

# VIEWS FROM THE WATERSHED

Winter, 2022

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## **Chairman's Column** by Stephen Williams

How far back can you go in your memory bank? If you are like me it depends on how far back and what the topic is I am trying to remember. My hint for you is a 2016-2017 timeframe and the topic is funding for conservation practices. Back then the Santa Cruz NRCDC held three workshops. The first identified Farm Bill practices that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) would fund. The second was presentations by State, federal and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) entities that provide funding for conservation practices. The third was pointers from experts about applying for the various programs that they offer, and tips on how to complete the paperwork for the applications. Is this reminder helping you recall the advice given? It is time for you to go through your files and dust off the notes and handouts from these workshops, especially if you have any conservation practices you want to place on your farm or rangeland.

There is still project money available. For instance, the recently passed (and inappropriately named) Inflation Reduction Act allocated over \$8 billion to the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). That's right. \$8 billion. It is too soon to know what Arizona's allocation will be and what share of that will be distributed to NRCDC Team 7. Team 7 includes what we fondly recall as the Tucson Field Office, and the office which historically worked with our District.

This is just one pot of money and one agency. Forestry programs which have rangeland linkage, such as fuel reduction and replacement of fire damaged rangeland improvements, have also received an infusion of State dollars through the Division of Forestry and Fire Management. The same reliable partners, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, the Arizona Game and Fish Department Habitat Partnership Committee program, and the Department of Defense Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape program, are still ready and willing to work with landowner Cooperators on behalf of working landscapes.

Don't be afraid to ask these entities for help completing an application. They all made the offer of assistance at

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our prior workshops and they understand that this kind of public service is still part of their jobs.

Our District had a successful presence at the Santa Cruz County Fair in September. We had a steady flow of inquiring attendees. We signed up some new Cooperators and dispensed advice to those who sought it. All of our Supervisors (Bill Schock, Dan Bell, Andy Jackson and myself) shared time at our booth, as did our faithful clerk, Chris Postel, who provided snacks and sandwiches. One of the highlights of the first Fair day is the school children from around the County who attend. The District hands out our version of "swag." It is pencils and erasers in the shape of farm animals. We were assisted in the swag distribution by staff from NRCS Team 7. They were: Alisha Phipps, Rangeland Management Specialist; Heather Knight, Rangeland Management Specialist; Yissel Martinez, Soil Conservationist; and, Melanie Stephanovic, Civil Engineer. We very much appreciated their assistance!

It is my duty as Chairman to remind Cooperators that our Cooperator Agreement states, "I, the undersigned, have natural resources under my control in regard to which I agree to protect, conserve and practice wise use...". Those who do not take this oath to heart, and are lax in their management obligations to the resources they are entrusted to manage draw negative attention to all of us. Not only is it an embarrassment to neighbors and fellow Cooperators, this behavior reinforces a belief that many environmentalists hold that various forms of agriculture, such as livestock grazing, should be banished from the land. Our reputation as conscientious stewards of the land and natural resources needs to be upheld, not diminished.

We have a vacancy on the District Board of Directors. If anyone is interested in serving on the District Board, please contact me at smw85611@gmail.com.

## Arizona ranchers, feds clash over potential new rules for Mexican Gray Wolf livestock kills

By: [Courtney Holmes](#) *Posted at 6:22 PM, Nov 03, 2022 and last updated 6:22 PM, Nov 03, 2022*

The vast country in Eastern Arizona is one of the reasons rancher Tom Paterson says it's so difficult to find his cows that may have been attacked by Mexican Gray Wolves. "If we do find that cow, it has to be a relatively fresh kill," he said. Fresh wolf kills are more likely to be confirmed by investigators with USDA Wildlife Services. That confirmation allows ranchers to be paid when their livestock is killed. Paterson said some form of a compensation program has been around for nearly 20 years, but he is convinced, "they're going to change the rules so that there'll be more probable kills. A lot fewer confirmed kills." Confirming a kill triggers an investigation to find the wolf responsible which could lead to relocation or lethal removal.

Paterson and other ranchers believe there is political pressure to stop the practice by changing criteria to make wolf kills harder to prove and resulting in a reduction of confirmations. USDA Wildlife Services investigates reports of depredations and sets the rules for confirmation. According to the agency, since 1998, it has confirmed 1,157 wolf kills and/or attacks on livestock. ABC15 asked Western Regional Director Keith Wehner if there was a belief within the agency that there are too many wolf kills being confirmed.

"I wouldn't say that necessarily," he said. Over a five-year period, Wehner said that wolf removals "went from pretty regular lethal removal of wolves to almost no lethal removal of wolves." When Wehner inquired why he said he was told, "the investigations aren't as clean as they should be." He said that the goal of the changes isn't to reduce the number of confirmed kills but to better justify why they are confirmed. "And make sure that when somebody who doesn't trust Wildlife Service's investigations comes and looks at those they can say clearly, 'okay, that's there's obvious evidence of a wolf kill here.'"

