



Arizona Association of Conservation Districts

2017 Policy Book

- Each policy, position and resolution (PPR) has been assigned to a Standing Committee for review and update at each annual meeting. The policy book has been organized by committee and topic.
- Any District, District Supervisor or Committee may recommend changes to policies, positions, or resolutions. Notify the chair of the assigned committee.
- Recommend changes for PPR committee assignment at the Board of Directors meeting.
- PPRs are organized by subject matter.
- Each PPR is given a short title and a background statement
- Based on the definitions of policies, positions, and resolutions (page 5) each PPR then has a Policy, Position, or Resolution statement.

AACD Committees as approved by the Board of Directors, August 2016.

Government Affairs:

Chair: AACD President; Winkelman, Fredonia, Whitewater Draw, Navajo County, Pima, Redington, Hereford, Little Colorado River, Chinle

Partnerships Committee

Chair AACD 1st Vice President; Apache, Hereford, Littlefield-Hurricane Valley, Winkelman, Gila Bend, Tohono O'odham, Shiprock

Rangelands and Forest:

Chair Apache; Littlefield-Hurricane Valley, Santa Cruz, Tonto NRCD, Big Sandy, Chino Winds, Triangle, Navajo County, Navajo Mountain, Hopi, Hualapai, Ft. Defiance, Pima, Winkelman

Cropland Committee:

Chair Yuma; Laguna, Willcox-San Simon, Parker Valley, West Pinal, Gila Bend, Eloy, Florence-Coolidge, Buckeye Valley, Gila Valley, Agua Fria, San Carlos

Education:



Chair Coconino; West Pinal, Florence-Coolidge, Verde, East Maricopa, Chino Winds, Yuma, Laguna, Triangle

Contents

DEFINITIONS	5
A. Policy Statements.....	5
B. Position Statements	5
C. Resolutions.....	5
D. Operational Guidelines	5
I. AACD Government Affairs Committee	6
A. General Policy.....	6
B. Coordination with State and Federal Agencies.....	7
1. Coordination Status.....	7
C. Federal Laws and Regulations	8
1. Genetic makeup of Mexican Wolves	8
2. De-Listing of Jaguar, Wolf, Lesser Long Nosed Bat, and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.....	8
3. 4d Rule for Ranching Activities if the Sonoran Desert Tortoise is listed.....	8
4. Definition for Waters of the United States	9
5. Waters of the U.S. Proposed Rule.....	10
6. Clean Water Restoration Act	11
7. Waters of the United States	11
8. National Heritage Areas	13
9. National Wild and Scenic River Act	14
10. Equine Management	14
D. State Laws and Regulations	15
1. State Lands Permit Application Notice to Districts	15
2. Water Transfers	15
3. Rural Water for Stock Ponds and Domestic/Livestock Wells.....	16
4. Water Measuring Devices on Exempt Water Wells.....	16
5. Monitoring of Wells.....	17
6. Management and Regulation of Arizona’s Riparian Areas	17



7. State Control of Wild Horses and Burros	18
8. Recreational Fees For State Lands.....	19
E. International Border.....	20
1. International Border Security Enforcement.....	20
II. AACD Partnership Committee.....	20
A. Private Property Rights.....	21
1. Loss of Private Lands in Arizona	21
B. Technical and Financial Assistance.....	21
1. Replicable, Reliable and Verifiable Data.....	21
2. Technical Assistance	22
3. Funding for Navajo Nation SWCDs:	22
4. Technical Support For Tribal Conservation Districts.....	23
5. NRCS Engineering Assistance for Yuma and La Paz Counties	24
6. Conservation Incentives.....	24
7. Desalinization.....	25
8. Opposition of Formation of Upper San Pedro Water District	25
9. The Use of Rotenone and/or Antimycin A.....	26
10. Stocking Fish at Public and Private Lakes	26
11. Arizona Conservation Partnership Funding.....	27
III. AACD Cropland Committee	27
A. Management of Exotic and Invasive Species.....	27
1. Noxious and Invasive Species Management	27
2. Weed Management Areas	28
IV. AACD Rangeland and Forestry Committee.....	29
A. Rangeland Management	29
1. State and Federal Grazing Leases.....	29
2. Grazing Permit Buyouts	30
3. Purchase of Grazing Permits for Permanent Retirement from Grazing:	31
4. Interagency Memorandum of Understanding for Rangeland Assessment	32
5. National Cooperative Rangeland Survey.....	33
6. Forage Allocation	34



- 7. Forage Utilization and Residual Vegetation Measurement 35
- 8. Restocking after Drought 37
- 9. Role of Grazing in Wildfire Control 38
- 10. Introduction of Livestock into the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area 39
- B. Agency Training and Certification 40
 - 1. Certification of Rangeland Professionals..... 40
 - 11. Standards for Natural Resource Specialists Involved in Rangeland Management 41
 - 12. Certification of Range Management Professionals 41
- C. Forest Management..... 42
 - 1. Management to Improve Forest Health..... 43
 - 13. Land and Water Conservation Fund 45
- V. AACD Education Committee..... 46**
 - A. Conservation Education..... 46
 - 1. Conservation District Education Center Authorities..... 46
 - 2. Environmental special plate fund 46
 - 3. Tax Deduction for Education..... 47



DEFINITIONS

A. POLICY STATEMENTS

Policy statements address the basic philosophy and goals of the organization. Such statements guide the setting of priorities and programs for the organization. They should be consistent with the enabling legislation and the policy of NACD. Policy statements should have a relatively long life, i.e. they do not change unless the goals of the organization change. They are used to guide the officers and member of the organization and to describe the organization to others, e.g. in informational material, letters, etc.

Example: AACD supports the use of incentive-based, voluntary programs to achieve conservation goals on private and public lands. AACD supports protection of private property rights and the local tax base. AACD supports the concept of sustainable use of natural resources for the benefit of people.

