

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE

Action Plan



California State University
SAN MARCOS

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

At California State University San Marcos, our commitment to sustainability is rooted in our mission to serve students, our region and future generations. As we prepare students to lead in a changing world, we also are working to ensure that our campus models the values of environmental stewardship, as outlined in our strategic plan. Our goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2045 reflects both our commitment and our responsibility to the communities we serve. In 2023, I was proud to sign the Presidents’ Climate Leadership Commitment, reaffirming CSUSM’s dedication to advancing a sustainable and resilient campus.

The Sustainability and Climate Action Plan represents the next evolution of this work. Aligned with our campus strategic plan, this comprehensive road map outlines strategies to reduce our carbon footprint, strengthen our adaptive capacity and embed sustainability across our institution.

Grounded in the foundation established by our 2014 and 2018 sustainability master plans, this plan builds on more than a decade of progress and centers our commitment to student success. It recognizes how a sustainable campus environment fosters learning, innovation, engagement and overall well being.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Sustainability Advisory Committee, as well as the many departments and individuals who contributed their expertise and engagement. This plan is the result of true collaboration – shaped by staff and faculty engagement and strengthened by meaningful input from our students.

The Sustainability and Climate Action Plan belongs to all of us. It provides a clear path forward for advancing the university’s sustainability and climate goals, while equipping departments with the tools to advance broader, campuswide initiatives. Together, we are shaping a more resilient, sustainable future for CSUSM.

Thank you to everyone who played a role in bringing this plan to life and for your continued commitment to making our campus a model of sustainability, climate action and resilience.

Ellen J. Neufeldt

Ellen J. Neufeldt, Ed.D.
President





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California State University San Marcos Sustainability and Climate Action Plan (SCAP) provides a holistic road map to advance sustainability and climate action as a core expression of CSUSM’s mission, vision and values. Grounded in our commitment to educational equity, innovation and inclusive excellence, this plan positions sustainability as a catalyst for student success, social mobility and regional resilience – preparing CSUSM to lead in building a just and sustainable future for our region and beyond.

As a university recognized for advancing social mobility,

CSUSM views sustainability as essential to ensuring that students thrive amid climate change, resource constraints and social inequities. By integrating sustainability into student basic needs, applied learning, workforce development and community partnerships, the university equips students to respond to societal challenges and lead as socially just changemakers.

“The Power of CSUSM,” the university’s strategic plan, identifies sustainability and climate justice as core values, reflecting a shared responsibility to honor past, present and

future generations. With this acknowledgment, CSUSM recognizes and respects that the land CSUSM is built on is the traditional territory of the Luiseño/Payómkawichum people. This recognition honors the Indigenous peoples as original stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous peoples and their homelands.

The SCAP advances four interconnected commitments: climate leadership, transformative academics, sustainable campus operations and a culture of sustainability that translate CSUSM’s values into action. Together, these commitments

support academic excellence through innovative curriculum and research; enhance student success through applied learning and career readiness; advance inclusive excellence, community well-being and climate justice; and strengthen community partnerships. These commitments provide a cohesive framework for embedding sustainability across all aspects of the university, driving measurable progress toward a climate-ready, equitable and resilient future.



APPROACH

This plan encompasses the main CSUSM campus and serves as a strategic, guiding framework through 2035. It is designed to remain adaptive and responsive through regular reviews and updates, ensuring continued alignment with evolving institutional priorities, emerging California State University systemwide policies, new state requirements, and meaningful input from students, faculty, staff and community partners. Furthermore, this plan is designed to be implemented by CSUSM, CSUSM Corporation and all its auxiliary entities.

Building on the university’s previous sustainability master plans (2014, 2018), this plan intentionally aligns CSUSM

priorities articulated through “The Power of CSUSM” strategic plan with local, systemwide, national, and global frameworks including the following:

- The CSU Sustainability Policy and relevant California climate, energy and waste mandates, ensuring alignment with systemwide strategies and compliance with state goals.
- AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating (STARS), the comprehensive tool used by higher education institutions to measure and report sustainability progress across academics, operations, planning, engagement and administration.

- Second Nature Climate Leadership Commitments, an integrated pledge for carbon neutrality and climate resilience that positions CSUSM as a leader in the transition to a low-carbon, climate-ready future.
 - United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which offer a globally recognized blueprint for addressing climate action, health, education, equity, economic vitality and stewardship.
- By advancing an integrated approach that connects climate leadership, academic excellence, operational integrity and community well-being, the SCAP is intended to guide decision-making and partnerships across the university while supporting

transparency, accountability and continuous improvement.

The SCAP was developed in close collaboration with the Sustainability and Climate Action Task Force, a group of CSUSM stakeholders who hold leadership roles aligned with the plan’s goals. In addition, the planning process engaged a broad cross-section of the campus community through in-person and online conversation circles, targeted student engagement efforts and an online feedback survey. Together, these engagement opportunities ensured meaningful participation from students, staff, faculty and managers in shaping the vision, priorities and direction of this plan.



