



SCNRCD NEWSLETTER

VIEWS FROM THE WATERSHED

Winter, 2025

SCNRCD, 97 Old Ruby Rd, Nogales, AZ 85621

Questions email Chris Postel, clerk.scnrcd@gmail.com

Chairman's Column by Stephen Williams

COWS & CREEKS

Given the pending lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service alleging that the condition of riparian areas on the Coronado National Forest is imperiling endangered plant and animal species, I thought it would be timely to share the thoughts of Steve Leonard and Wayne Elmore from a chapter entitled "Cows and Creeks: Can They Get Along?" in the book, RANCHING WEST OF THE 100th MERIDIAN - CULTURE, ECOLOGY AND ECONOMICS.

If you are wondering what credentials Leonard and Elmore have to weigh in on this topic, the answer is quite a lot. Steve Leonard was the range ecological and grazing systems specialist on the Interagency National Riparian Service Team. With 10 years on the National Soil-Range Inventory Team (BLM/NRCS) his experience extends throughout the West. Prior to that, he managed a cattle operation in North Park, Colorado. Wayne Elmore was the team leader for the Interagency National Riparian Service Team, and has a broad background in forestry, fisheries, wildlife and range management. He has given over 500 presentations on riparian function, potential and management.

Both believe that, in most cases, livestock grazing is compatible with the restoration of watershed and streamside areas. Restoration of riparian areas is a cornerstone to the restoration of an entire watershed. Most of the undesirable impacts associated with water arise from landscapes shedding it faster than they originally evolved to hold it and store it - thus creating accelerated erosion and higher floods. This would seem to make them water sheds. But keeping water on the land longer should be a primary objective, so Leonard and Elmore prefer the term "water catchment" instead of "watershed." Many factors, both natural and human, alter a landscape's ability to retain and release water from natural catchments. A certain amount of natural disturbance, followed by recovery, is necessary to achieve a dynamic equilibrium of ecological processes.

Early attempts in the 1960s and 1970s to demonstrate the effects of grazing on streams

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resulted in the construction of enclosures that eliminated grazing in small plots that could be compared with adjacent sites. In the 1980s and 1990s, positive recovery comparable to cattle exclusion was demonstrated on thousands of miles on riparian areas. Once a problem is recognized, grazing strategies can often be devised that restore the catchment functions of the landscape with little or no reduction in total numbers of animals.

Although there are no simple formulas for riparian recovery, there are some common elements. Each success required a change in one or more of the following: timing (when livestock begin grazing), intensity (the amount of vegetation removed), frequency (how often livestock are allowed access), or duration (how long livestock are allowed to graze). Most operations required some form of adaptive management: the ability to change in order to meet objectives. When uncertainty involves a rancher's livelihood, it is more scary than exciting. But we cannot improve conditions by continuing the same practices that degraded the stream in the first place.

One common thread of all successful strategies, according to Elmore and Leonard, is the rancher's commitment to implement changes despite the uncertainty. A commitment from other interest groups or governmental agencies to support these changes is important, too. Despite our so called science base for resources management and new technologies, success still seems to depend on the hard work and determination of the people who move the animals. But it is also essential to have achievable objectives and a monitoring program that allows you to determine whether the changes are working. With few exceptions, then, Elmore and Leonard believe that recovery of streams and rivers can be attained even with livestock grazing.

AZ NRCB Board Formed by Deborah Smith, AACD Director, March 12, 2025 email

The Arizona Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) is thrilled to announce the members of the newly established **State Natural Resource Conservation Board (NRCB)**! We know many of you have been eagerly awaiting this news, and we appreciate your patience while the confirmation process was completed. Now that all members are officially confirmed, we can introduce them and share details about the board's inaugural meeting. **Natural Resource Conservation Board Members** are listed below:

- Brent Mackelprang, Area 1 - Senate President Appointment
- Claudette Haverfield, Area 7 - Senate President Appointment
- Sadie Lister, Area 6 - Governors Appointment
- Ray Martinez, Area 4 - Governors Appointment
- Tim Grandy, Area 3 - Governors Appointment
- Daric Knight, Area 5 - Governors Appointment
- William (Bill) Dunn, Area 2, House Speaker Appointment
- Frank Krentz, Area 8 - House Speaker Appointment
- Director Paul Brierley, Arizona Department of Agriculture - Governors Appointment
- Director Tom Torres, Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management - Governors Appointment
- Director Tom Finley, Arizona Game and Fish Department - Governors Appointment

We encourage **each Arizona Conservation District** to have at least one board member attend this inaugural meeting date, still to be determined. Your engagement is critical in ensuring the board's success in supporting the Districts and their conservation efforts statewide. 2 key meeting Agenda items below:

Discussion of Strategic and Operational Issues

- Goals and Priorities
- Roles and Responsibilities
 - Board Members
 - Committee Formation
 - Advisors
 - Administrative Officer and Support Staff
 - Records Officer
- Compliance with Open Meeting Law
- Committee Development: Bylaws, Policies, and Procedures
- Budget and Funding Sources
- Communication Protocols
- Future Training and Presentations
- Frequency and Duration of Regular Meetings (Minimum Quarterly)

Consideration and Possible Action Items

1. Election of Officers (Chair, Vice Chair, Records Officer)
2. Interim Bylaws, Policies, and Operating Procedures
3. Committee Formation
 - Bylaws and Policy Review
 - Seal Creation
 - Other Committees (Finance, Strategic Planning, etc.)
4. Transfer of Records from ASLD
5. Development of NRC Board Website
6. Inter-agency Service Agreement and Representation Letter with the Arizona Attorney General's Office

HUMANS ARE PART OF THE ECOSYSTEM

Dennis Sun, publisher of the Wyoming Livestock Roundup, wrote an interesting article recently. Its two themes were outdoor recreation and human interactions with predatory animals. He titled his article “Humans Are Part Of The Ecosystem.” Mr. Sun extensively quoted Dr. Rick Knight, professor emeritus at the Colorado State University’s Warner College of Natural Resources, in his article. Dr. Knight taught wildlife biology and has served as a science advisor to both the Diablo Trust and Malpai Borderlands Group in Arizona.

Since Santa Cruz county plays host to various forms of outdoor recreation, and since the Arizona Game and Fish Commission has recently received a request to prohibit hound hunting for certain predatory species, Mr. Sun’s and Dr. Knight’s perspectives are applicable to Arizona.

Dr. Knight states that the biggest problem species, it seems, is humans, and that we, as humans, are part of the ecosystem. Residential developments and outdoor recreation are in a sense often overlooked impacts, and we need to keep this in perspective. Based on current land use, current economic incentives drive private land use toward residential development, which deteriorates the ecosystem more than grazing and ranching, and outdoor recreation is the number two cause of degradation on our public lands and fourth leading cause for the decline of federally threatened and endangered species on both private and public lands.

Dr. Knight also discussed the issue of introducing predators into an ecosystem. He said once depredation happens it is much harder to prevent it because it becomes a cultural option for the predator interactions with wild predators. He stressed the importance of establishing aversion to humans with minimal harm.

Knight cautioned that if interaction with humans have a penalty, wildlife will avoid humans. If interactions have a reward, they are attracted to humans. If there is neither penalty nor reward wildlife becomes habituated, which is the most dangerous option for these species.

In response to Dr. Knight’s statements, Mr. Sun remarked that to him this is why we have hunting seasons on wolves and mountain lions, and to allow lethal take of animals that attack livestock. He noted that California outlawed hunting of mountain lions in 1990 and in the 24 years since, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has had to kill many more lions every year than were killed when permitted hunting was allowed. In an ecosystem, all species have to be managed - even humans- to make it function.

CLIMATE PORN by Stephen Williams

Climate Central, a nonprofit group that researches the impacts of climate change, is claiming that winter has become several days shorter in Wyoming and around the Rocky Mountain region because of climate change.

According to the group’s newly released report, Mountain West states lost between two to ten below freezing days between 2014 and 2023. Wyoming endured an average loss of two below freezing days over the same decade.

For Don Day, longtime Wyoming meteorologist, reports like Climate Central’s are misleading and what he calls “climate porn.” It’s part of his frustration with the discussion and mainstream media coverage of climate change and how accurate data can be used to draw misleading conclusions.

“I like to say you can torture data to confess anything,” Day said. “If a person communicating this information doesn’t have a long term historical perspective of climate in any region around the world, it’s easy for the data to lead you to some conclusions that may or may not be correct. This is one of them.”

Day’s thoughts on the politically charged topic of climate change are complicated, to put it mildly. However, the scientific and meteorological discussion of climate change and the conclusions drawn from the available data tend to be far too simple for his liking, and much of it is ill informed.

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CLIMATE PORN

“I have significant issues with a lot of what is out there about climate change,” he said. “I’m inherently skeptical of a lot of claims, and I’m inherently skeptical of conclusions like the one from Climate Central, and there’s good reason for it.”

For his Wyoming forecasts, Day said he draws from numerous sources, including computer generated weather models and historical climate data. In his experience, any of the data can be easily misinterpreted or, in some cases, manipulated to draw a desired conclusion.

“When it comes to weather and climate data, that’s when I get passionate about it,” he said. “I’m all for studying greenhouse gasses and their impact on climate and weather, but I will cry foul when people start playing with numbers and jumping to conclusions.

Day’s main criticism of Climate Change’s conclusion is the range of data they used. He doesn’t think anything can be said about climate change when only examining a ten-year period.