B. POSITION STATEMENTS

Position statements should be consistent with the policies of the organization and should establish the position of the organization with respect to specific issues. Position statements would not normally be addressed to specific individuals, but could be sent along with cover letters to a number of decision makers.

Position statements can be used by the officers and the members of the AACD and NRCDs in any way they see fit to advance the agenda of the AACD. For example, they can be included in letters to government officials or agencies to lend support for certain actions. Anyone can use these position statements and be assured that AACD has duly endorsed the position and will stand behind it. Position statements should be consistent with policy statements and should not duplicate or contradict existing positions. Positions may change or become irrelevant as the nature of issues of concern changes.

Example: AACD supports forest thinning and prescribed burning where appropriate to improve watershed conditions and reduce the risk and intensity of wildfires.

C. RESOLUTIONS

Resolutions are usually adopted to request specific action by specific people. They should be backed up by policy and position statements. Because they refer to specific actions (e.g. proposed legislation, land use plans, endangered species listings, etc.), they may become quickly out-of-date.

Example: AACD urges the Arizona Congressional delegation and the Governor of Arizona to support the Healthy Forests Initiative presently being considered by Congress.

D. OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

Many of the existing "resolutions" of the AACD fall under this category. They are guidelines or suggestions passed by the members regarding organization and operating procedures for the AACD. They are not addressed to anyone outside of the organization. These matters should properly be dealt with as motions made during the business meeting by the representatives of the NRCDs. When passed, they should provide direction to the Executive Director and Executive Committee.

Example: A travel reimbursement guideline, or guideline to follow regarding ethics of the Executive Committee and organization contracts.



I. AACD GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Chair: AACD President

Winkelman, Fredonia, Whitewater Draw, Navajo County, Pima, Redington, Hereford, Little Colorado River, Chinle

A. GENERAL POLICY

We recognize that soil and water are our State's basic renewable resources, upon which not only individual prosperity and human welfare depend, but upon which community, state and national welfare are likewise dependent.

With the enactment of the National Resource Conservation District Law of the State of Arizona and under Tribal codes and ordinances providing the basic machinery for organization and concerted effort directed toward the conservation of these resources, the organization of this Association of NRCDs is but one additional step toward the ultimate solution of our problems.

Believing that the welfare of both present and future generations is dependent upon the soil and water resources and will be directly benefited by this action, we establish and adopt this constitution.

The AACD, through the local Conservation Districts, has but one basic aim; to see an effective conservation program applied to the land of Arizona by a free people acting on their own initiative and responsibility. Its primary concern is the conservation and orderly development of Arizona's land, water and related renewable natural resources through Conservation Districts.

Therefore, in further support of and to further develop interest in these resources of Arizona, Arizona Conservation Districts do hereby associate themselves together with the following primary objectives:

- To provide means of cooperation and unification of the interest of all Districts within the State, and to provide for the people of the Districts and citizens of the State of Arizona a group which can effectively represent their interests in the furtherance of resource conservation and development.
- To more closely ally the Districts with the State Natural Resource Conservation Commissioner of the State Land Department.
- To cooperate with the National Association of Conservation Districts, state and federal agencies in the factual information relative to the problems and accomplishments of the Districts to the end that soil and water be given rightful recognition among the resources of the State.
- To foster and develop citizen participation and leadership in conservation in the affairs of Conservation Districts.



- To establish basic policies and objectives which are of uniform character in soil and water conservation work.
- To cooperate with all agencies of local, state and national government that can assist in conservation efforts.
- To create a general awareness of the state and national urgency for conserving and developing our renewable natural resources to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding population.
- To convince all who use or manage land that Arizona's future depends on the use of each acre within the limit of its capabilities and the treatment of each acre in accord with its need for conservation, development, and improvement.
- To persuade the general public that the failure of a few to care for our land and water resources jeopardizes the rights of all to own, use and manage land and water.
- To work impartially with private and public groups and organizations of all political affiliations to promote the proper conservation of natural resources.
- To secure for Conservation Districts such technical and scientific services from public and private sources as are required to insure universal adoption of multiple use conservation methods.
- To gain full public understanding of the essential role of soil and water conservation in watershed development for such purposes as flood control, protection of industrial, municipal and agricultural water supplies, recreation and wildlife improvement, recognizing at the same time all established water rights.
- To bring about effective coordination of conservation work on public land with that on adjoining or nearby lands in private ownership.

B. COORDINATION WITH STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES

1. COORDINATION STATUS

Background

Local government has the responsibility to protect the local tax base, value of private property, economic stability, well-being of the school system and, in general the well-being of the local community. These critical functions are closely entangled with federal and state management decisions. Coordination status is a valuable tool for local Conservation Districts to protect those values.

Position (2009)

AACD supports coordination status with other government agencies to be held by its member districts.



C. FEDERAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS

1. GENETIC MAKEUP OF MEXICAN WOLVES INTRODUCED SPECIES

Background

Whereas, AACD advocates science as the basis for decisions;

and whereas, there is substantial information that the genetic composition of Mexican Wolves being introduced in Arizona and New Mexico is in question

Position (2016)

AACD supports objective third party research on this introduced species and supports the determination by any individual District to fund such research.

2. DE-LISTING OF JAGUAR, WOLF, LESSER LONG NOSED BAT, AND SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER

Policy

AACD supports the delisting of the jaguar, all wolf species including, but not limited to the Mexican Gray Wolf, Lesser Long-Nosed Bat, and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.

Additionally, AACD supports the adoption of this resolution by the Arizona Legislature.

3. 4D RULE FOR RANCHING ACTIVITIES IF THE SONORAN DESERT TORTOISE IS LISTED

Background

Whereas livestock grazing and associated land management activities were not identified as significant threats to the Sonoran Desert Tortoise in the twelve month finding for the Sonoran Desert Tortoise published in the federal register by the US Fish and Wildlife Service on December 14, 2010.

Whereas the Winkelman Natural Resource Conservation District, the Arizona Association of Conservation Districts, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service worked together for over four (4) years to complete a thorough assessment of the effects of ranching activities on the Sonoran Desert Tortoise, including but not limited to normal animal husbandry, installation of structural improvements, and implementation of vegetation treatments.

