The idea behind drought is scarcity," says Jennifer Clary, California State Director with Clean Water Fund, a grantee of Rose Foundation’s California Watershed Protection Fund.

"Scarcity is something that some populations always feel, but in a drought, everyone feels it. Drought is and will continue to be an enormous challenge, but we can also use it to expand people’s thinking."

This season’s rain may be — finally — falling, but California and much of the Western United States remains in a historic drought brought on by years of low rainfall and meager snowpack. In late October, the U.S. Drought Monitor declared drought conditions in ninety percent of the American West, and images of record low reservoirs have become disturbingly commonplace. So, in this issue of our newsletter, we’re taking Jennifer’s challenge to “expand our thinking” seriously. This historic drought deserves a historic response. And as we at Rose do in times of crisis, we’re turning to our grantees to hear how drought makes their work more crucial than ever and to get their take on where we need to go from here to protect what precious water we do have — before it’s too late.

**Clean Water Fund**

In the waters and wetlands of the San Francisco Bay Area, Jennifer Clary and the Clean Water Fund team are tackling the impacts of PFAS pollution. PFAS, often referred to as “forever chemicals,” are a family of chemicals that never break down and are known to cause cancer and other human health impacts. PFAS creeps into our waterways and our everyday lives from countless sources, including wastewater and food packaging. A generation ago, no one understood the pervasive harm that these chemicals inflict on people and planet. But now we do — and that means we need to make some changes. A grant from Rose’s California Watershed Protection Fund is helping Clean Water Fund advance the study of PFAS and its impacts on Bay Area water quality, wildlife, and humans, and work with local decision-makers to advance policy that protects the Bay Area’s waterways from these forever chemicals.

“Rose Foundation’s support for our work studying the impacts of mercury in SF Bay fish was crucial to winning new statewide protections for subsistence fishing and tribal cultural use of water, tools that also help us fight to protect salmon dying of heat exposure from low water levels during the drought,” Jennifer says. She hopes that her team’s current work on PFAS can chart a similar course. “While we’re not quite there yet on mercury in fish, we’re going to get there. We’re not going to get there overnight on PFAS either, but if you work on something consistently, you can make things happen.”

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Nancy Berlin served on the Rose Foundation board for 8 years, a time in which she was a constant source of sound advice, teamwork, and positive direction. She has left a lasting impact on the board members she’s worked with, the grassroots organizations she’s advised, and the Rose Foundation as a whole.

Here are a few reflections from Nancy on her time helping steer the ship of Rose, philanthropy, and the struggle for justice. As always, we learned a lot from the conversation, and we hope you do too!

You have dedicated your time and energy to philanthropic and community advocacy work for decades. Why?

I think sometimes people get stuck on the idea that to do something to make the world a better place, it has to be enormous or big. But part of the work of being alive on this planet is to make the world a better place than what you came into.

I think about my ancestors, how much they struggled. All of my family in the last generation or two were immigrants to this country and they really struggled to find a way to survive, and it wasn’t always easy. I feel like my life stands on their shoulders and I owe them a debt for what they’ve done and the many others who I don’t know, who aren’t part of my blood family, who have worked and struggled so hard to make this place better.

And then on the other side, it is all the people that come after us. My daughter and everyone’s daughters, sons, and children. We owe them a decent place to live and a certain amount of happiness and contentment. And I think that is what motivates me.

What inspired you to join the Rose Foundation board 8 years ago?

I first got involved with the Rose Foundation through Jill, working on helping young people get registered to vote. It is something I have always been passionate about — that voting is the way we get things done in this country — whether we like it or not. And when she told me what she was doing, I was fascinated with it. A lot of times we think of only certain kinds of groups doing voter registration work, and here was Jill coming at it from a completely different perspective — combining very basic grassroots organizing of young people with environmental justice work. I think that’s more common now, but was overlooked for a long time.

And along with that, I really love the idea that the Rose Foundation really is the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment. In some parts of the world we wouldn’t have to say it that way, it would be obvious. But it’s important, in fact, to make that clear. From that very beginning time I loved that interconnection of how we look at environmental issues through the lens of communities on the ground.

Much of my adult life, I’ve interacted with environmental issues, but I’ve been on the side of working with low-income communities and I’ve always seen that interconnection. But the Rose Foundation makes it clear, for me.