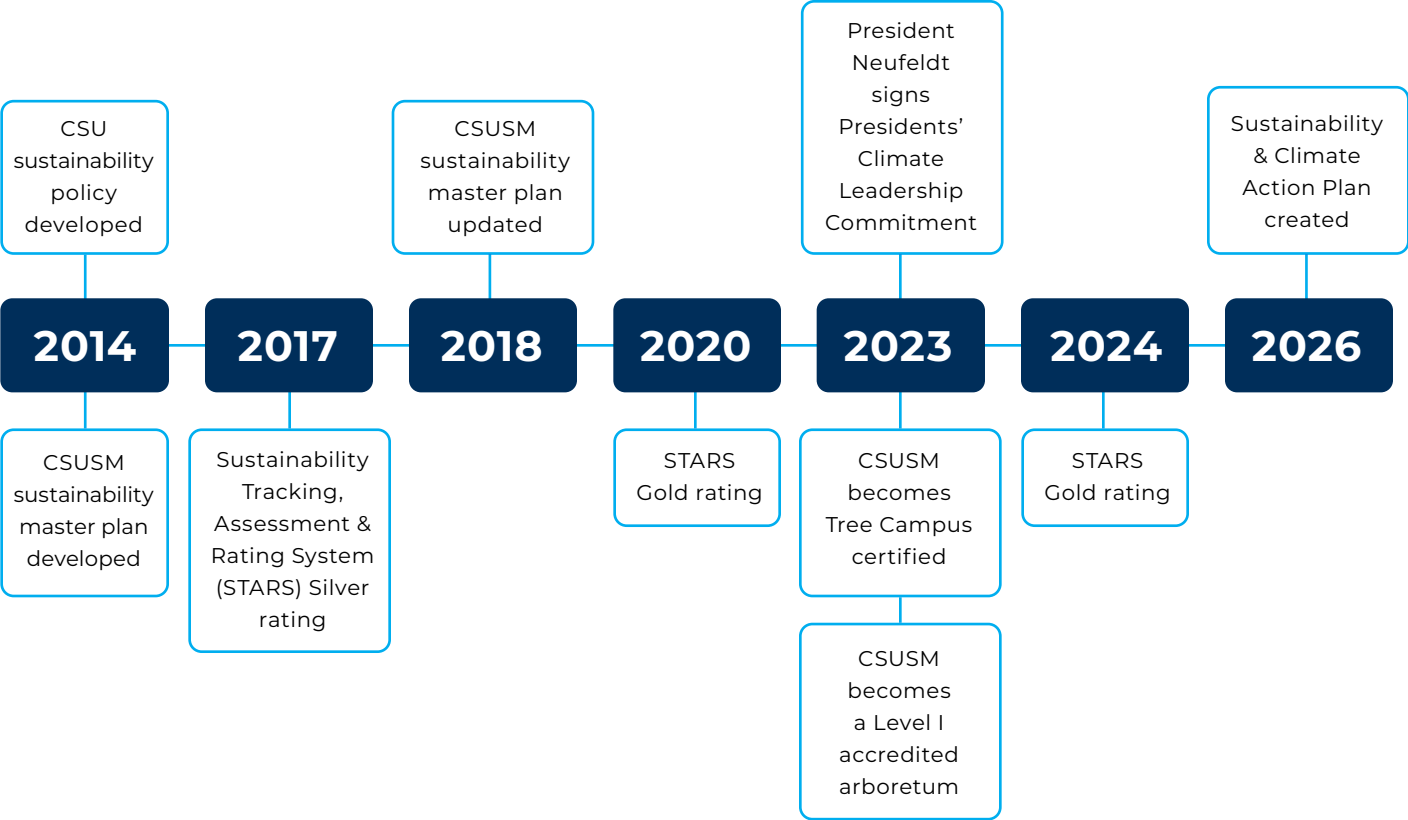
BACKGROUND

CSUSM has been an active leader in sustainability for more than a decade. As an innovative public institution of higher education, the university has a longstanding record of early adoption and implementation of best practices in sustainability, resource conservation and equitable student achievement. Over the past decade, CSUSM has earned numerous prestigious state and national awards recognizing excellence in areas such as academic innovation, waste

management, energy efficiency, water conservation and inclusive sustainability. CSUSM remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing environmental stewardship while expanding access, opportunity and pathways to success for its diverse student population.

In 2014, CSUSM developed its first sustainability master plan, marking an important milestone in articulating campuswide goals and establishing a foundation for a culture

SUSTAINABILITY MILESTONES



of sustainability. A subsequent update in 2018 deepened this commitment, strengthening integration across academic programs, inclusive excellence and student engagement. Both plans were developed collaboratively with the Sustainability Advisory Committee, ensuring broad participation and institutional alignment.

In 2022, CSUSM completed its current campus strategic plan, “The Power of CSUSM,” which for the first time elevated sustainability and climate justice as a core institutional value. Sustainability and climate action also are embedded throughout the university’s mission, vision, values and campus goals. This high-level guiding document reflects CSUSM’s deep commitment to these priorities and further strengthens the commitments outlined in this plan.

In 2023, President Neufeldt signed the Presidents’ Climate Leadership Commitment, formally setting CSUSM on a path toward carbon neutrality and strengthening the university’s role as a leader within the CSU system and the broader higher

education community. This plan builds upon the collective progress, expertise and dedication that has come before. It unifies prior sustainability, climate and resilience efforts into a coherent framework that positions CSUSM to achieve its carbon neutrality and climate resilience goals while advancing its educational mission and culture of sustainability.

CSUSM’s progress is further reflected in its performance within the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education’s (AASHE) Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS). After earning a silver rating in 2017, the university advanced to gold ratings in both 2020 and 2024. CSUSM is now on a trajectory toward achieving STARS’s highest distinction: platinum. This plan provides the strategic guidance, accountability structure and long-term vision necessary to support that goal and to continue advancing institutional excellence in sustainability through 2035 and beyond.



CURRENT CONTEXT

As an institution of higher learning, CSUSM plays a critical role in preparing students, faculty and staff to embrace sustainability and climate challenges and to model leadership in responding to the realities of a changing planet.

Climate change is driven by human activities that release heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere, such as emissions from transportation, electricity generation and industrial energy use. Scientific findings from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirm that the Earth’s climate systems are undergoing rapid and far-reaching transformation. These changes are already intensifying weather and climate-related extremes worldwide, with disproportionate impacts on historically marginalized and vulnerable communities.

In California – and particularly within the San Diego region – projected impacts include rising average temperatures, more intense and prolonged heat events, increasing frequency and severity of drought, heightened wildfire risk, sea-level rise, and greater variability in precipitation. Together, these trends are expected to contribute to both inland and coastal flooding, ecosystem and biodiversity loss, and a range of additional environmental, social and economic challenges.

As a publicly funded university in California, CSUSM plays an important role in advancing the state’s ambitious climate, clean energy and emissions reduction goals. CSUSM is uniquely positioned to support statewide efforts to address

climate change while serving as a model for innovation in sustainable campus operations, academic programs, institutional culture and student achievement. California is making historic investments in climate-smart, resilient and renewable infrastructure, creating a critical opportunity for leadership, partnership and transformational change. The SCAP ensures that CSUSM is prepared and ready for any climate impacts that the region will face.