Whereas private, state and federally funded studies of Sonoran Desert Tortoise populations and habitat have provided the US Fish and Wildlife Service with critical information about the Sonoran Desert Tortoise.



Whereas Rule 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act may be used by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to incentivize positive conservation activities and streamline the regulatory process for minor impacts.

Position (2015)

AACD strongly recommends that if the Sonoran Desert Tortoise is listed as threatened, that the US Fish and Wildlife Service include a 4(d) rule that provides exemptions from take for normal ranching activities that are implemented with the approved Best Management Practices.

That the 4(d) rule provide exemptions for normal ranching activities on private, state, tribal and federal lands, and for conservation practices and other measures that are installed with federal funding that are implemented with the Best Management Practices.

That the 4(d) rule provide exemptions and encouragement for private, state, or federally funded studies and monitoring of Sonoran Desert Tortoise populations and habitat that were in place prior to listing.

4. DEFINITION FOR WATERS OF THE UNITED STATES

Background

The Clean Water Act (CWA), enacted in 1972, limits federal jurisdiction to “navigable” waters of the United States. The U.S. Supreme Court, in 2001 and 2007, reaffirmed those limits. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), through regulations, guidance and other means, are seeking to expand their authority to the maximum extent, potentially even beyond the limits approved by Congress and reaffirmed by the Court.

In August 2013, a report, PRELIMINARY DRAFT Report Connectivity of Streams and Wetlands to Downstream Waters: A Review and Synthesis of the Scientific Evidence was made available by EPA. Comments were submitted on this report but no final report has been published.

On April 21, 2014, EPA and the Corps published a draft joint proposed rule defining the scope of waters protected under the CWA to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for interagency review. The draft proposed rule fails to comply with important regulatory procedural requirements, relies on an incomplete and inaccurate economic analysis, bases its scientific justification on a flawed scientific report that has not been peer reviewed, and is contrary to Congressional intent and SWANCC and Rapanos.

The document EPA sent to OMB effectively eliminates any constraints the term “navigable” imposes on the Corps and EPA’s CWA jurisdiction by granting regulatory control over virtually all waters, assuming a breadth of authority Congress has not authorized. The draft’s list of waters deemed “non-navigable” is exceptionally narrow, providing that few, if any waters, fall outside federal CWA jurisdiction. Such a shift in policy would mean that EPA and the Corps could regulate any or all waters found within a state, no matter how small or seemingly unconnected to a federal interest. Congress must not permit the agency to adopt such an approach.



WHEREAS, AACD is opposed to any rulemaking that does not clearly respect the limits of federal CWA jurisdiction articulated by the U.S. Supreme Court in SWANCC and Rapanos. The Supreme Court rejected the notion that CWA jurisdiction extends to waters with “any” connection to navigable waters (no matter how tenuous) and rejected the agencies’ “land is waters” approach. Any proposed rule must acknowledge that not all water bodies are subject to CWA jurisdiction and provide specific examples of features that are not within the scope of CWA regulation.

WHEREAS, AACD opposes proposals to fundamentally change the CWA by reinventing jurisdiction granted by the CWA to the federal government covering intrastate waters, including but not limited to groundwater, ditches, culverts, pipes, desert washes, sheet flow, erosional features, farm and stock ponds, springs, seeps and prior converted cropland. Two Supreme Court decisions over the past decade have reaffirmed that the term “navigable waters” under the CWA does not include all waters.

WHEREAS, the Natural Resources Conservation Service will be put in the untenable position of having to report possible “new waters of the U.S.” while doing conservation work on lands operated by private citizens. This will eviscerate the Service’s conservation programs since producers will no longer use their services for fear that they will find new “waters of the U.S.” on their properties. A new “federal nexus” will appear whenever NRCS finds anything that falls within the definitions of the proposed rule for federal waters.

Policy

AACD supports Federal CWA authority to continue to be limited to navigable streams and waterways that have continuous flow as defined in the CWA and affirmed by at least three Supreme Court cases.

AACD opposes any new rule that is contrary to Congressional intent of the CWA and Rapanos. The proposed rule will negatively affect the functions of the local NRCDs and SWCDs since much of their ability to affect local conservation is based on their longstanding partnership with NRCS.

THEREFORE, EPA should cancel the proposed rule.

5. WATERS OF THE U.S. PROPOSED RULE

Background

The districts in Arizona are adamantly opposed to the E.P.A.'s "Waters Of the U.S." proposed Rule for many reasons, including:

- It is contrary to at least three (3) Supreme Court decisions.
- It has created a constitutional crisis because of the Executive Branch ignoring over 200 years of respect for the Separate but Equal doctrine.



- It ignores the Clean Water Act mandate that regulation of intrastate waters is the province of the states.
- It defines land as water.
- It creates new ways for "federal nexus" to affect private property where before there was none.

Resolution

AACD calls on The E.P.A. to rescind their proposed rule; calls on Congress to pass legislation to defund the rule being implemented; and pass legislation that will define the term "navigable streams" to be consistent with the definition made by the Supreme Court in *Rapanos v. U.S.*

"Waters Of The United States" " includes only those relatively permanent, standing or continuously flowing bodies of water 'forming geographic features' that are described in ordinary parlance as 'streams, oceans, rivers, and lakes'."

6. CLEAN WATER RESTORATION ACT

Background

The United States Congress is considering rewriting the Clean Water Act. S787 would delete the word "navigable" from the Clean Water Act, thus allowing the EPA to control all waters in the United States. Conservation Districts in Arizona were created, among other things, for "the preservation of water rights and the control and prevention of soil erosion" (ARS-1001).

If S787 is enacted, **or successor legislation with a similar purpose**, control of all waters, large or small will come under the control of the federal government effectively extinguishing vested water rights in Arizona. Arizona's Conservation Districts will lose the ability to accomplish their mission.

