Council (NCRC&DC)**

**P.O. BOX 6417**

**Santa Rosa, CA 95406-0417**

**Phone 707-996-1370 FAX 707-938-5462**

## SONOMA VALLEY BOY SCOUTS, GRAPE GROWERS, WINERIES, AND LOCAL FARMERS BAND TOGETHER TO SUPPORT “BEE PATCHES” OF FORAGE FOR POLLINATORS

The non-profit North Coast Resource Conservation & Development Council (NCRC&DC) is planting “Bee Patches” of forage for pollinators working with Sonoma Valley Boy Scouts, wineries, grape growers, and other farmers to create habitat in Sonoma Valley for struggling bees and other pollinators. Eighty percent of the world’s flowering plants are animal pollinated, and wildlife ecosystems are vitally dependent on pollinating partners. Honeybees, other pollinators and pollination services represent a critical component of healthy wildlife ecosystems and sustainable agriculture, with honeybees pollinating an estimated \$15 billion of agricultural crops annually in the United States. Direct and indirect value could total \$30 billion annually. Scientists and farmers alike are increasingly recognizing the importance of honeybees and native pollinators, and the reality that they are at risk. Our bees are disappearing, and one important action to help bees is to create forage habitat where they can feed and nourish their colonies. This summer, new habitat “Bee Patches” will be planted through a partnership with Sonoma Valley Boy Scouts, wineries, local grape growers and other farmers in the Sonoma Valley. The Boy Scouts will tally up the total amount of forage planted by farmers in the “Bee Patches” effort.

Specialty seed mixes developed by LeBallister Seed Company to support bee forage will be used in plantings. Last year, LeBallister reported they sold 1300 pounds of Bee Forage Seed, and the NCRC&DC hopes this is a growing trend.

Tish Ward, a local Sonoma Valley farmer and a Board member of the NCRC&DC and Sonoma Resource Conservation District, is working with the Boy Scouts in planting “Bee Patches” of forage habitat in Sonoma Valley agricultural fields. She reports that the Scouts will learn first-hand about bees from Kathy Kellison, educator and former Executive Director of Partners for Sustainable Pollination, at Beltane Ranch on June 29<sup>th</sup>, when the Scouts are taught how important bees are to our community. Ward says, “The bees need help, and the Boy Scouts have always been great about helping good causes—they are terrific to work with, and we hope ‘Bee Patches’ will spread across the county.”

“Bee Patches” are a new habitat enhancement, one of many measures kicked off during National Pollinator Week, which runs from June 17<sup>th</sup> through 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013.

The NCRC&DC is a local 501(c)3 non-profit organization working in Marin, Sonoma, Mendocino, and Lake Counties. The NCRC&DC’s overall goal is to protect water, soil, and air resources. Its all-volunteer Council works to protect pollinator habitat, eliminate invasive species, promote agricultural tourism, support new and expanding farm operations, and encourage alternative energy from biomass.