GUIDING FRAMEWORKS

The development of a campus sustainability and climate action plan began with the alignment of systemwide priorities and campus-specific institutional goals. Systemwide policies and sustainability frameworks establish overarching expectations related to climate action, operational efficiency, social equity, environmental stewardship and long-term resilience. Building upon these guiding principles, the campus master plan and related institutional planning efforts translate broader commitments into strategies that reflect the unique needs, opportunities, infrastructure and culture of the campus community. Furthermore, CSUSM has made other climate and sustainability commitments that help guide this plan. The following table highlights these key guiding documents that collectively serve as the foundation and strategic precursor to the development of a comprehensive sustainability plan.

GUIDING FRAMEWORKS AND COMMITMENTS

CSUSM STRATEGIC PLAN	The CSUSM strategic plan is the institution's primary high-level framework that defines long-term priorities, values and goals to guide decision-making,	resource allocation and institutional growth. Core values include sustainability and climate justice and inclusive excellence.
CSU SYSTEMWIDE SUSTAINABILITY POLICY	A systemwide policy that addresses sustainability and climate at all 22 institutions. Some goals include: • Achieve systemwide carbon neutrality by 2045 for emissions sources that the university has direct control over (scope 1 and 2 emissions only). • Further integrate sustainability and climate literacy into the academic curriculum, working within the normal campus consultative process. • Promote environmental and social justice through new and existing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs such as the CSU Basic Needs Initiative. • Develop employee and student workforce skills in the green jobs and climate-related industry, promote the development of sustainable products	and services, and foster economic development. • Pursue sustainable practices, using AASHE STARS for guidance and reporting, in all areas of the university, including: - Business operations such as procurement, information technology, student and employee services, food services, events, habitat and land-use management, facilities operations, design and construction; - Self-funded entities such as student housing, student unions, parking and transportation, children's centers, and auxiliary operations. • Each CSU will designate a sustainability officer/staff member responsible for planning and/or coordinating campus sustainability program efforts.
CSU SYSTEMWIDE SINGLE USE PLASTICS POLICY	• Eliminate single-use plastic carryout bags no later than Jan. 1, 2019. • Eliminate plastic straws no later than Jan. 1, 2019. • Eliminate single-use polystyrene (e.g. Styrofoam™) food-service items no later than Jan. 1, 2021.	• Eliminate single-use plastic water bottles (regardless of serving size or volume) by Jan. 1, 2023 or upon contract renewal if existing contract terms prohibit. • Replace single-use plastic items with materials that are reusable, locally compostable and/or recyclable.
SUSTAINABILITY TRACKING, ASSESSMENT, & RATING SYSTEM (STARS)	A transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance. CSUSM uses STARS to track sustainability progress	in Academics, Engagement, Operations, Planning and Administration and Innovation and Leadership
SECOND NATURE PRESIDENTS' CLIMATE LEADERSHIP COMMITMENTS	• Signed climate commitment in August 2023 by President Neufeldt. • Develop a climate action plan and	create carbon-neutral goals along with community resilience. • Report progress annually.
UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (UN SDGS)	Adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its	heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership.



CSUSM SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE COMMITMENTS

1. CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

Advance a carbon-neutral campus and strengthen climate resilience across university operations in service of student success, community well-being and responsible stewardship of resources.

2. TRANSFORMATIVE ACADEMICS

Accelerate awareness, understanding and action in the areas of sustainability, climate and environmental justice through teaching, research, creative activities and service to prepare our students to respond to the most pressing regional, national and global issues.

3. SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS OPERATIONS

Align sustainable campus operations and environmental practices with our educational mission by responsibly stewarding our natural resources and campus systems to support resilience, campus well-being and future generations.

4. CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Cultivate a campuswide culture of sustainability grounded in care, belonging and shared responsibility, empowering students, faculty, staff and partners to embed sustainability and climate action into everyday decisions, practices and institutional life.



Commitment 1

CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

Advance a carbon-neutral campus and strengthen climate resilience across university operations in service of student success, community well being and responsible stewardship of resources.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Between 2023-25, we reduced natural gas usage by 28%.
- As of 2026, 75% of campus fleet vehicles are fully electric.
- According to results of the Transportation and Sustainability Survey in spring 2026, 18% of the campus community uses alternative transportation methods.
- Five buildings on campus are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified. Two of the buildings are LEED Silver, and three are LEED Gold.
- In November 2025, CSUSM joined the Higher Education Efficiency Program, a rebate program to find energy efficiency projects on campus.
- In 2025, we received a \$37,500 energy grant in partnership with Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

CHALLENGES

- Limited resources to support accelerated decarbonization coupled with competing capital priorities and aging infrastructure makes emissions reduction difficult.
- The need to balance reliability, deferred maintenance and decarbonization while maintaining academic and research operations.
- Utility tariffs and interconnection issues coupled with evolving regulatory and state requirements, supply-chain constraints and long lead times for major electrical and mechanical equipment make change slow.
- Uncertainty with long-term funding availability for large-scale electrification and energy storage projects.

STUDENT SUCCESS, EQUITY,
AND RESILIENCY IMPACTS

- Improved building comfort, learning environments and reduced disruptions from aging infrastructure will enhance opportunities for experiential learning tied to sustainability, energy and climate initiatives.
- Reduction of long-term utility costs will support reinvestment in academic programs and student services.
- Improved indoor environmental quality for students, faculty and staff aligns with CSU commitments to environmental justice and equitable access to healthy campus facilities.
- Equitable access to transportation options for students, staff and faculty will support student success and employee retention.
- Increased on-site renewable generation and planned battery storage to support grid reliability will strengthen campus resilience to utility outages, extreme weather and future energy market volatility.
- CSUSM will be better prepared to manage climate-related impacts and reduce interrupted service to our students.



GOAL 1.1 | CARBON NEUTRALITY

Reduce scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions by 80% below 2006 baseline by 2040, to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045.

Action Steps:

1. Install solar canopies in summer 2027.
2. Pursue an energy storage system to offset peak power usage.
3. Replace natural gas boilers with electric boilers after solar installation.
4. Restructure campus operations for load shifting post-solar.
5. Continue to explore financial opportunities for energy reduction projects such as grants or rebates.
6. Upgrade campus building automation system controls and implement more energy-efficient sequences of operations.
7. Develop an energy-conscious campus by coordinating facility use and operational practices to support energy-reduction goals.
8. Further investigate geoexchange possibilities on campus.
9. Decommission the campus fuel cell.