Resolution (2009) *

AACD opposes the removal of the word "NAVIGABLE" from any clean water legislation. Therefore, the Arizona Association of Conservation Districts opposes S787 **or successor legislation with a similar purpose**.

7. WATERS OF THE UNITED STATES

Background

Farmers and cattle producers believe the EPA should rescind the 2015 WOTUS Rule and replace the WOTUS definition;

Whereas, the following are major points that should be considered in the WOTUS definition:



- Federal jurisdiction cannot extend to non-navigable, isolated, temporary or intrastate waters and wetlands. Nor does it extend to any ordinarily dry features, such as ephemeral streams.

The AACD supports the NACD's unofficial definitions of jurisdictional waters as described in their letter of June 16, 2017 to Donna Downing, Project Lead Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds Environmental Protection Agency; and Andrew Hanson, Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations, Environmental Protection Agency, as quoted below:

AACD believes that jurisdictional waters should consist of and be limited to the following:

- 1. Those interstate waters that are navigable-in-fact and currently used or susceptible to use in interstate or foreign commerce. These waters include the territorial seas.*
- 2. Relatively permanent, standing or continuously flowing streams, rivers, and lakes having an indistinguishable surface connection with navigable-in-fact waters described in 1 (above).*
- 3. Only wetlands that directly abut and are indistinguishable from waters in 1 and 2 (above). Wetlands are those areas inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstance do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes and bogs. Those wetlands that do not directly abut or are indistinguishable from waters described in 1 and 2 (above) are not jurisdictional.*

Furthermore, the terms "indistinguishable" and "relatively permanent" should be defined as:

- Indistinguishable: Relatively permanent waters that are directly connected at the surface by other relatively permanent waters.*
- Relatively permanent: Waters that contain throughout the year except for infrequent periods of severe drought⁴ and having an indistinguishable surface connection with those waters in 1.*

The proposed definition of "relatively permanent" is consistent with U.S. Geology Survey (USGS) Hydrologic Unit Code FCode 46006. Based on GIS analysis at the USGS Hydrologic Unit at the 1:24,000 scale, the above definitions will clarify and enable the regulated communities, local, and state governments to determine jurisdictional waters, limit federal oversight as appropriate, and recognize that states and local governments clearly have the capability and expertise to address their water quality protection.

Any definitions proposed by the EPA upon this review need to have come about after careful consideration of the effect it would have on localities and developed with respect to local decision makers and the regional makeup of the country. One local unit of government the EPA should consult as natural resource experts is conservation districts. The districts provide the on- the-ground working knowledge that is critical when developing a thoughtful and unbiased rule.



The 2015 Clean Water Rule would have expanded the jurisdiction of the CWA unlawfully and unnecessarily.

In addition, Waters of the U.S. should include the following:

“Navigable waters” are defined as, “deep enough and wide enough to afford passage to commercial freight ships.” This definition excludes waters that are navigable only by toys or recreational boats.

“Ephemeral” waters are defined as lasting fewer than 300 days per calendar year.

- Features that are usually dry and only carry water when it rains, or are ephemeral, are not “relatively permanent” waters.
- Wetlands should only be classified as “Waters of the U.S.” if they are mapped on a USGS topographic map as a permanent body of water. They specifically exclude waters retained by temporary beaver dams.
- Any revised definition should retain the long-standing agricultural exclusions from WOTUS and should consider the need for additional exclusions for features such as ditches or irrigation structures, depending on the scope of the revised WOTUS definition.

Resolution (2017)

The Arizona Association of Conservation District urges the EPA to consider the aforementioned in the definition of Waters of the United States.

8. NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAS

Background

Proposed National Heritage Areas are currently being considered which will cover large tracts of land within the State of Arizona. Within the state, several jurisdictions have reviewed potential impacts of the National Heritage Areas and have chosen to withdraw their support for such designation. Such areas will result in federal jurisdiction over private and state lands. Management plans for such areas are developed by a group appointed by the U.S. Park Service having no accountability to the public or landowners for management of these areas. If the landowner does not wish to be in the area he/she must opt out, and therefore is automatically included in the boundary unless otherwise stated. Private property rights and the landowner’s ability to take management actions for his/her property will be impacted by the buffer areas surrounding these designations.



Position (2009)

It is the position of the Arizona Association of Conservation Districts to oppose creation of new National Heritage Areas within the State of Arizona.

9. NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ACT

Background

The National Wild and Scenic River Act was instituted over twenty-five (25) years ago and is designed as a protection tool for segments of American rivers. The Act classifies river segments for various levels of protection based on established criteria and designates them as Wild, Scenic or Recreational.

Currently, there is increased activity in Arizona in response to Congressional interest in completing Wild and Scenic River evaluations on public lands. The result of this activity is that river segments are being evaluated for eligibility and nominated for designation.

The Act has provisions for including adjacent private lands in eligibility determinations as long as the landowner supports the findings and is committed to participating with the federal agency in the suitability evaluation and day-to-day management. Eligibility does not confer designation, but it does place the river segment under protective management until such time as it is determined unsuitable in a record of decision or Congress designates the river to the system.

The result of designation is a limitation of some activities along the river segments based on the type of classification it receives. These limitations could have an impact on the ability to perform some conservation activities on public lands and may indirectly affect private lands.

The federal agencies must amend their management plans to consider eligibility nominations for river segments. Adding these plans requires public input as part of the planning process.

Position (2009)

The position of the AACD is that the ability of landowners and operators to implement conservation practices on private lands should not be impeded if the lands are determined to be eligible for or become included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. In addition, acquisition of land by eminent domain should not be permitted.

Further, comments from duly organized Conservation Districts in Arizona be given full consideration during the required federal agency public comment period.

