

SCNRCD NEWSLETTER

VIEWS FROM THE WATERSHED

Fall, 2024

SCNRCD, 97 Old Ruby Rd, Nogales, AZ 85621 Questions email Chris Postel, clerk.scnrcd@gmail.com

Chairman's Column by Stephen Williams

Are you aware that the Santa Cruz NRC D pays to have rangeland monitoring performed annually on select ranches within our District? We sure do. The Board of Directors thought it is important to gather monitoring data in case radical environmental groups ever brought lawsuits against District Cooperators alleging damage to rangelands and/or adverse impacts from livestock grazing to threatened or endangered species.

In 2008, the Santa Cruz NRC D contracted with Jim Koweek of Arizona Revegetation and Monitoring to perform the monitoring. He works with Natural Resource Specialists from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to identify transects to be read each Fall. We fund the reading of 20-25 transects per year. Rangeland monitoring means making repeated measurements or observations over time to establish whether or not changes in selected resource attributes (i.e. vegetation, soil, water) have occurred. The protocol the District uses includes Frequency, for changes in the number and/or distribution of plants, Precipitation and Repeat Photography at the Key Areas.

Weather, particularly precipitation, is the main environmental factor affecting rangeland vegetation. Precipitation data should always be analyzed when interpreting monitoring data. If no data are available for a monitoring site, the nearest station with a good record should be used, recognizing that rainfall amounts can vary greatly over short distances due to topography or elevation. Annual totals are not very informative according to the Arizona Grazing Lands Conservation Association's publication, "Guide to Rangeland Monitoring and Assessment" (Smith et.al., 2012). The Guide suggested summarizing data by growing season. For example, Arizona's should be summarized by using the months of June through September as

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the summer growing season, and October through May as the cool season period. The best protocol would be to have a rain gauge at each Key Area where monitoring is conducted. Hopefully, Cooperators have more gauges on the ranch than just the one at the headquarters. The Santa Cruz NRC D offers free Tru Check rain gauges every year at our County Fair booth. Come by the booth this September and pick up a rain gauge or two. The data you collect will help Jim Koweek and the NRCS personnel in accurately interpreting the results of your Fall rangeland monitoring.

For the past two sessions of the Arizona Legislature the Arizona Association of Conservation Districts has sponsored legislation to create a State Natural Resource Conservation Board. This Board will be comprised of Supervisors from NRC Ds and agency representatives from the State Land Department, Department of Agriculture and Department of Forestry and Fire Management. The Board will administer the Natural Resource Conservation Fund, which will fund Districts' operations, as well as on the ground projects that are approved by the Board. The creation of this Board will change the historic relationship the Districts have had with the State Land Department. The ASLD will no longer administer the Districts' funding and elections. More on this structure in a future newsletter, as this authorizing legislation is awaiting the Governor's signature.

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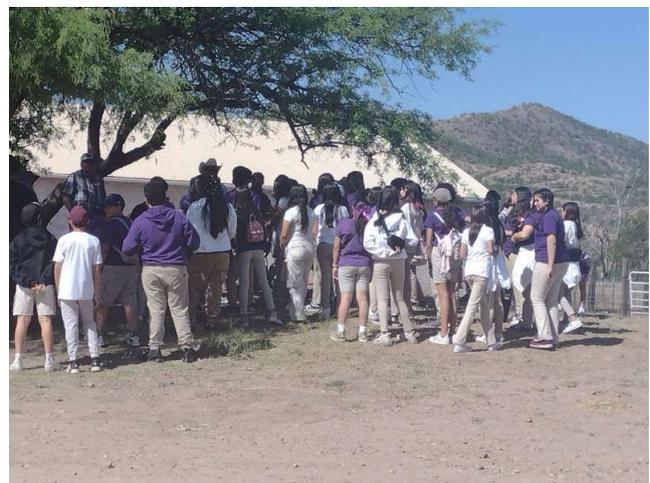
Let me leave you with this. The Winter, 2024 issue of the University of Arizona's Alumni Magazine carried an article about Nevada's Secretary of State, Cisco Aguilar. Mr. Aguilar discussed the concept of "Community Rent." This is the obligation for us to give back to the people and places that formed us. This speaks to volunteerism and the need for District Cooperators to step up and serve the Santa Cruz NRC. We have a vacancy on our Board for a Supervisor position. Contact me, or our Clerk, Chris Postel, if you are interested in serving. We can provide you the information you need to get started in this rewarding experience.

Stephen Williams, SCNRCD Chairman

2024 Santa Fe Ranch Days: May 10, 45 students (Desert Shadows Middle School) attended. The following organizations participated: AZ Game & Fish Dept., US Forest Service (Fire), NRCS, the Santa Fe Ranch Foundation, and the Santa Cruz NRC. 108 hamburgers served!!