GOAL 1.2 | INDIRECT EMISSIONS REDUCTION

Advance efforts to reduce indirect carbon emissions (scope 3) from business travel and commuting.

Action Steps:

1. By 2030, 25% of our campus community will utilize alternative modes of travel to and from campus, and after 2030, a steady increase by 1% yearly.
2. Celebrate alternative modes of transportation with the broader campus community each semester.
3. Assess and implement pedestrian and personal recreation/ transportation device access on and around campus, ensuring safe travel for active transportation users.

4. Implement strategies outlined in the Transportation Demand Management plan.
5. Create a business travel online guide to help reduce and mitigate business travel.
6. Continue to leverage and better track hybrid remote work and instructional modalities to reduce emissions and ensure continuity during operational disruptions.

GOAL 1.3 | UNIVERSITY BUILDING DEVELOPMENT

Integrate sustainable, durable design principles into all new buildings and major renovations to deliver future-ready, high-performing facilities.

Action Steps:

1. Deliver high-performing, green facilities that meet recognized standards (e.g. LEED, Living Building Challenge).
2. Optimize life-cycle costs by using durable, sustainable materials and efficient systems, reducing long-term operational expenses.
3. Track furniture purchases and donations year over year to increase reuse and reduce waste.
4. Reuse or repair furniture or equipment to the extent possible.
5. Develop adaptive reuse of buildings rather than demolition by extending the useful life of existing facilities.

GOAL 1.4 | CAMPUS INFRASTRUCTURE

CSUSM will upgrade campus infrastructure to support long-term sustainability by implementing energy-efficient systems, renewable energy generation, water conservation technologies

and smart resource management, ensuring resilience and reduced environmental impact.

Action Steps:

1. Integrate renewable energy sources (e.g., solar, battery storage) into campus operations.
2. Enhance water efficiency through smart irrigation, rainwater harvesting, condensate and graywater reuse.
3. Support sustainable transportation infrastructure with EV charging stations for fleet, community and electric personal recreation/transportation devices.
4. Adopt smart technologies for real-time monitoring and optimization of energy and water use.
5. Upgrade to energy-efficient building systems (e.g., HVAC systems and LED lighting), strengthening climate resilience while improving long-term operational efficiency and reducing energy costs.

GOAL 1.5 | RESILIENCY PLANNING

Build a resilient, climate ready institution by aligning business continuity planning with sustainability and climate adaptation to safeguard community well-being and institutional stability.

Action Steps:

1. Incorporate climate risk and resilience considerations into CSUSM business continuity and emergency management plans.
2. Provide climate resilience and continuity training to key campus leaders and operational units.
3. Strengthen partnerships with local agencies and our surrounding communities to create opportunities for collaboration and regional resilience in the event of a climate emergency or emergency.



Commitment 2

TRANSFORMATIVE ACADEMICS

Accelerate awareness, understanding and action in the areas of sustainability, climate and environmental justice through teaching, research, creative activities and service to prepare our students to respond to the most pressing regional, national and global issues.

HIGHLIGHTS

- As of 2024, 28.5% of faculty conduct sustainability-related research.
- The Climate Action and Sustainability Center (CASC) is spearheading faculty micro-grants to facilitate faculty research and creative activity, and engage students in climate action. Ten faculty have received grants.
- Through two cohorts of the CSU Faculty Learning Community in Teaching Climate Change and Resilience, 15 faculty have infused these themes into more than 20 courses offered to students.
- New majors and minors have been developed to address the needs of our students and our region, including a minor in sustainability and a bachelor's degree in wildfire science and the urban interface.

CHALLENGES

- Competing priorities across teaching, research, creative activities and service – along with limited time, funds and resources – may affect faculty capacity to engage.
- Given faculty autonomy over course content, encouraging the inclusion of sustainability or climate-related material should be approached in ways that respect and support academic independence.
- Assessing student knowledge related to sustainability and climate literacy.
- Developing new sustainability- or climate-related courses can be a lengthy process.
- Funding opportunities may be limited.

**STUDENT SUCCESS, EQUITY,
AND RESILIENCY IMPACTS**

- Advances student success and social mobility through curricular and co-curricular education by giving students the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in an ever-changing world.
- Expands equitable access to high impact learning, including research, creative activity and service opportunities that are interdisciplinary, inclusive and connected to real world climate and sustainability challenges.
- Elevates diverse ways of knowing and lived experiences by centering equity, community knowledge and social justice within teaching, research, creative activities and service, strengthening inclusive excellence across disciplines.
- Strengthens climate resilience at campus and community scales through research, community engaged scholarship and solution oriented learning that supports adaptation, mitigation and regenerative practices.
- Positions students as co-creators of climate solutions, fostering innovation, critical thinking and collective action while aligning academic excellence with institutional and regional sustainability goals.



GOAL 2.1 | CURRICULUM

Embed sustainability and climate literacy across the CSUSM educational experience to advance innovation, climate resilience and social mobility.

Action Steps

1. Support the development of sustainability and climate-related course content, activities and learning outcomes through workshops, working groups, collaborations and shared resources.
2. Utilize the sustainability survey to assess student knowledge, skills, and understanding and identify further strategies to increase sustainability and climate action.
3. Connect classroom learning to real-world challenges that advance innovation and climate resilience, such as using the campus as a living laboratory.
4. Continue to update and share a list of courses with sustainability and climate-related content and explore highlighting these classes in our course catalog.
5. Develop and expand curricular and co-curricular opportunities for students that connect sustainability and climate with their professional aspirations.

**GOAL 2.2 | RESEARCH, CREATIVE ACTIVITIES,
AND SERVICE**

Facilitate and support impactful sustainability and climate-related interdisciplinary research, creative activities and service opportunities.

Action Steps

1. Organize opportunities to develop, support, disseminate and celebrate interdisciplinary research and creative activities associated with sustainability and climate.
2. Utilize the CASC to support the dissemination of appropriate grant opportunities and foster collaborations.
3. Facilitate grant writing for research and creative activity related to sustainability and climate.
4. Cultivate opportunities for faculty to engage in climate and sustainability-related research and creative activities.