10. EQUINE MANAGEMENT

Background



Horses and burros are considered to be a part of our heritage in the American West. Because of this, their management succumbs to human emotion. In recent years legislative actions have been taken in order to stop the sale and transportation of horses and burros for slaughter. As a result of these actions the horse market in the United States has been severely impacted to the point that horses are nearly impossible to dispose of and the market, whether for slaughter or pleasure, has become saturated. Horses are now being dumped by their owners on public trust and private lands to be left to their own devices. This creates many unintended consequences, to include: natural resource degradation on rangeland and in riparian areas, inhumane treatment and health hazards where they congregate leading to disease and death in wild and domestic animal populations.

Position (2009)

AACD supports legislation to allow for horse sale, transportation, and processing in order to restore a healthy equine marketing system so as to eliminate equine problems on federal, tribal, state, and private lands.

D. STATE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

1. STATE LANDS PERMIT APPLICATION NOTICE TO DISTRICTS

Background

Many proposed actions on State land by permit applicants affect the range health and watershed function; and

Arizona Revised Statute §37-1001 directs the Natural Resource Conservation Districts provide for restoration and conservation of lands and soil resources, preservation of water rights, and control and prevention of soil erosion, and thereby conserve natural resources, conserve wildlife, protect the tax base, protect public lands, protect and restore the State's rivers, streams and associated riparian habitats including fish and wildlife dependent on those habitats in such a manner to protect public health, public safety, and the general public welfare;

Position

AACD requests that the Arizona State Land Department copy the respective District with any notice to a State land lessee of any State Lands permit application pending within the District **to improve coordination between agencies and districts to safeguard natural resources and minimize resource impacts.**

2. WATER TRANSFERS

Position



AACD supports the existing Arizona State laws preventing water from being transferred from one watershed (or basin) to another.

Further, AACD requests that the Governor, the Arizona Legislature, the relevant State Government Agencies and the State Courts make every effort to establish through policy, regulations, and legislation the beneficial minimal use classification of such waters.

Whereas, as AACD believes that the recharge from farm stock ponds, seeps and springs is beneficial to and actually decreases soil erosion, sedimentation, and benefits natural resources and wildlife, the AACD supports classification of these waters to be diminamus.

Further, the AACD requests that the governor, the Arizona State legislature, the relevant state government agencies and the state courts make every effort to establish through policy, regulation, and legislation that such waters be classified as diminamus.

3. RURAL WATER FOR STOCK PONDS AND DOMESTIC/LIVESTOCK WELLS

Background

A general adjudication of water rights in Arizona is being carried out by the courts which will ultimately establish all legal rights to use surface water in Arizona. Under present procedures all claimants for surface water rights will have to prove the validity of such rights in court.

The continued use and conservation of rural and agricultural lands are entirely dependent on the productive use and conservation of soil and water resource for the benefit of rural residents and for the larger population dependent on these lands for food, fiber, clean water, recreation, and other economic and ecological benefits.

Most of the rural and agricultural residents of Arizona have little knowledge about the complexities of water law and lack the financial resources to obtain adequate legal counsel to defend their rights against corporate and governmental downstream water users.

Position (2009)

AACD supports the classification of waters used for rural domestic, livestock, and wildlife as beneficial and minimal uses which are essential to the continued use and conservation of natural resources for the benefit of all residents of the State.

It is also our position that Federal Government recognize and follow Arizona Water Law.

4. WATER MEASURING DEVICES ON EXEMPT WATER WELLS

Background

The following Arizona Revised Statutes apply to water measuring devices and reporting in Arizona:



45-604 B. A person who holds a type 2 non-irrigation grandfathered right or a groundwater withdrawal permit in the amount of ten or fewer acre-feet per year is not required to use a water measuring device to measure withdrawals pursuant to that grandfathered right or groundwater withdrawal permit unless the person holds more than one such right or permit in the aggregate amount of more than ten acre-feet per year and withdraws more than ten acre-feet of groundwater per year pursuant to those rights or permits from one well.

45-632 C. Persons who withdraw groundwater from exempt wells and non-irrigation customers of cities, towns, private water companies and irrigation districts, except customers receiving water pursuant to a permit, are exempt from the record keeping and reporting requirements of this section for such water.

Position (2011)

AACD supports the current statutes that do not require water measuring devices for type 2 non-irrigation grandfathered right or a groundwater withdrawal permit in the amount of ten or fewer acre-feet per year.

AACD supports the current statute that exempts persons who withdraw groundwater from exempt wells and non-irrigation customers of cities, towns, private water companies and irrigation districts from the record keeping and reporting requirements of that same section of water statute.

5. MONITORING OF WELLS

Background

Be it known monitoring wells does nothing to alleviate lack of water availability in our aquifers. Meters create an extra expense for the user and in many situations would be time consuming to monitor and maintain. What is the purpose of metering if not to control and eventually tack a monitory value to water usage?

Metering water usage opens the door to government control of water which may in fact infringe on long established water rights. After the meter, next the control and then the tax and charge. It seems to work that way with Government whether local, state or national.

Resolution (2017)

AACD does not support any meters on exempt wells. We do support water recharge to improve infiltration as a means to solve the shortage of water.

6. MANAGEMENT AND REGULATION OF ARIZONA'S RIPARIAN AREAS

Background



Water is essential to life in arid Arizona. Where water is present, an abundance of life exists. This is especially true of Arizona's riparian areas. These areas are not only home to a host of plant and animal species, but are also primary sites of both prehistoric and modern settlement. Because water in riparian areas was a magnet to early settlers, much of Arizona's more accessible areas are in private ownership. The urbanization of some of these lands has generated increasing demands from segments of the environmental community to transfer remaining riparian areas into public ownership or management. Many of the current riparian landowners treasure the riparian values of their lands and believe these values can be better managed under private ownership.

The conflict over riparian ownership and management has escalated; there has been a growing push to control owner activities and management via regulation. A number of riparian area proposals generated at the national level ignore the physical realities of Arizona's arid environment and threaten the ability to provide restorative or conservation management practices essential to the health and maintenance of Arizona's riparian areas.

The loss of the ability to enhance riparian areas or generate new areas through land management practices along with the threat to existing property and water rights is of growing concern to Arizona's Soil and Water Conservation and Natural Resource Conservation Districts.

