

# VIEWS FROM THE WATERSHED

Winter, 2024

97 Old Ruby Rd, Nogales, AZ 85621

Questions, contact Chris Postel, clerk.scnr.cd@gmail.com

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

### THE USDA MODEL – AND HOW IT CHANGED

The title of this column is actually the title of Chapter 55 in the book, *COMMITTED TO CONSERVATION*, by R. Neil Sampson and Robert W. Sampson. They are a father and son, respectively, who both had lengthy careers in the Soil Conservation Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Both worked in the Northwest part of the country. Neil also had a detail to Washington, D.C. and later became the Executive for the National Association of Conservation Districts. Rob spent most of his career as an engineer in the Northwest along with a stint in Alaska. As of the book's 2015 publication the SCS and NRCS have had 15 Chiefs. Collectively, Neil and Rob have worked for all but the first two.

The authors provided a historical perspective on changes that occurred in the agency over a span of years due to Farm Bill directives, politically appointed leadership replacing professional leadership, and a steady reduction of field staff resources shifting to an administrative focus. Their hearts were in the field work preparing conservation plans. Yet even as they promoted to positions up the ladder they provided a field person's perspective for how the inevitable changes would impact the landowners who implemented practices on the ground.

The authors acknowledge that technological equipment has changed how the job is performed. Calculations done by a slide rule are now figured on a computer spreadsheet, and all surveying is done by electronic machines instead of a manual transit and "throwing a chain." What they emphasize is that technical assistance still consists of the day to day effort of showing up at a farm or ranch and looking at the situation. Discussions and agreements with the local landowner, the person who works the land, are still the only way to change land management.

NRCS thinks of itself as a technical agency, so technical knowledge and skill are prized in the agency, although the focus on program administration has grown in recent years. The authors point out that if technical skills, the ability to read and understand the land, and the planning acumen to lay out a conservation system that works are the backbone of NRCS credibility, the agency will need to

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decide how this coexists with program administration and the intense and consistent pressure on effectively spending the program money that Congress has appropriated.

The authors go on to state that the skills involved come not just from formal education, but also from experience. A technician who works with dozens of landowners a year gains an increasing knowledge reservoir of problems analyzed and solved. Each solution builds competence that is more than technical – it also represents an approach that worked and might work elsewhere at some future time. As NRCS field people spend more time in the office working with program documents and rules, and as staff levels stay the same or decline, there is less opportunity to be in the field solving conservation problems. Whether this will have a negative effect on the overall technical competency in the agency is a concern.

Both men observe that conservation is the result of a scientifically based communication effort that blends the professional's skills with the landowner's knowledge of their situation. The limiting factor to planning and designing conservation management and practices is trained planners and technicians. That has not changed.

They go on to state that a shift from the technical focus to an administrative one has been evident since passage of the 1985 Farm Bill. The NRCS is pushing 10 times more money out the door that it did 25 years ago. (Note: this figure does not take into account the billions of dollars of recently authorized spending during the Biden Administration.) Although some may bemoan the fact that the programs are driving the agency's agenda, every signal the field staff gets from the National and State offices is driven by allocating the money and passing the audit. There is no pretense anymore – program regulations and dollars rule the day.

(Continued from Page 1 THE USDA MODEL – AND HOW IT CHANGED)

In the jockeying around the 2002 Farm Bill, the final transfer of fund management responsibility for the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) was transferred from the Farm Service Agency to NRCS. NRCS now does all the advertising, application ranking and contracting with landowners to install conservation practices. NRCS still plans, designs and certifies the installation of the conservation practices, but now they also write the financial contract with the landowner and document and authorize payment.

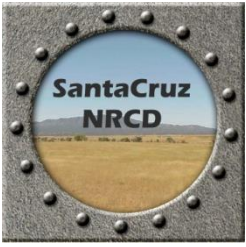
Neil and Rob close with the admonition that with new responsibilities comes oversight. NRCS's new found financial authorities raised it to a level of scrutiny that was very unfamiliar. The financial audit hammered one of the last nails into the coffin of conservation planning. Audit performance became part of the State Conservationist's performance plan. More EQIP contracts brought more money to pay salaries. The contracts and payments would be done right. These priorities were very clear to the field offices. There is talk among the stakeholders, including Conservation Districts, that the administrative people seem to be replacing technical competence at many field offices.

These are interesting observations from a couple of agency professionals who watched throughout their careers as changing emphases in Farm Bills caused change in the SCS/NRCS. They help you understand how we arrived at where we are today.

### News Briefs

- Andy Jackson resigned from the SC NRCD board effective January, 2024. Christin Peterson (Red Rock Ranch Patagonia) is the new supervisor. (Her Bio is on Page 6)
- Elections will be held in 2024 and the board still has a vacant supervisor position. If you are interested in the supervisor position, please email our clerk (Chris Postel) at [clerk.scnrcd@gmail.com](mailto:clerk.scnrcd@gmail.com)
- The District's mailing address has changed and is now: 97 Old Ruby Rd, Nogales, AZ 85621
- The Nogales Water Festival (Project WET) was held on May 2, 2023 (Pictures on Page 5).
- Santa Fe Ranch Days was held on May 19, 2023 (Pictures on Page 5).
- AACD Summer Meeting (Aug 8-9): There was a good representation of NRCS employees, at all levels of the agency, in attendance at the AACD summer meeting. There were 3 panels: agency coordination and partnership efforts driven by local work groups, how Conservation Districts and local work groups can drive USDA's Climate Smart Program, and a panel of four state legislators discussing how they approach water, energy and issues.
- The 2023 Monitoring program was concluded.
- Stephen Williams was awarded the **2023 Scout Award** for his volunteer work with the Santa Cruz County Fair & Rodeo Assoc. See picture below.