Commitment 3

SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS OPERATIONS

Align sustainable campus operations and environmental practices with our educational mission by responsibly stewarding our natural resources and campus systems to support resilience, campus well being and future generations.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Since 2018, 83,494 pounds of goods have been diverted from the landfill through Crash's Clean Out program, whereby students donate items during move-out.
- CSUSM is diverting plastic film (i.e. plastic bags, plastic packaging materials) that typically goes to the landfill by working with nonprofit Plastic Beach.
- Current vendor contracts already include sustainability language during solicitations and contracts.
- CSUSM is an accredited arboretum, with an arboretum trail winding through the campus core that highlights more than 80 trees and shrubs, including an increasing number of drought-tolerant and native plants.
- Low-flow faucets, dual-flush toilets and waterless urinals have been installed to conserve water.
- Since an irrigation well was installed in 2013, the campus has saved \$2.7 million in utility costs and reduced potable water usage by 241 million gallons.
- Using Microsoft Teams and other electronic databases has allowed the campus to save money, save paper and operate virtually.
- A fire management plan was created that helps the campus manage its developed and undeveloped lands to mitigate any impacts due to flood, fire or other disasters.

CHALLENGES

- Changing individual behavior is a hurdle to reaching our operational goals.
- Obtaining and tracking accurate sustainable spend data can be difficult.
- Sustainable products are typically more expensive.
- Shifting landscaping practices away from herbicides and pesticides.

STUDENT SUCCESS, EQUITY, AND RESILIENCY IMPACTS

- Enhances student learning and well being by using campus operations as a living laboratory, connecting waste reduction, water conservation, procurement and land stewardship to experiential education and workforce-relevant skills.
- Advances equity through responsible resource stewardship, reducing environmental burdens, improving campus health outcomes and ensuring that sustainable operations benefit all campus users – especially those most vulnerable to environmental harms.
- Strengthens climate resilience by conserving critical natural resources, including water, materials and biodiverse landscapes, while reducing exposure to climate related risks such as drought, heat and ecosystem degradation.
- Reduces institutional environmental impacts through circular and sustainable systems, prioritizing waste prevention, reuse, responsible purchasing and compliance with CSU and state mandates to support long-term operational resilience.
- Fosters a culture of shared environmental responsibility, engaging students, faculty, staff and partners in sustainable practices that protect natural resources and support thriving campus and regional ecosystems for future generations.

GOAL 3.1 | ZERO WASTE

Transform CSUSM’s materials management system by prioritizing waste prevention, reuse and circular practices to minimize resource consumption, resulting in continued waste reduction and a diversion rate of 90% by 2045.

Action Steps:

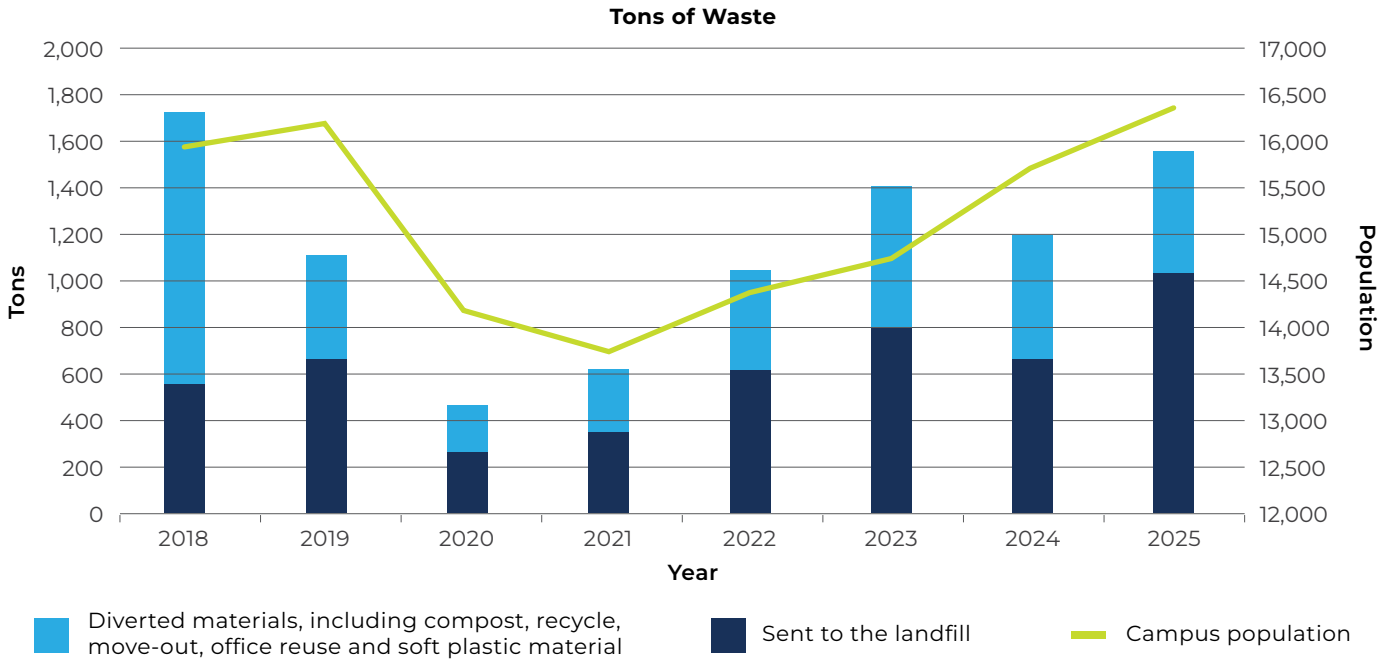
1. Prevent waste at the source by prioritizing reuse and reducing disposable materials to create an on-campus circular economy.
2. Institutionalize zero-waste practices through comprehensive education and training for students, staff and faculty on waste reduction, reuse and proper waste sorting.
3. Embed zero-waste infrastructure, services and reuse practices into all student housing facilities.
4. Prevent, reduce and recover food waste from dining operations while transitioning away from single use foodware to reusable and low-waste dining systems.
5. Expand compost infrastructure and operations to ensure that unavoidable organic materials are diverted from landfill disposal.
6. Explore the opportunity to establish a free on-campus reuse store to keep usable materials in circulation and out of the landfill.
7. Seek opportunities to decrease financial costs associated with excess waste.