Position (2009)

Current land ownership patterns, private property rights, historic water rights (both surface and subsurface) natural resources, management practices, economic, and operating factors should be granted full consideration in the management and regulation of Arizona's riparian areas.

Existing and future soil, water and other natural resource conservation management practices within Arizona's riparian areas should not be hindered or stymied by adverse State or Federal rule, regulation or law.

7. STATE CONTROL OF WILD HORSES AND BURROS

Background

There is concern that there will be an effort to call for legislation to turn over management of the Free Roaming Horses and Burros to the states. Arizona's experience with the Salt River Horse Herd on the Tonto National Forest shows us that state officials are more likely to concede their responsibilities of sound management of horses and burros than the federal agencies are. Most western state legislatures are filled with urban legislators and agency personnel. Usually these folks come from one or two very large metropolitan areas with no background in natural resources and beholden to urban voters.

We think the wiser move is to strengthen existing legislation to mandate absolute maximum numbers of horses and burros and a mandate to remove and destroy excess animals that cannot be adopted within a short period of time. There should be sanctions for BLM and their decision makers who do not



comply with this legislation and they would be immune from lawsuits if they follow it. This legislation should include the US Forest Service also. We feel the agencies would privately welcome this legislation.

Resolution (2017)

AACD is against turning over management of animals covered under the Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act to the states. We urge the Congress to strengthen the Act to provide for mandates of absolute numbers of wild horses and burros and sanctions to those agencies that do not fulfill the mandates of the Act.

8. RECREATIONAL FEES FOR STATE LANDS

Background

Arizona's State Trust Lands are managed by the Arizona State Land Department on behalf of the public schools and other beneficiaries of the revenues generated from these lands. These lands are not "public lands" like Forest Service and BLM lands because, unlike federal lands, their purpose is to generate revenue for beneficiaries of the Trust. Accordingly, any use of State land for agriculture (including grazing), would cutting, rights of way, or sand and gravel is done only by permit from the State Land Department which charges a fee for such permitted activity. The money collected, less administrative costs, goes to the beneficiaries.

Recreational use of State land also can only be made by purchasing a permit for such use from the State Land Department, although many people are either unaware of this requirement or ignore it on the expectation that it will not be enforced. One problem with the recreational permit program is that money collected from the sale of permits does not go to the beneficiaries of the Trust as other revenues do, but goes directly into the general revenue fund of the State.

Thus, the State Land Department has a responsibility to collect such fees, but no source income to administer and enforce the program.

Position (2009)

The AACD recommends to the Governor of Arizona and to the Arizona Legislature, that necessary changes in the law or regulations be made to require that recreational fees for use of State Trust Lands go to **the beneficiaries of the Trust**, and that the State Land Department be authorized to use a portion of the receipts from such permits to administer and enforce the requirement for recreational permits on State land. Further, we recommend that purchase of recreational permits be facilitated by making them available in outlets similar to those that sell hunting and fishing licenses, to make it easy for people to comply with the law in a timely fashion.

***Trust Land Management Fund**



E. INTERNATIONAL BORDER

1. INTERNATIONAL BORDER SECURITY ENFORCEMENT

Background

The Arizona/Mexico border is not secure. There are many areas along the international border that allow for the considerable flow of human and drug smuggling into the United States. This is at the great detriment of the environment in this area. Such smuggling results in considerable soil erosion along smuggling routes, garbage accumulation, excessive trampling of vegetation, destruction of watering facilities, and extremely unsafe conditions for land managers. The presence of massive garbage piles is a danger to wildlife, THE PUBLIC HEALTH, livestock, and presents a safety hazard to those cleaning up the piles. Excessive trampling of vegetation creates habitat fragmentation and increases the presence of invasive plant species. In some areas and with some species animals are being depredated outside of the regulatory planning for wildlife hunting for the area.

Unauthorized automobile, bicycle, and foot travel create trails and roads that continue to be used for illegal purposes and compound many of the above effects. It has become increasingly difficult if not fully impossible for land managers to actively manage the natural resources because of safety concerns and the impossibility of keeping up with the amount of environmental degradation and the rate at which it occurs. Conservation cannot continue in these areas for this reason. Partnering land and water conservation agencies such as the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service now have to limit regularly scheduled field activities, send employees in pairs for field work, and restrict working at night. For these reasons the cost and complexity of conducting conservation operations along the border will continue to increase in order to provide these safety measures.

Position (2010)

AACD urges the Congress of the United States and The State Of Arizona to secure the border at the international boundary, add sufficient personnel to secure the border, provide the personnel with all the modern technology and resources necessary to enforce security at the international boundary, and enhance civil and governmental communications to provide full coverage throughout the border region.

AACD support Congressional action to exempt the Border Patrol from the multi-year delays caused by federal planning and environmental laws that impede construction of infrastructure deemed necessary by the Border Patrol within a one-mile strip immediately north of and adjacent to the international border in order to secure the border at the border.

II. AACD PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Chair: AACD 1st Vice President



Apache, Hereford, Littlefield-Hurricane Valley, Winkelman, Gila Bend, Tohono O’odham, Shiprock

A. PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS

1. LOSS OF PRIVATE LANDS IN ARIZONA

Background

Since Arizona was admitted as a state, the Federal Government has been acquiring private land through condemnation, willing purchase, or gift. Since the 1970s the rate of conversion has been accelerating at an alarming rate. Private land is now less than 15% of the total land ownership in Arizona. With the loss of each acre of private land the remaining private land bears a greater burden for the production of food and fiber as well as industrial output and property taxes. Agencies of Arizona state government are often used as surrogates for the federal government, to hold title to property.

The founders of our nation required in Article 1 Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution, the consent of the legislature before transfer of property to the federal government can be finalized, for many years the Arizona Legislature has failed to require its constitutionally mandated consent.