The report notes fewer below freezing days and is based on the assumption that this must be because of climate change.

“I almost laughed when I saw that,” he said. “Using ten years of information to claim that we are losing up to 10 days of subzero temperatures is laughable. That wouldn’t withstand any scientific scrutiny.”

Day doesn’t deny there’s been a warming trend over the last decade as climate data between 2014 and 2023 show. However, saying that trend has led to a loss of winter days is a stretch - and a misleading one at that, he said.

For example, Day recalled how the opposite reaction was seen after meteorologists and climate scientists examined the 10 years between 1970 and 1980.

“If Climate Central looked at Wyoming during those 10 years, they would have seen an increase in freezing temperatures and winter days,” he said. “You could conclude that we were heading toward another Ice Age, which is what people did at the time. There were discussions about putting carbon soot on the Arctic ice sheets to make the world warmer.”

Day also takes issue with the ‘implication’ that any winter days lost during the ten years between 2014 and 2023 are gone forever. Climate Central doesn’t outright say the loss is irreversible, but he believes that’s the conclusion the group wants people to take from the assessment.

“The implication is Wyoming has lost two days of freezing temperatures and they’re never coming back, like, due to climate change,” he said. “People have to tread very, very carefully with conclusions like this.”

For what can and can’t be said about climate change, Day knows Wyoming’s weather. Climate change might explain the warming period between 2014 and 2023, but he sees another historical pattern that contributed.

“I can tell you there’s been multiple La Ninas in the past 10 years,” he said. That is a warm signal that has nothing to do with climate change and everything to do with the Pacific Ocean. And looking back in the 1970s, there were a lot more El Ninos with the opposite impact.”

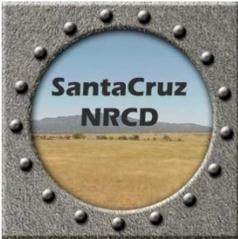
If Wyoming has lost any winter days in the last decade, Day believes they’ll return. Saying or insinuating a permanent loss of that weather to climate change is too much to take away from a limited data set.

“Causation isn’t necessarily correlation,” he said. “A lot of people walk into that scientific trap. That’s why I cry foul when people start playing with numbers and jumping to conclusions.”

Day said Wyoming’s climate is cyclical but non-linear. Historically, anything “lost” will be regained over time, even if it isn’t clear how long it will take.

“Historically, when you see these changes, you need to chill and let Nature go through it’s cycle,” he said. If we lost these days of freezing temperatures, they will be gained back. I can’t tell you when, but historically, the trends show that that will happen.”

The take away from these comments from a professional meteorologist is that faulty analysis of limited weather data sets can apply to Southwest weather data as well as Mountain West weather data.



**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.

- Prescribed burning
 - Rangeland monitoring
 - Brush control _____
 - Plant identification
 - Soil erosion control _____
 - Livestock water developments
 - Funding Sources
 - Irrigation: flood, sprinkler, drip _____
 - Fencing: barbed wire, electric, virtual _____
 - Other (describe) _____

- Grazing management planning
 - Managing small acreage horse properties
 - Seeding
 - Conservation easements
 - Soil health
 - Creation of wildlife habitat
 - Grant writing

When completed, please email to: clerk.scnrcd@gmail.com or mail to address below:

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

Cooperator: _____
Address: _____

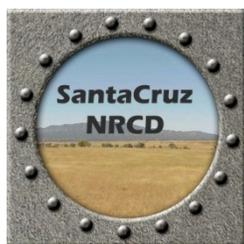
Phone: _____
Email: _____

Local Work Group Meeting

What is a Local Work Group (LWG) meeting? No one knows more about a community's natural resource problems than the people who live and work there. That's why it's so important to give local landowners and partners a voice in how best to prioritize and address these issues through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Local Working Groups (LWG). The LWG is led by your local Natural Resource Conservation Districts (NRCDS) and is the foundation of NRCS' conservation program delivery process. It supports locally led conservation efforts by coordinating USDA programs with other landowner stake holders such as federal, state, and local conservation programs to provide an integrated solution to addressing natural resource concerns. Please complete the Cooperator Questionnaire and email to the Santa Cruz District clerk. Your responses will be used for the LWG meeting. clerk.scnrcd@gmail.com

Calendar of Activities/Events

- Local Work Group Meeting at 1 pm on April 22 for the Winkelman, Santa Cruz, & Pima NRCD Districts. Location: NRCS Tucson office (Training Room), 3241 N Romero Rd.
- Santa Fe Ranch Days, May 9.
- Nogales Water Festival, May 6.
- Santa Cruz Quarterly meeting on May 28, 2025 at Wild Horse Restaurant, Patagonia, AZ.



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