In these 8 years serving on the Rose Foundation board, what have been your most memorable experiences?

One of the most exciting things about every board meeting was getting this enormous email package of grant recommendations and reading through them. It is a very hopeful thing to read through that package. Despite all the bad news of today, it makes you say, “Look at all the people out there working to make this world better and to change it.” Even though it was overwhelming to review, it was filled with optimism and hope — that was probably my most favorite thing. And I really felt like it was a way that people don’t often think about how change happens. It often doesn’t happen in one big way but with one thing, on top of another, on top of another, and that’s how it happens.

We tend to think of the glamorous people and the celebrities but it’s change from the bottom up that really works over the long haul, and you see that in those funding packages. And it’s fun to see groups grow over time and watch their wins.
Farewell, Katherine
This September, we said goodbye to our New Voices Are Rising Program Director, Katherine Funes. Katherine started out as a program assistant in early 2019 while she was still finishing her undergraduate work at Mills. A natural leader, Katherine quickly stepped up to become co-coordinator, then co-director, and then took on the role of sole director when the pandemic hit.

Katherine steered New Voices through a critical time. Her energy and unflagging belief in the power of youth leadership were key in keeping New Voices youth enthusiastically engaged with virtual programming. And her fierce commitment to youth-centered, youth-led environmental justice work made it possible to expand the program to involve youth from other heavily impacted Bay Area communities, while maintaining New Voices’ unique spirit.

We are sad to see Katherine go but equally excited for her journey into graduate school and beyond. Katherine is now pursuing a Global Studies Phd at the University of California, Irvine. Wherever she goes, we are confident her compassion, knowledge, and leadership will leave a lasting impact, just as it did on us.

Thank You, Aviva
After two years of major contributions to the Rose Team as Communications Associate, we bid adieu to Aviva Kardener this past summer. Back in 2019, Aviva quickly established herself as the communications hub here at Rose. Not only was she one of our principal storytellers, her self-organization helped keep us all on track. Aviva is an activist at heart. We know that her unwavering passion for environmental, climate, and social justice which drove all of her work at Rose will carry her forward in her future endeavors.

Welcome, Mars!
Please join us in giving a warm welcome to Mars Keith, who joins the team as our New Voices Are Rising Youth Coordinator! Mars brings with her a passion for justice, a love for redwoods, and deep skills working with youth. Growing up in Bayview-Hunters Point, her personal experiences with the impacts of pollution planted the seeds of her commitment to environmental justice. We’re so lucky to have her join the team!

Hello, Jodene!
This May, we welcomed Jodene Isaacs to the Rose team as Program Officer for our Consumer Products Fund. Jodene is a veteran litigator who has enforced various environmental and public interest laws on behalf of community-based groups for many years. She is also a trained mediator, and has regularly volunteered her time in Bay Area Superior courts to help settle business claims and restraining orders among unrepresented litigants. We are thrilled to have Jodene deepen her relationship with the Rose Foundation in this new role!

Now to Nancy!
We’re so thrilled for Nancy Huizar to join us as a Program Associate at Rose. Nancy is a longtime South Seattle resident with a degree in Aquatic and Fishery Sciences and over 10 years of wide-ranging leadership experience in environmental justice, from research work to community organizing. They are excited to join the philanthropic sector with the Rose Foundation to utilize their technical background and community advocacy experience to continue building a thriving community.

And One More Welcome to… Jessica!
Jessica Guadalupe Tovar has been a longtime climate and environmental justice organizer in a variety of urban, rural, and indigenous communities throughout California and Arizona. In her work at the Local Clean Energy Alliance, Jessica has hosted New Voices youth and been a key New Voices partner for years. This summer, Jessica formally joined the Rose team as New Voices’ interim Program Director. Her deep experience and insight into climate justice and youth work are helping the program grow and thrive as we work to recruit a long-term Program Director. Jessica enjoys comedy, art, traveling, scary movies, and spending time with family — especially the toddlers!