GOAL 3.2 | BIODIVERSE LAND MANAGEMENT

Protect, enhance, and steward natural and managed landscapes to safeguard regional biodiversity and support the health, well-being, and resilience of the campus community.

Action Steps:

1. Practice alternative, sustainable methods for landscape maintenance, such as weed whacking, mulching and other non-herbicide/pesticide strategies to reduce the use of chemicals on our grounds.
2. Pursue Bee Campus USA status by 2035.
3. Work with faculty and Facilities Development & Management to ensure that locations throughout campus are available for research and academic needs.
4. Collaborate on “campus as a living lab” projects.
5. Develop a one-for-one tree and plant replacement guiding document.
6. Maintain an inventory of trees on ArborPro and uphold CSUSM’s Tree Campus certification.
7. Focus on planting California native plants and drought-tolerant plants.
8. Ensure proper irrigation practices that reduce water usage for natural landscape efforts, including the Calsense system that uses weather satellite data for irrigation control.



9. Eliminate gas power equipment and transition into electrical equipment as it becomes available and adequate to perform the task.

GOAL 3.3 | SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT

Enhance the framework for implementing and measuring sustainable procurement practices in alignment with CSU and State policies and mandates.

Action Steps:

1. Improve sustainability criteria in solicitations.
2. Improve data collection from vendors for reporting, with a focus on construction materials, electronics, cleaning supplies and office supplies.
3. Leverage existing vendor relationships to prioritize and expand sustainable products and services, advancing low-carbon and circular procurement practices
4. Make CSUSM sustainability expectations available and known to campus vendors.
5. Continue to promote campus spending with California-certified small businesses and the Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise program.
6. Ensure that campus partners, including auxiliaries, comply with the CSU sustainability policy and single-use plastics policy.

GOAL 3.4 | RESPONSIBLE SOURCING

Encourage campuswide awareness and engagement regarding sustainable purchasing and contracts.

Action Steps:

1. Promote and train campus community on selecting supplies and/or commodities made of recycled content to support the State Agency Buy Recycled Campaign (SABRC) and improve CSUSM’s Buy Recycled reporting percentages.
2. Establish sustainable spend baseline metrics and track progress annually for campus partners.
3. Work with our food service provider to find local, sustainable food options for our dining offerings.

GOAL 3.5 | WATER

Decrease water usage by 10% below 2019 baseline by 2030 to align with statewide water-efficiency standards under Assembly Bill 1668.

Action Steps:

1. Explore the development of a new irrigation well to irrigate athletic fields.
2. Use the most water- and cost-efficient fixtures available in new and existing infrastructure.
3. Investigate grass reduction around campus in accordance with AB 1572.
4. Continue to educate the campus community, especially campus housing, on water reduction efforts.



Commitment 4

CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Cultivate a campuswide culture of sustainability grounded in care, belonging and shared responsibility, empowering students, faculty, staff and partners to embed sustainability and climate action into everyday decisions, practices and institutional life.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Multiple food security programs, including the ASI Cougar Pantry, Swipe Out Hunger and food recovery efforts, provide students with reliable access to free food and basic needs support.
- The Planet Mentorship Program engages students from all disciplines in sustainability leadership through mentorship, sustainability and climate data visualizations.
- ASI's Sustainability Projects Fund invests in long-term, student-led initiatives that enhance campus sustainability, environmental stewardship and project management.
- Waste reduction and redistribution programs, such as Cougar Thrifts and Crash's Clean Out, support student success while diverting thousands of pounds of reusable items from the landfill.

CHALLENGES

- Fragmented ownership and siloed structures can limit cross-campus coordination, accountability and consistent implementation of sustainability initiatives.
- With a large commuter population, sustained engagement and participation in sustainability programs can be challenging.
- Building reciprocal, trust-based community partnerships requires significant time, capacity and long-term investment, particularly in communities facing climate inequities and resource constraints.

**STUDENT SUCCESS, EQUITY,
AND RESILIENCY IMPACTS**

- Integrates sustainability into the core academic and operational fabric of CSUSM, supports student success through experiential learning, career readiness and mission aligned education.
- Centers equity, belonging and social justice in climate action, ensuring that sustainability initiatives address disproportionate climate impacts, and expands access for current and historically marginalized communities.
- Builds a shared culture of responsibility and engagement, empowering students, faculty and staff to participate meaningfully in sustainability and institutional decision-making.
- Advances reciprocal community partnerships, generating real-world learning opportunities for students while supporting regional well-being, environmental justice and long-term resilience.



GOAL 4.1 | SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Embed sustainability across all university functions and operations to advance CSUSM’s mission, vision, values, and commitments while aligning with CSU strategic priorities.

Action Steps

1. Create a sustainability champions program that reaches across all divisions to advance sustainability action, share best practices and connect campuswide sustainability and climate goals to everyday operational efforts.
2. Collaborate with ASI to ensure that the student voice is meaningfully represented in advancing sustainability and climate action.
3. Expand and develop new training and educational opportunities, including online modules, to foster a culture of shared responsibility.

GOAL 4.2 | INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

Advance inclusive excellence by embedding equity and social justice into all sustainability and climate initiatives, elevating diverse voices in decision-making, validating our communities’ lived experiences, and expanding equitable access so our campus can thrive now and into the future.

Action Steps:

1. Apply an equity lens to all sustainability and climate initiatives by using equity assessment tools or guiding questions to evaluate who benefits, who may be burdened and whose voices are represented in sustainability planning and implementation.
2. Strengthen leadership development and expand equitable pathways for historically underrepresented students pursuing careers that incorporate sustainability, climate and social impact.
3. Invest in education, professional development and programming at the intersection of climate and justice by expanding support for courses, research, co-curricular programs and training that advance climate action alongside social justice, Indigenous knowledge, public health and economic equity.
4. Increase equitable access to sustainability resources and opportunities by ensuring that sustainability internships, research opportunities, leadership roles and funding are accessible to all students.



