

# We Make Sustainability Happen



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As concerns about the impact of climate change, drought and threats to wildlife increase, San Francisco State University has been using its institutional muscle to promote sustainability. By taking action to safeguard the environment, shed new light on the plight of endangered species and conserve valuable resources, SF State is working to preserve a bright future for the whole world.

## Protecting Habitats & Endangered Animals

Since 1978, SF State’s Romberg Tiburon Center (RTC) for Environmental Studies has been monitoring water quality and conducting important research in San Francisco Bay. Recently, RTC researchers have worked to help marine life and eelgrass habitats recover from the devastating Cosco Busan oil spill, and the center spreads awareness of the need to further protect and nurture the Bay through outreach programs and an annual Discovery Day open house.

Other SF State scientists have been trying to help animals far beyond the Bay. With the help of more than 100,000 volunteers, the University’s Great Sunflower Project has built the single largest

database of North American pollinator populations. Another project, the Great Pollinator Habitat Challenge, went a step further by making backyards and parks across the country more pollinator friendly. Thanks to these initiatives, scientists have new, crucial information about which habitat improvements (such as planting native wildflowers) are most effective at attracting bees and other pollinators. That data will in turn aid conservationists in their efforts to stem an alarming decline in pollinator populations.

North America’s salamanders and frogs are in danger, as well: Both are threatened by deadly funguses that have already brought hundreds of species to the brink of extinction elsewhere. That’s why SF State scientists are working tirelessly to understand and stop the invasive funguses before they wipe out two important parts of the native food chain.

## Conserving Resources & Addressing Climate Change

Many other species face growing threats as the impact of climate change makes itself felt. Understanding their challenges — and how they can or can’t adapt to them — gives scientists a clearer picture of what the decades ahead hold for life on earth.

Porcelain crabs offer one such case study in survival. SF State biologists recently finished



an intensive study exploring the effects of warming waters on the small crabs, which are an important food source for coastal fish, birds and other crabs. The researchers' conclusion: Porcelain crabs will be able to adjust, but their metabolism will decrease markedly. As a result, they'll have less energy to expend on growth, reproduction and escaping from predators. It's a grim prognosis for porcelain crabs and the animals that feed on them — and another wake-up call for the world.

While SF State researchers have been thinking globally, the University's grounds operations team has been acting locally. Sustainability is a top priority on campus. In many areas, water-guzzling grass has been replaced with native and drought-resistant plants, and rainwater collection tanks irrigate gardens with the help of solar-powered pumps. In addition, new computer-run irrigation controllers have helped save hundreds of thousands of gallons of water, and student volunteers helped create several bioswales — sloping, vegetation-filled drainage courses — that have reduced water use on campus even further.

Such efforts have won praise from The Princeton Review, which declared the SF State campus one of the nation's greenest. And the University doesn't keep its sustainability expertise to itself. The School of Engineering provides free energy assessments to Bay Area manufacturing plants, resulting in annual savings of 10 to 20 percent. SF State also offers bachelor's and master's degrees in environmental studies as well as an MBA with an emphasis in sustainable business, ensuring that the world has both the scientific experts and the climate-minded entrepreneurs it's going to need in the years ahead.

## Encouraging Personal Responsibility

SF State has created an array of events and initiatives that encourage individuals to shrink their carbon footprints. Each April, for instance, the University hosts both Farm to Fork — an open-to-all vegetarian meal made exclusively from organic food grown within 250 miles of San Francisco — and a campuswide Earth Day celebration.

The University doesn't just wait for special occasions to emphasize the need for sustainability, though. It makes it easy for students to give Mother Nature a helping hand every day. Water-bottle filling stations cut down on plastic bottle waste, recycling and composting bins can be found around campus and free bicycle repair stations encourage biking to school.

And the University's commitment to encouraging sustainability extends far beyond campus. In 2013, the SF State University Foundation, which manages the school's endowment fund, announced its commitment to divesting from fossil fuel-related companies and creating a socially responsible portfolio option for donors. That's putting your money where your mouth is — and where it will do the most good for the earth.

To learn more about SF State's sustainability initiatives, go to [sustain.sfsu.edu](http://sustain.sfsu.edu).