Sage Steps Up
Join us in welcoming former Sponsorship & Marketing Intern, Sage Bachman, to a full-time role on staff as our Communications Assistant! Whether or not you realized it, you’ve probably appreciated Sage’s work already in the run up to this year’s Film Fest. Sage brings a unique voice and a keen eye for design to the role — check out her work throughout this newsletter! Sage grew up in the East Bay and studied Marketing and Spanish at the University of Oregon. She’s excited to use her marketing skills to uplift the voices of grassroots organizations at Rose.
DEFENDING OUR PRECIOUS WATERS IN A TIME OF DROUGHT

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Californians for Alternatives to Toxics

Just up the coast, Northern California’s Napa and Sonoma counties are famous worldwide for their wines. But there’s a dirty underbelly to the wine industry — toxic pesticides used in viticulture. The Russian River, famous in its own right as a local treasure and tourist haven, weaves between the vineyards. But the picture-postcard views don’t show the steady runoff of pesticides from the grapes and other crops. With support from Rose Foundation’s California Watershed Protection Fund, Californians for Alternatives to Toxics (CAT) is working to study local agricultural pesticide use as well as other toxic pollutants and their impacts on water quality in the Russian River watershed, building towards a landmark report. Local environmental activists will use this report to advocate for riparian buffer zones to filter out pollutants before they reach the river, reduced toxic pesticide usage, and other improvements for the region’s primary source of potable water. CAT Executive Director Patricia Clary hopes that by improving our understanding of the causes and effects of Russian River contamination, and by arming activists with the data they need to make their case, the report will help move us toward “better stewardship of, and a much healthier water quality for, the Russian River.”

California’s years-long drought has left no part of the state unscathed, and the Russian River is no exception. This summer, to combat extremely low water levels in Lake Mendocino, a reservoir connected to the East Fork of the river, the California State Water Resources Board took the unprecedented step of issuing “emergency curtailment orders” for the upper and lower Russian River. The orders reduced the amount of water that grape growers, ranchers, community water districts, and other rights holders could draw from the river.

But CAT’s Patricia Clary thinks those water curtailments are just the beginning of the drought’s impacts on the Russian River, and rivers like it across the West. “On the one hand, when it doesn’t rain, there’s less runoff and that could mean less pesticides entering the river through runoff,” Patricia notes. “But on the other hand, when it’s so dry, there’s more dust! Dust can hold onto chemicals like pesticides, so as dust is blown into the river, there could be more pesticides entering that way.” Patricia also notes that if the same amount of pesticides and other chemicals are entering the river while there’s less water flowing, that could potentially cause higher concentrations of toxics in the water. She thinks further study of the drought’s impact on the accumulation of toxins in our rivers is critical: “I don’t think anyone really knows the answers to these questions yet, but we need to find out.”

In addition to serving as a key source of potable and irrigation water, the Russian River experiences heavy recreational use in the summer months, and is home to many species of fish and other wildlife. CAT is working to identify and help reduce pesticides and other toxics that wash into its waters. A cleaner river will benefit us all.

Executive Director Patricia Clary near her home above the Trinity River in Hoopa, CA. To discover the drought’s impact, Patricia is digging deep into the data.
Black Farmers Collective
Washington State — an area famous for its precipitation — has been hit hard by this year’s drought too. So hard, that according to the U.S. Drought Monitor the entire state was “abnormally dry” this summer and over 40% of the state is still experiencing “extreme drought” conditions. Thankfully, groups like Black Farmers Collective are working hard for climate resilience in communities, by protecting and stewarding water resources around Puget Sound while building a food system that better serves people of color. The Yes Farm, a project of the Black Farmers Collective in the Yesler neighborhood of Seattle, is an initiative to grow the healthiest food possible, connect people to all aspects of the food system, and develop Black leadership on the land.

With a grant from the Rose Foundation’s Puget Sound Stewardship and Mitigation Fund, a fund created by a record settlement from a pollution lawsuit brought by the Puget Soundkeeper Alliance, Black Farmers Collective is implementing a multifaceted storm water mitigation and rain water capture project at the Yes Farm.

“It’s interesting, because the stormwater project we’re granted for has a lot to do with the problem of too much water,” says Ray Williams, Program Associate with Black Farmers Collective. “What we’re seeing from climate change in our area is dryer summers and wetter winters. So for us, the problem is connected. Water that we capture and stop from running off into the Sound in the winter, and maybe picking up pollution along the way, is water we can also use to help with the first part of the growing season.”