Az Game & Fish talking about AZ native wildlife



Dean Fish & Dan Bell outlining the day's activities

Nogales Water Festival: On May 14, Nogales high school students taught over 400+ 4th grade students about Watersheds, the Water Cycle, the Groundwater System, & Water Conservation Technology. Financial sponsors: Santa Fe Ranch Foundation & Santa Cruz NRC



High School students getting their teaching assignments



Students learning about the Water Cycle

50x40 Coalition by Stephen Williams

You have undoubtedly heard of the 30x30 scheme by the Biden Administration, but have you heard of 50x40? A coalition of organizations is dedicated to cutting the global production and consumption of animal products by 50% by 2040. They have declared “Livestock production is the New Coal.” See organizations link: <https://50by40.org/>

The goal of the effort is to reduce the global production of animal products by half by 2040, with strategies based on a variety of focal areas, from animal rights to climate change - but all joined together in their single goal. It is the climate change argument to which most of these special interest groups have coalesced.

The chairman of the board of directors of 50x40 is Chris Laue, a vegan and animal rights philanthropist who also serves on the boards of the Humane Society of the United States and the Good Food Institute, created to promote plant and cell based alternatives to animal products “to effect the transformation of the global food system.”

Climate change is now used by groups like the Center for Biological Diversity, Western Watersheds, Greenpeace, Wolves of the Rockies, Project Coyote and Wild Earth Guardians to lobby the U.S. Department of Agriculture to “immediately make meat and dairy reduction a key part of the USA’s climate strategy” and to align all USDA programs with this new strategy. Their letter to the USDA suggested, “Cutting 90% of beef consumption and reducing half of our consumption of other meats with plant based foods would save more than 2 billion tons of greenhouse gasses from being released by 2030 - equivalent to taking half of the world’s cars off the road for a year.”

The letter did not acknowledge the variety of ways that U.S. animal agriculture is working to reduce its greenhouse emissions, or that animal ag is a small portion of such emissions in this country.

Another strategy against animal ag appears to be occurring in banking. The United Nations convened Net Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA) is a group of leading global banks committing “to transition the real economy to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.”

U.S. banks joining this Alliance include Bank of America, Citi, J.P. Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, Wells Fargo, Areti Bank and Amalgamated Bank. Concerned with NZBA’s potential impact to American agriculture, a group of 12 state agricultural commissioners sent a letter to the banks expressing their concern that NZBA’s policy could harm food production and result in increased prices, decreased food availability, and limited credit access for farmers.

That caught the attention of a group of Congressional members who sent a similar letter to NZBA pointing out, “At a time when global demand for food is rising and wars continue to affect the global food supply of food and agricultural inputs, we cannot sacrifice our nation’s food security to the demands of the far-left climate agenda.”

Animal rights activists have also recognized that both the climate movement and alternative protein market are an important opportunity for the animal protection movement to advance the potential to eventually make animal free consumption a social norm.

It is important to know that all who are promoting a climate crisis are not exactly honest brokers.

Arizona's Proposed Constitutional Amendment:
A Right To a Clean and Healthy Environment
By Stephen Williams

In the 56th Legislature, Second Regular Session, Senate Concurrent Resolution 1031 was introduced to amend the Arizona Constitution. This would amend Article II by adding Section 38, a right to a clean and healthy environment.

Section 38. A. reads: Each person, including a person in a future generation, has a right to a clean and healthy environment, including pure water, clean air, healthy ecosystems and a stable climate, and to the preservation of the natural, cultural, scenic and healthful qualities of the environment.

Section 38. C. reads: The rights prescribed in this section are inherent, inalienable and indefeasible and are among those rights reserved for all people. This state shall not infringe on these rights. This section and the rights prescribed in this section are self-executing.

A timely article from the Sierra Magazine by Dana Drugmand, dated March 28, 2024, shed some light on the background of this amendment, and other like it that are being considered actively in 13 other states.

So-called green amendments establish a state constitution recognition of the right to a clean and healthful environment, placing this right on par with other such rights such as the right to free speech, due process, and freedom of religion. Green Amendments for the Generations, a movement founded by environmental advocate and attorney Maya van Rossum, defines these amendments as “provisions added to the bill of rights section of a constitution that recognize and protect the rights of all people, including future generations, to pure water, clean air, a stable climate, and a healthy environment.” Van Rossum decided to focus on advancing the concept at the state level first. “This state-by-state approach is actually also part of the federal amendment strategy,” she said.

Independent legal observers caution that even if an amendment is adopted, it generally takes litigation to insure it is implemented or enforced. “Green amendments can fulfill their potential only if the courts find that they go beyond existing environmental laws and create new enforceable rights and obligations,” said Michael Gerrard, founder and faculty director of the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia Law School.