ABC15 asked who does not trust the agency. "There's a whole group of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) that generally don't trust Wildlife Services," he said. "A lot of it's a philosophical difference, in wildlife management." Wild Earth Guardians counts itself as one of the groups that does not trust the investigations according to wolf advocate Chris Smith. The group has sued the federal government several times for stronger wolf protections in its quest to see Mexican Gray Wolves restored throughout their historical range from Western New Mexico to the Southern Rockies. "Subpopulations should be at least 750 wolves," he told ABC15. "That's what scientists say indicates full recovery of the species. So that's our end game." He said the group mistrusts the USDA Wildlife Services investigations because it "works on behalf of the livestock industry" and has "an inherent conflict of interest when investigating livestock losses." Smith points to a May 2022 report from the Intercept that highlights a whistleblower who claimed some in the agency were "erroneously confirming wolf kills." Smith said the agency and the ranchers have a duty to reduce interaction between livestock and wolves to prevent depredations. "That includes, you know, removing carcasses, putting up fences, putting up fladry (fencing) when necessary, being a real cowboy out on the range, when necessary," he said.

Ranchers say they have prevention measures in place. Ranchers like Carey Dobson say he and his workers sometimes camp in their pastures for days at a time to keep wolves from their cattle. He says even current compensation doesn't begin to cover the amount of money ranchers are losing due to wolf presence alone. "For all the animals we don't find, for all the moves we have to do, the hay we have to bring in, the water we have to haul when we have to move out of pastures. There's just so much to it," Dobson said. The Arizona Game and Fish Department which heads up the wolf recovery program for the state deploys helicopters and range riders to push the wolves back into the forest. About half the wolves have GPS collars but ranchers are not allowed real-time access to that information, something Paterson believes could help prevent some livestock deaths. "We can tell where the wolves are in our pastures, we can send someone out to haze the wolf away, or to find the kills," he said. While the ranchers gear up to fight the changes Paterson says they are doing what they can to mitigate their loss.

<https://www.abc15.com/news/local-news/investigations/arizona-ranchers-feds-clash-over-potential-new-rules-for-mexican-gray-wolf-livestock-kills>

## **Grazing: USDA studies rotational grazing adoption across the nation**

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS Capital Press Nov 3, 2022 Updated Nov 3, 2022

A study by USDA's Economic Research Service finds 40% of cow-calf operations use rotational grazing and less than half of them use intensive rotational grazing. Of the operations reporting using rotational grazing, 24% are practicing basic rotational grazing and 16% are practicing intensive rotational grazing.

The study also found rotational grazing adoption, seasonal use and stocking density vary by region and rotational grazing is more common in the Northern Plains, Western Corn Belt and Appalachian regions. In addition, most basic rotational grazing systems are relatively simple, with five or fewer paddocks, an average paddock size of 40 acres or more and permanent fencing.

The Rotational Grazing Adoption by Cow-Calf Operations is one of the first nationally representative datasets to dive into the prevalence of rotational grazing in cow-calf operations and how producers implement the practice. Rotating livestock through fenced grazing areas, or paddocks, is used to manage forage production, forage quality and environmental quality. But despite the breadth of support for rotational grazing, only limited information was available on its use. USDA set out to fill in the information gap with a 2018 survey directed at cow-calf producers included in the 2018 Agricultural Resource Management Survey. USDA released the findings of its study Nov. 1. The study provides details on how frequently grazing operations rotate livestock between paddocks, key system characteristics such as average paddock size and how outcomes such as stocking density and cost relate to system characteristics.

Other key findings:

- Retained stockers — operations that retain the majority of their calves through the initial feeder stage for later sale to feedlots — are the most likely to adopt intensive rotational grazing.
- Intensive rotational grazing operations have a significantly higher average stocking density than basic rotational grazing operations.
- Basic rotational grazing operations tend to have larger herds and more grazing land on average than either intensive rotational grazing operations or continuous grazing operations.
- Rotational grazing operations are more likely than continuous grazing operations to participate in Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program.
- The Appalachian region, with the smallest average grazing acreage per operation, is the only area in which intensive rotational grazing is more common than basic rotational grazing.
- In the Delta states and Southeast, a greater share of rotational grazing operations practice year-round rotational grazing.
- In each region, the stocking density for intensive rotational grazing operations is higher than that for basic rotational grazing operations.
- The Delta states and Southeast region had the most densely stocked grazing land.
- Intensive rotational grazing systems tend to have more paddocks and smaller average paddock size than basic rotational grazing systems.
- About 46% of intensive rotational grazing operations only spend an average of one hour a week moving their cattle, compared to about 36% of basic rotational grazing operations.
- Rotational grazing operations using four or more rotations per paddock per year are more likely to spend three or more hours a week moving cattle.

[https://www.capitalpress.com/ag\\_sectors/livestock/usda-examines-rotational-grazing-adoption-nationwide/article\\_21051f08-5bae-11ed-8a5f-cbfc1ef347fd.html](https://www.capitalpress.com/ag_sectors/livestock/usda-examines-rotational-grazing-adoption-nationwide/article_21051f08-5bae-11ed-8a5f-cbfc1ef347fd.html)