Looking down the road, Ray thinks decision-makers will have to start prioritizing water uses that meet human and ecological needs. “Do you want to have local food systems? Well if you strangle it by keeping those water rights tied up, including for some things we don’t really need, you’re not gonna add the urban or peri-urban farmland we do need.”

These grantees and their work demonstrate the importance of a holistic approach to protecting our water. As periods of drought become longer and more severe, we — as individuals, communities, and industries — need not only to conserve our water but also to “expand our thinking” and follow these grantees’ leads in preserving and caring for our precious watersheds.

The California Watershed Protection Fund supports grantees working to improve water quality through legal advocacy, research, watershed monitoring, riparian restoration, environmental youth education, community science, and fire-recovery efforts. In our most recent grantmaking cycle, the Fund awarded over $322,000 to 15 organizations across the state that are making every drop count. Learn more about the Fund at: rosefdn.org/california-watershed-protection-fund

The Puget Sound Stewardship and Mitigation Fund’s goal is to mitigate past pollution runoff by supporting community-based efforts to protect or improve the water quality of Puget Sound. Since its inception in 2012, almost $6M in grants have been awarded for projects in Puget Sound related to conservation, restoration, citizen science, environmental justice, shoreline access, and environmental education. Learn more about the Fund at: rosefdn.org/puget-sound-stewardship-mitigation-fund

Stormwater running down the hill above Yes Farm is caught in this “swale” and then pumped into large storage tanks (as featured on the front page of this newsletter), reducing runoff into Puget Sound and increasing water available for spring and summer crops.
While we were sad to have to go another year without an in-person Film Fest, we had another incredible virtual event this September. And one bright spot of our virtual world is that we were able to connect with the Rose community all throughout the country for the event.

We presented our largest film line-up yet this year, with over 25 selections. We screened shorts like Midori Farm, featuring an organic vegetable farm benefitting from the Jefferson Land Trust’s conservation easement program, and full-length films like Where There Once Was Water, a deep dive into California’s drought and those fighting to get us on the right track. We were struck by the richness and diversity of stories at this year’s Film Fest, from the unique environmental health issues present at the U.S.-Mexico border to how the Quinault tribe in Washington state is adapting to rising sea levels. New Voices students even got the chance to interview the subject of one of the films, youth activist Dez Rae Kai, who in leading us through her activist journey reminded us all that you don’t have to be “the leader” to make a difference.

We hope you were one of the hundreds of people who were able to join us this year. And whether you were or weren’t — stay tuned for details on our 2022 Film Fest, which we plan to host as a hybrid in-person and online event!

A BIG thank you to our 2021 Film Fest sponsors and hosts, including our Visionary sponsor Community Bank of the Bay, for making the event possible!

Next year...in Oakland!

“There is such compelling storytelling, beautiful and moving to watch.”

“The Rose Foundation’s Film Fest continues to be one of my favorite events hosted by a nonprofit. I loved that it was virtual this year. I hope we can continue the virtual experience next year, so people who cannot attend in person can still connect with the Rose family.”

THE GRASSROOTS FUND IS GOING STATEWIDE!

BIG NEWS — the Rose Foundation’s Northern California Environmental Grassroots Fund is now the California Environmental Grassroots Fund. That’s right, the Grassroots Fund is going statewide!

We launched the Grassroots Fund almost 20 years ago to “bridge the gap” between small and emerging community groups who fly under the radar of most large foundations. The Fund specifically serves these grassroots groups, providing grants of $5,000 or less while helping to build their organizational capacity and feasibility for securing larger grant awards in the future.

And really, we’re all one California. Environmental and social issues threaten our communities statewide — and community groups up, down, and across the state are rising up to face these challenges. We want to support their work and help them grow. While the Grassroots Fund will maintain its historic investment in the Greater Bay Area and Northern California, it has also begun to welcome applications from community groups in Southern California.