The Arizona Legislature charged the NRCDs with, among other things, the preservation of water rights and protection of the local tax base. These cannot be achieved without protecting private property, economic stability, the well-being of the local school system and the general well-being of the community.

Position (2011)

AACD supports the requirement that the Arizona Legislature give consent prior to land sales transferring ownership from private to local or federal government ownership.

B. TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

1. REPLICABLE, RELIABLE AND VERIFIABLE DATA

Background

Whereas, federal natural resource management policies have had a devastating impact on Arizona’s economy, and

Whereas, many of these policies, including the Endangered Species Act, have relied on questionable science and dubious academic research, and

Whereas, in light of the enormous economic and social cost of these decisions, the State of Arizona has an interest in ensuring that its federal partners rely on fact-based research.



Resolution

The State of Arizona should call on the federal government to exercise greater diligence in ensuring that its natural resource management and regulatory agencies rely only on replicable, reliable, and verifiable science.

2. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has provided incentive payments to farmers and ranchers for building and implementing conservation practices on rangelands and agricultural lands.

Implementation and monitoring of such practices to ensure they are done properly and achieve desired results often requires, either by law or necessity, technical assistance to private landowners.

Incentive funding for conservation practices has continued to be available, but the staffing levels for qualified professionals in the Natural Resource Conservation Service and other agencies has declined significantly in the past several years.

Lack of qualified technical assistance makes it difficult or impossible to implement and monitor conservation practices based on incentive payments.

Resolution (2009)

The AACD requests the Arizona Congressional Delegation to work to ensure that in addition to incentive payments to rangeland and cropland owners to implement conservation practices adequate funding is included for technical assistance to landowners to ensure that such practices are correctly planned, implemented, and monitored.

Further that such funding be granted either to the Natural Resource Conservation Service or the Natural Resource Conservation Districts, or both, with specification of required professional credentials for people providing technical assistance either as agency personnel or contractors.

3. FUNDING FOR NAVAJO NATION SWCDs:

Background

Whereas, the Navajo Nation Soil and Water Conservation Districts are members of the Arizona Association of Conservation Districts.

Active membership shall be open to any Conservation District now organized or which may become organized under the Conservation District Law adopted by Arizona Indian Tribes.

The Navajo Nation Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) have a Memorandum of Understanding, a Mutual Agreement and other agreements with the United States Department of



Agriculture (USDA) and the Navajo Nation to assist the Navajo people to conserve the soil, water, air, plants and animals on the Navajo Nation through education and support.

The Navajo Nation SWCD is a major partner to the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) by working closely with the NRCS field offices in securing funding through the various sources for conservation projects.

The Navajo Nation SWCDs have not received any funding since 2009 from the Navajo Nation Council for promoting conservation practices/programs to cooperators, assisting cooperators, attending district meetings, attending conferences, membership dues to various organizations, salary for a part time administrative staff, and/or project monies.

Resolution (Re-affirmed 2011) *

AACD supports the Navajo Nation Soil and Water Conservation Districts in their request to the Navajo Nation Council for funding in the amount of \$400,000.00

4. TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR TRIBAL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Background:

The Arizona Association of Tribal Conservation Districts (AATCD) are interested in coordination with the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management regarding funding opportunities for Tribal interests related to irrigation practices. There is a 2 out of 5-year irrigation requirement needed to get support from staff engineers from the Arizona Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The Arizona Association of Conservation Districts (AATCD) consists of ten (10) Tribal Conservation Districts, and was formed in August 2010 to service as the voice for the Tribal Conservation Districts in Arizona on issues related to conservation and environmental quality and to enhance USDA programs on Tribal nations in Arizona.

The AATCD organization is recognized by the Tribal Conservation Districts and Tribal farmers and ranchers to advocate on their behalf for the benefit of our natural resources and conservation efforts by means of collaboration, outreach and education.

The AATCD encourages coordination and collaborative efforts to extend program opportunities with the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management.

The AATCD identifies the 2-year irrigation policy as a barrier to Tribal groups participating in USDA programs.

Resolution

AATCD requests and supports additional funding for the Arizona NRCS to employ additional engineering staff to work with Tribal farmers and ranchers.



AATCD requests coordinating with the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management to identify funding opportunities related to irrigation services for Tribal interests.

5. NRCS ENGINEERING ASSISTANCE FOR YUMA AND LA PAZ COUNTIES

Background:

Whereas Yuma and La Paz Counties have over 200,000 acres of irrigated cropland farmed year-round and;

Whereas installation of conservation practices can only occur in a narrow time slot.

Resolution (2016)

AACD supports establishing and staffing an Agriculture Engineer and Engineering technician in the Yuma NRCS Field Office to provide timely design and installation of practices in the Parker and Yuma Field offices, supporting the existing combined staff of 2 District Conservationists and one Soil Conservationist.

6. CONSERVATION INCENTIVES

Background

A majority of the state of Arizona and most other western states is rangeland or farmland used and managed for the production of livestock and agricultural crops. These lands not only furnish the basis for one of the State's major industries, but they also comprise most of the watersheds, most of the wildlife and endangered species habitat, much of the outdoor recreation, and most of the "open space" increasingly appreciated and valued by all citizens.

Many of the public's concerns about wildfires, invasive species (weeds), clean water and air, and other environmental issues depend on sound management of these lands. Ranchers, farmers and other landowners are uniquely qualified to implement the management necessary to provide environmental benefits to the general public as well as economic benefits to their own operations.

Land and livestock management designed to produce benefits in terms of water quality, wildlife/endangered species habitat, or other environmental services for the benefit of society may require management investments that produce no increasing direct income or other benefits to the landowner.

Cost share and incentive payments to farmers and ranchers have made it possible for sound conservation practices to be implemented, however, many farmers and ranchers are reluctant to participate in these programs, due to concerns of releasing private business information under the Freedom of Information Act.

Position (2009)



AACD supports continued and increased funding of programs through the U.S Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Interior, the State of Arizona, and any other organization that provide incentive payments or grants to private land owners and/or federal/state land lessees to compensate them for the portion of investments made and/or income forgone to implement management to obtain environmental or public benefits rather than for personal gain.