GOAL 4.3 | CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

Engage students and employees in meaningful sustainability and climate action through experiences and opportunities that support student success and institutional excellence.

Action Steps:

1. Further integrate sustainability practices, values, goals and opportunities during student orientation, employee onboarding and ongoing training to increase engagement.
2. Recognize and celebrate sustainability leadership by elevating the Sustainability Champions award to include a student and an employee.
3. Continue to provide co-curricular avenues for students to engage in meaningful career pathway opportunities.

GOAL 4.4 | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Expand and strengthen community partnerships to advance climate resiliency and sustainability, enhance regional well being and support the development of healthy, resilient and thriving communities for current and future generations.

Action Steps:

1. Support faculty and students in community-based projects that address real-world sustainability needs while providing tangible benefits to partner organizations.
2. Position CSUSM as a regional hub for sustainability and climate action through the CASC by hosting workshops and public events that bring together regional stakeholders to share knowledge, elevate community priorities and support collective action.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Ensuring alignment with the CSUSM strategic plan, CSU systemwide sustainability policy, AASHE STARS and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals was a central priority in the development of this plan. This table demonstrates how the plan is strategically aligned with all six CSUSM strategic plan goals and directly supports achievement of systemwide policy objectives, while positioning

the university for a STARS Platinum rating. Furthermore, by connecting our efforts to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, we underscore our commitment to preparing global leaders and affirm that our sustainability work extends beyond the campus to contribute to broader regional and global impact.

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS AND SCAP ALIGNMENT

CSUSM STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS	Goal 1: Academic excellence Goal 2: Student success Goal 3: Diversity, equity and inclusive excellence	Goal 4: Culture of care Goal 5: Community partnerships Goal 6: Distinctive institutional identity and reputation
UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)		
AASHE STARS 3.0 CREDITS	Academics (AC Credits): AC 1 – Sustainability course offerings AC 2 – Undergraduate programs AC 3 – Graduate programs AC 4 – Applied learning AC 5- Sustainability literacy assessment AC 6 – Sustainability research AC 7 – Center for sustainability research AC 10 – Responsible research and innovation Engagement (EN Credits): EN 1 – Outreach and communications EN 2 – Co-curricular activities EN 3 – Staff engagement and training EN 4 – Sustainability culture assessment EN 6 – Community partnerships EN 9 – Inter-campus collaboration	Planning & Administration (PA Credits): PA 2 – Commitments and planning PA 3 – Institutional governance Operations (OP Credits): OP 1 – Building design and construction OP 2 – Building operations and maintenance OP 3 – Water use OP 4 – Ecologically managed grounds OP 5 – Energy use OP 6 – Greenhouse gas emissions OP 7 – Dining service procurement OP 8 – Food recovery OP 9 – Sustainable procurement system OP 10 – Purchased goods OP 11 – Materials management OP 12 – Waste generation and recovery OP 13 – Vehicle fleet OP 14 – Commute modal split
CSU SYSTEMWIDE SUSTAINABILITY POLICY	• Carbon neutrality by 2045 (scopes 1 and 2) • Greenhouse gas reduction targets and reporting (including Scope 3 progress) • Renewable energy procurement and on-site generation • Building electrification and energy efficiency requirements • Green building standards (LEED or equivalent) • Zero-waste and waste diversion requirements • Single-use plastics reduction policy • Water efficiency compliance (AB 1668) • Sustainable procurement requirements • Transportation Demand Management (TDM) • Fleet electrification and alternative transportation • Sustainable food systems and dining requirements • Integration of sustainability into curriculum and research • Climate adaptation and resilience planning • Campus engagement, training and reporting requirements	



IMPLEMENTATION AND REPORTING

The success of this SCAP depends on coordinated, university-wide collaboration to turn goals into measurable outcomes. Each of CSUSM’s divisions, units, operational departments and colleges play a vital role in bringing this plan to life. By engaging with its commitments and goals and exploring opportunities to incorporate its recommendations and actions into planning, budgeting and reporting efforts, the campus community collectively can advance a more sustainable and climate-resilient future.

Now is the time to take an active role. Review the plan,

identify opportunities within your area and commit to embedding these priorities into your work to help move the university from vision to impact.

Next steps include developing an implementation guide that will identify responsible parties for each of the four commitments and their associated goals, ensuring accountability and sustained progress.

The SCAP is sponsored by the Finance and Administrative Services (FAS) division. Oversight, progress tracking and reporting are managed by the Sustainability Program.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank everyone who contributed their time, energy, knowledge and skills to making this plan come to life. Thank you to the members of the task force who met regularly and used their expertise to craft sections of this plan, and to the wider campus community for participating in conversation circles, tabling exercises and feedback forms.

CSUSM SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE ACTION TASKFORCE

Marissa Acosta

*Zero Waste and Sustainability Specialist,
Safety, Health and Sustainability*

Michelle Alves

*Campus Planner, Planning Design and
Construction*

Brittani Brown

*Associate Vice President, Finance
& Administrative Services (FAS)
Administration*

Heather Burkland

*Director, Energy Management and Utility
Services*

Victor Chavez

Assistant Director, Facility Services

Floyd Dudley

Director, Planning, Design and Construction

Randy Duncan

Senior Director, Budget Office

Belinda Garcia

Director, Parking and Commuter Services

Juliana Goodlaw-Morris

*Director, Sustainability and Climate Justice
and Co-Director, Climate Action and
Sustainability Center*

Annie Macias

Executive Director, Associated Students, Inc.

Miguel Angel Martinez

*Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Representative, Associated Students, Inc.*

Mitchell Maynard

Director, Facility Services

Alejandrina Mercado

*Administrative Support Coordinator II,
Office of Inclusive Excellence*

Camryn Nelson

*Sustainability Coordinator, Safety, Health,
and Sustainability*

Mark Norita

*Associate Vice President, Facilities,
Development, Management*

Ally Parker

*Sustainable Transportation Coordinator,
Parking and Commuter Services*

Jennifer Ralph

*Emergency Manager, Emergency
Management and Business Continuity*

Ariel Stevenson

*Deputy Chief Diversity Officer, Office of
Inclusive Excellence*

Lindsay Swensen

Director, Procurement and Contracts

Darcy Taniguchi

*Associate Professor, CSTEM and
Co-Director, Climate Action and
Sustainability Center*

Leon Wyden

*Vice President, FAS, Presidents
Administrative Team Sponsor*

CSUSM COMMUNITY CONVERSATION CIRCLES INPUT

- Attendees from the March 2026 conversation circles
- All survey respondents
- Student participants in our tabling events in March and April 2026.