We’re so excited to use this opportunity to build stronger connections among local environmental activists all over the state. The problems we’re up against are too big to face alone, but together, we can win the resilient future we need.
This was a year of firsts for New Voices Are Rising’s annual Summer Climate Justice Youth Leadership Academy. It was our first year expanding outside of Oakland; we were thrilled to welcome students from the East Bay refinery corridor and Bayview-Hunters Point, another frontline community, to explore pollution impacts in their neighborhoods and across the Bay Area. It was also our biggest program yet, nearly twice the size of past Academies. And, it was New Voices Youth Coordinator Mars Keith’s first Summer Academy!

We had a chance to ask Mars what she thought of the Academy and how this expanded virtual program impacted the students:

**What are some ways that you think the Summer Academy has impacted students’ lives?**

In many ways the staff of New Voices understand that when working with youth it is important to come as you are and be you, and I think because of that we had a lot of youth that we watched blossom out of their shyness. I also believe that the Summer Academy staff helped youth to see the greatness within themselves. Oftentimes we forget how strong youth are, we forget that so many great movements were led by youth. We as staff make sure to remind our youth that as much as this world is ours it is theirs also, and they should also have a say in the things that will affect them. I believe that our youth now know that when they go into the world they have people who support them and the moves they make.

**Out of all the activities, workshops, and field trips this summer, which do you think was most memorable for the Summer Academy participants?**

I think the most memorable activity was our environmental justice poetry workshop and virtual Poetry Slam. Our youth started out very nervous! At the beginning of the workshop we heard so many youth say, “I don’t know how to write poems” or “I’m not a poet.” When we asked if any volunteers wanted to read what they wrote, it was complete silence. But then some youth decided to step up and volunteer themselves, and we heard so many beautiful beginnings to poems that were later finished and performed at our poetry slam. These poems held beautiful stories about our youth and their experiences with the topics we covered in our program, ranging from environmental injustices such as living next to factories and the health effects of that, and social injustices such as police brutality and beauty standards that reinforce white superiority. Our youth shared with us what they feel is important to them and their communities.

**Did the students or the program as a whole achieve any climate justice wins over the summer?**

Yes! One of the climate justice wins we had this summer was the Bay Area Air Quality Management District’s ruling that requires Chevron Richmond refinery and another refinery in Martinez to cut down and clean up the pollution they have been spilling into communities of color for many years. A lot of the New Voices youth and staff have been advocating for this change and many more changes for a long time, and it is great to finally see it.

**What are some ways you think this year’s Summer Academy participants will apply their experiences in the program moving forward?**

In our exit interviews, so many youth echoed the fact that now that they have learned about environmental justice they will be educating their friends and other people they know. Some have even mentioned starting EJ clubs at their schools. I think the saying, “Each one teach one,” is very important, especially when it comes to youth.

A big “Thank You” to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the East Bay Community Foundation for their special grants supporting the expanded Academy, and to everyone who donated during our New Voices fundraising campaign to make this year’s Summer Academy an overwhelming success!
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• Reporting Back from the 2021 Film Fest
• Board Update: Thank You, Nancy Berlin!

A NOTE FROM TIM & JILL

Record rainfall and record drought. Can both be true at the same time? As we look over the past year, we have to say ‘yes’. Even as our sun-baked western reservoirs shrunk to scary new lows, our grantees in New Orleans, Gulfport, Port Arthur, and New York have suffered another year of historic flooding.

We can’t say we haven’t seen it coming. In 1970, CBS news icon Walter Cronkite shared the first Earth Day’s message with his viewers. It was loud and clear: “Act or die.” Half a century later we’re in uncharted territory where both climate and democracy wobble, and the way forward is clouded by COVID. Mr. Cronkite’s message is even more urgent today.

When our kids were little, we had a family joke about “go bold or go home.” But some jokes hold a sliver of truth. A lot of our old ways of thinking just don’t work anymore, and we can’t keep making the same mistakes. It takes boldness to act, and a special kind of boldness to be willing to act differently.

Throughout California, and all over the country, local community members are stepping forward to make our communities more resilient to climate threats, to protect voting rights, and to fight for the human right to clean air and water. This newsletter profiles some of our grantees who are building community resilience that is rooted in equity and justice. You’ll also read about some of our New Voices Are Rising students who are stepping forward and accepting the challenge that our generation has left to them.

Our grantees, students, and community partners understand that in times like these, not only is bold transformation necessary — it’s possible. Let’s go bold. It’s time.

Tim & Jill