Rather than trying to prevent environmental harm, the current regulatory system merely attempts to manage harm, van Rossum said. Green amendments bring forth that transformational change to our systems of law and governance when it comes to environmental protection, she added. She also noted this systemic shift is critical. “We need to reorient this system so it really is a system where it’s focused on prevention of harm,” she said.

In most states green amendment proposals are first proposed through the legislature; if approved by state lawmakers, they would then be put before the state’s voters as a ballot referendum.

The oil and gas industry tends to be the most vocally opposed, van Rossum said, though polluting industries generally try to attack green amendment proposal through closed door lobbying.

Van Rossum pointed to a recent court decision in Montana - which also has a constitutional guarantee to a clean and healthful environment - as “another powerful awakening for people. Last August, Montana District Judge Kathy Seeley issued a landmark ruling in favor of 16 young people who had sued their state government over its fossil fuel policies. The case, Held et al, v. State of Montana, was brought on constitutional grounds

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alleging the state had violated plaintiffs' right to a clean and healthful environment. It was the first youth climate lawsuit to go to trial in the United States. In her decision, Seeley determined the state's fossil fuel and climate policy was unconstitutional, and she affirmed that the youth plaintiffs "have a fundamental constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment, which includes climate as part of the environmental life-support system." The state is currently appealing the verdict.

While well intended, there is the real possibility that if this amendment were to be adopted by Arizona voters, it will become a lawyer's best source of income as lawsuits will surely follow, as in the Montana case. How "pure" should pure water be? How "clean" should clean air be? How "healthy" should healthy ecosystems be? And how "stable" should a stable climate be? Unless these adjectives are defined in the Amendment, and standards provided, it will be left up to a judge to decide. Their perceptions will vary judge to judge. There will be no consistency in their determinations and verdicts. Keep an eye on this proposal!

FARM BILL ISSUES By Stephen Williams

The Farm Bill was due for reauthorization last year, but got a yearlong extension through September, 2024. It covers: commodities, forestry, conservation, nutrition and rural development. Producers have been calling on Congress to put more "farm" in the Farm Bill because the world has changed drastically since the last Farm Bill in 2018.

Key priorities in both the House and Senate framework for the bill are: modernizing the Farm Safety Net, boosting rural and broadband services, expanding popular conservation programs and empowering the next generation of farmers and ranchers. Under the current administration the NRCS has prioritized equity and climate goals over conservation. Its website states, "In recent years NRCS has taken strides to advance equity, address climate change, and support markets, which are part of USDA's broader efforts to address these priorities using resources from the Farm Bill, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act."

The American Farmland Trust cautioned that this energy transition is expected to have significant impacts on the rural landscape since increasing national solar generation from 4% up to 45% would consume upwards of 7.4 million acres of farmland by 2040. The AFT also warned that displacing farming from productive land would put more marginal land in production, leading to decreased productivity, farm viability, food security, as well as increased environmental impacts.

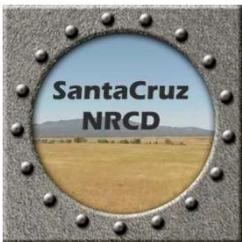
Putting climate ahead of conservation champions like farmers and ranchers, those with a vested interest in conserving land for future generations, would be a grave mistake. Radical environmentalists who influence the Biden administration accuse farmers and ranchers of despoiling the environment, even though this under-appreciated segment of the U.S. population (who comprise 2% of the population) feed 98% of the nation.

Regulations like the Securities and Exchange Commission's Climate Disclosure and the EPA's Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rule hurt producers. Equally concerning is Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investing practices that steer investment money away from agriculture to climate policies which could result in a 34% increase in food costs.

Farming and ranching at their core are conservation based. The current legislative framework by both the House and Senate Agriculture Committees recognize this.

Calendar of Activities/Events

- September 13-15, **Santa Cruz County Fair**
- September 25, **Santa Cruz NRC D meeting**, at noon Wild Horse Restaurant (Patagonia)
- October 17 & 18, **Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape Tour & Partnership meeting**:
 - Oct 17, Tour (9 am – 3pm), Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch. RSVP is required. 366 Research Ranch Rd, Elgin, AZ 85611
 - Oct 18, Partnership Meeting (10 am – 2 pm), Sierra Vista Fire Dept, Station 3, 675 Giulio Cesare Ave, Sierra Vista, AZ 85635. Partnership Coordinator, Amber Morin
 - Amber Morin contact information: 480.323.6832, amber@legacyworksgroup.com
- September, 24, **Lehmann Lovegrass Workshop** (9 am-12), Spike S Ranch, RSVP by Sep 18. Lunch will be provided. Register Contact: Tricia Dunham, 520-384.3594 or email triciadunham@arizona.edu



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