DEFINITIONS

ADAPTIVE REUSE

Repurposing existing buildings for a new purpose, different from the original design, lowering the carbon footprint associated with demolition, and the production of new materials.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

A plan that lays out how CSUSM’s academic, operational and auxiliary departments will continue to function when normal operating procedures are not feasible.

CARBON FOOTPRINT

A measurement of the total greenhouse gas emissions – direct and indirect – associated with an individual, organization, product or event across all stages of its life cycle, from material extraction and manufacturing to use and disposal .

CARBON NEUTRALITY

A state in which an institution balances the total amount of greenhouse gases it emits with an equivalent amount of emissions removed, reduced or offset.

CLIMATE ACTION AND SUSTAINABILITY CENTER (CASC)

CSUSM’s center aims to advance educational, research and engagement activities focused on climate change, climate justice and sustainability for our North San Diego County region.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Long-term shifts in temperature and weather patterns. Natural shifts, due to changes in the sun’s activity or large volcanic eruptions, occur. But since the 1800s, human activities have been

the main driver of climate change, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

A lens through which social justice principles are incorporated into sustainability, recognizing that climate change amplifies socioeconomic disparities. Action requires collaborative and inclusive approaches to the climate crisis that create a fairer and more just world in the process.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The capacity of a campus, community or system to anticipate, prepare for, respond to and recover from climate-related hazards – such as extreme heat, wildfires, flooding or power interruptions. This includes both physical infrastructure and social equity, ensuring that vulnerable populations are protected and that operations can continue or rapidly recover from disruptions.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As a regional anchor institution and engine of transformative knowledge, community engagement is a commitment to building a stronger and more vibrant region by connecting the university to surrounding communities in mutually beneficial ways.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Active learning, experiential exercises or authentic assessments that encourage students to move beyond passive listening to produce original work and critical insights.

DECARBONIZATION

The process of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, primarily by moving away from fossil fuels and utilizing renewable energy. This also can include transportation and building retrofits.

EQUITY

A means of corrective justice that seeks to identify the remnants of oppression within institutional norms and implement transformative efforts to reconstruct institutional structures, policies and practices.

GEOEXCHANGE

An efficient heating and cooling system that uses underground piping and a heat pump to extract ground heat to warm a building in the winter or reverse the process to absorb and transfer indoor heat back into the cooler earth during the summer.

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

Knowledge, mastery, achievement and success are distributed equitably across the university, ensuring that diversity and inclusion are systematically leveraged to catalyze student learning, social justice, educational excellence and institutional excellence. Equity requires us to continue to work toward full access and success for all — across multiple dimensions of diversity — by identifying and eliminating barriers, preventing bias and discrimination, and providing multiple and inclusive pathways to success. In an inclusive organization, differences are valued as a source of learning and collective growth.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Materials and ecological systems provided by the environment, such as air, water, and soil.

PROCUREMENT

Purchasing goods and services through strategic sourcing and contracting.

RESOURCES

Assets – environmental, financial, human or material – used to support campus operations and well-being.

SCOPE 1 EMISSIONS

Direct greenhouse gas emissions from sources owned or controlled by the institution. Examples include on-site power generation and fleet vehicles.

SCOPE 2 EMISSIONS

Indirect emissions from the generation of purchased electricity, steam, heating or cooling consumed by the institution. Although the emissions occur at a power plant rather than on campus, the institution is responsible for them because it purchases the energy from these offsite power plants.

SCOPE 3 EMISSIONS

All other indirect emissions that occur as a consequence of campus activities but originate from sources not owned or controlled by the institution. Examples include commuting by students, staff and faculty; air and ground travel for university business; waste disposal; and purchased goods and services.

SOCIAL MOBILITY

The education and experiences that students receive at CSUSM will increase

their capacity to transcend barriers faced by earlier generations, unlocking their potential for lifelong success. It will empower them to transform their lives, and that of their families and communities. It will expand their choices and their opportunities to follow their dreams. In addition, communities and organizations benefit from a broadened talent pipeline, innovation, greater social equity and economic mobility across all sectors.

STEWARDSHIP

Responsible planning, management and care of the campus’ environmental, social and economic resources.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Students succeed when they achieve their own goals, personal, professional and educational, prepared to thrive in diverse environments as resilient and engaged global citizens. We commit to an expansive and holistic approach grounded in equity and social mobility that looks beyond access, retention and graduation to provide seamless, equitable, and effective support for all students throughout their life cycle: from the first point of contact, in the classroom and outside it, through graduation, and beyond.

SUSTAINABILITY

Holistically addressing the interconnectedness among societies, all living beings and ecosystems by ensuring socially just, ecologically sound and resilient communities that value diversity, innovation, fiscal stewardship, health and well-being for all by creating

a positive, local-to-global impact for current and future generations.

ZERO WASTE

The practice of designing and managing products, processes, and behaviors to prevent waste and conserve resources by keeping materials in use rather than sending them to landfills or incinerators. Zero waste is often demonstrated by 90-95% diversion of waste going to the landfill. CSUSM’s goal is 90% diversion by 2045.

References

AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023. (n.d.). IPCC. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>

California, S. O. (n.d.). San Diego Region- California Climate Adaptation Strategy. <https://climateresilience.ca.gov/regions/san-diego.html>

McNair, T. B., Bensimon, E. M., & Malcom-Piqueux, L. (2020). *From equity talk to equity walk: Expanding equity work in higher education*. Jossey-Bass.

CSUSM. (2022). CSUSM Strategic Plan. <https://www.csusm.edu/powerofcsusm/index.html>



California State University
SAN MARCOS

[CSUSM.EDU/SUSTAINABILITY](https://csusm.edu/sustainability) | [SUSTAINABILITY@CSUSM.EDU](mailto:sustainability@csusm.edu) | 760-750-4502