**Santa Cruz Natural Resource Conservation District  
97 Old Ruby Rd, Nogales, AZ 85621**

**COOPERATOR AGREEMENT  
ARIZONA NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

To Santa Cruz Natural Resource Conservation District (SCNRCD):

I, the undersigned, have natural resources under my control in regard to which I agree to protect, conserve, and practice wise use. My primary residence is within the SC NRCD's boundaries.

Cooperator: \_\_\_\_\_ Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: For voting purposes in District elections, Cooperators are people not corporate entities

First Class Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Acres, if any: \_\_\_\_\_ Present Land Use: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Natural Resource issues or problems on my property, if any:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

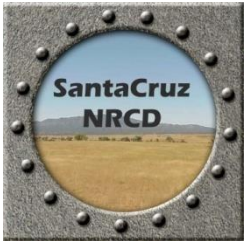
Suggested Donation: \_\_\_\_\_\$25 \_\_\_\_\_Other (Please make checks payable to Santa Cruz NRCD)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Cooperator) (Date)

The District agrees to assist the above-named cooperator and cooperate with said cooperator in every lawful way for the protection, conservation, and wise use of the natural resources described above.

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Authorized Board Member) (Title) (Date)

*Definition:* "District Cooperator" means any person who has entered into a cooperative agreement with a Natural Resource District for the purpose of protecting, conserving, and practicing wise use of the natural resources under his control. (Section 37-1002, Arizona Revised Statutes)



# Santa Cruz Natural Resource Conservation District Cooperator Questionnaire

Information about which of the following items would help you as a District Cooperator? Rank your top 5 choices with 1 being most important. Final rankings will help determine funding availability for future conservation projects.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low stress livestock handling<br><input type="checkbox"/> Livestock nutrition<br><input type="checkbox"/> Grazing management planning<br><input type="checkbox"/> Noxious plant and pest control<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Livestock water developments<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Prescribed burning<br><input type="checkbox"/> Relationships with agencies<br><input type="checkbox"/> Protection of historic sites<br><input type="checkbox"/> Creation of fish habitat<br><input type="checkbox"/> Managing small acreage horse properties<br><input type="checkbox"/> Equipment rental needs _____<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe) _____<br>_____<br>_____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Livestock reproduction<br><input type="checkbox"/> Plant identification<br><input type="checkbox"/> Rangeland monitoring<br><input type="checkbox"/> Soil erosion control<br><input type="checkbox"/> Soil health<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Irrigation system, design & install<br><input type="checkbox"/> Flood <input type="checkbox"/> Sprinkler <input type="checkbox"/> Drip<br><input type="checkbox"/> Grant writing & funding sources<br><input type="checkbox"/> Protection of archaeological sites<br><input type="checkbox"/> Creation of wildlife habitat<br><input type="checkbox"/> Zoning, land use plans, ordinances |
|---|--|

When completed, please email to: [clerk.scnrcd@gmail.com](mailto:clerk.scnrcd@gmail.com) or mail to address below:

Santa Cruz NRC D  
 97 Old Ruby Rd  
 Nogales, AZ 85621

Cooperator: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: \_\_\_\_\_



Nogales Water Festival, Nogales HS students taught 280 4<sup>th</sup> graders from the 5 county schools



Santa Fe Ranch Days on May 19 (50 6<sup>th</sup> grade students (Desert Shadow middle-school attended))



Santa Cruz County Fair (Sep 15-17), Booth & Board (Bill Schock, Stephen Williams & Dan Bell)



The AACD Summer Meeting on August 8-9 at Tucson El Conquistador Hilton Hotel



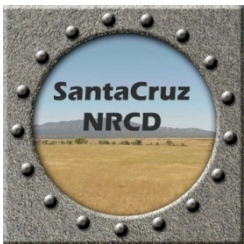
**Chris Peterson New Santa Cruz NRCD supervisor**

Christin Peterson, owner/manager of Redrock Ranch in Patagonia. I've been in the Sonoita/Patagonia community since 1993 working with the School System, Sonoita Fire Department, Church, Sonoita Crossroads and Sport Leagues prior to ranching. Originally from Wisconsin, then after spending 8 years in Haiti we moved to Arizona. I have 7 children and 13 grandchildren to keep me busy and on task. We bought the Redrock Ranch in 1997 and I have been raising black angus cattle since 2008. I enjoy working with people and making things happen. I look forward to being a productive board member of the NRCD. 2014 Article link: <https://westernhorseman.com/ranching/women-of-the-west/women-of-the-west-christin-peterson/>

**We are updating our Cooperator list; so, please complete the Cooperator agreement & questionnaire, mail to Old Ruby Rd address (below) or scan/email to [clerk.scnrcd@gmail.com](mailto:clerk.scnrcd@gmail.com)**

**Calendar**

- Feb 3 (8-noon): **Conserving Your Legacy**, Palominas Fire District Station, Hereford. Lunch provided by Arizona Land & Water Trust.
- Feb 28, 2024: **Santa Cruz NRCD Quarterly Meeting**, Wild Horse Restaurant, Patagonia



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