Further that current language in any Farm Policy Legislation must protect all private business information. Similar protection should be extended to other state and federal agencies involved in funding and/or providing technical assistance for rangeland management.

7. DESALINIZATION

Background

Whereas, Arizona has been a national leader in water management and conservation, and protecting critical groundwater rights for the state's vital agriculture industry, and

Whereas, Arizona must continue its strong record of protecting water rights in order to ensure Arizona ranchers and farmers have the supplies they need to support Arizona's economy, and

Whereas, Arizona is currently reviewing its projected supplies and demands for the next 100 years to determine whether additional steps are necessary to ensure an adequate supply of water for the state in the future,

Policy

Therefore, be it resolved by AACD that the State of Arizona should explore desalinization as a means of augmenting existing water supplies rather than place further restrictions on the public availability of this critical natural resource.

Therefore, be it resolved by AACD that the State of Arizona should explore requiring urban and urbanizing areas to increase their efforts to recover and conserve waters within their respective watersheds before looking to agricultural and rural waters to supplement urban supplies.

8. OPPOSITION OF FORMATION OF UPPER SAN PEDRO WATER DISTRICT

Background

WHEREAS, the Board of the Arizona Association Conservation Districts has the obligation and responsibility to represent the interests of the people and the interest of Arizona's Natural Resource Conservation Districts as a whole in economic stability, a sound environment and the general health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the District; and

WHEREAS, a Water District of unprecedented size is being proposed for an area co-extensive with the Hereford NRC on the November ballot of 2010; and



WHEREAS, said District proposes to usurp many of the functions already being successfully performed by the HEREFORD NRCD; and

WHEREAS, the use of surface water in the area has already been determined by historical use, and the geographic extent of those claims has been determined by Arizona Supreme Court in the Gila River General Stream Adjudication; and

WHEREAS, the proposed District would be a taxing entity that would impose an unnecessary level of government bureaucracy on the people of the region;

Position (2009) *

The Arizona Association of Conservation Districts is opposed to the establishment of the Upper San Pedro Water District.

9. THE USE OF ROTENONE AND/OR ANTIMYCIN A

Background

AACD is concerned about potential human, livestock, wildlife and environmental impacts of the use of rotenone and/ or antimycin A within Arizona's watersheds. The state and federal agencies currently plan to use various formulations of rotenone and/or antimycin A for the purpose of killing all native and all non-native fish and all macro-invertebrates in some of the State's rivers and streams.

There are at least 210 scientific papers that connect rotenone and Parkinson's disease and the effects of rotenone on beef cattle and ranchers' domestic water wells are as yet poorly studied and understood. The Arizona Game & Fish Department is working with federal agencies (DOI-Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA-Forest Service, DOI -Bureau of Land Management, and DOI - Bureau of Reclamation) on over 100 projects in Arizona, many of which include applying rotenone and/or antimycin A to Arizona waters.

Position (2011)

AACD opposes the use of rotenone and/or antimycin A for the killing of native and nonnative aquatic species in Arizona in the absence, in each case, of the required, project-specific Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under stipulations of the National Environmental Protection Act.

10. STOCKING FISH AT PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LAKES

Background

The stocking of sport fish in Arizona is important to the economy of many rural areas, and license sales for sport fishing are a major funding source for the AZ Game and Fish Department.



Consideration is now being given to banning the stocking of sport fish at public and private lakes in other western states. There is a strong possibility that such a ban will soon be recommended for Arizona.

Position (2011)

AACD is supportive of stocking rivers, streams, and lakes in Arizona with sport fish as it is of an environmental and economic benefit to Arizona and should be continued.

11. ARIZONA CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP FUNDING

Background

The Arizona Conservation Partnership uses a ranking system to determine the priority for funding of proposed conservation practices. Under the current system a successful applicant can apply again in the subsequent funding cycle and possibly again be ranked as high priority for funding, and the amount of money available for projects in each cycle is limited so that the number of projects awarded funds is also limited. This system can result in some applications being denied or the funding delayed even though the objectives and potential for success of such projects is high, now therefore

Resolution (2017)

Producers awarded ACP contract funding in one year shall not be eligible for further ACP contract funding for two years.

III. AACD CROPLAND COMMITTEE

Members

Chair Yuma;

Laguna, Willcox-San Simon, Parker Valley, West Pinal, Gila Bend, Eloy, Florence-Coolidge, Buckeye Valley, Gila Valley, Agua Fria, San Carlos

A. MANAGEMENT OF EXOTIC AND INVASIVE SPECIES

1. NOXIOUS AND INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Background



Noxious and invasive weeds are one of the top resource management concerns across the West, including Arizona. These plants create problems on farmland, rangeland, forestland, and riparian areas. Weeds have long been an important problem on cultivated lands, reducing yields and quality of crops and increasing costs of production. More recently invasive plants have become an increasing problem on other kinds of lands. These plants can affect wildlife and fish habitat, increase soil erosion, compete with desirable native plants, serve as hosts for crop diseases, reduce the yield and/or quality of water from watersheds, and negatively affect other land uses. Although the problems have not yet reached the proportions of some northern states, the potential for greatly increased impacts exists. As yet, Arizona has not taken much coordinated statewide action to implement preventative or control measures, such as the establishment of weed management areas.

The Natural Resource Conservation Districts (and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts on tribal lands) are entities of state or tribal government with the responsibility for education and implementation on all aspects of resource management. This authority extends to all kinds of land and classes of land ownership (private, state, federal, tribal). Conservation districts cover the entire state of Arizona. Weeds do not respect property boundaries. An effective weed control program must work on entire landscapes regardless of land ownership. Therefore, the conservation districts are the logical entity to assume responsibility for weed management programs, i.e. to assume the role of weed management areas for the state. The districts are already established under state and tribal law, represent local landowners, and have access to technical assistance to aid in this effort. They represent the people most directly affected by the invasive weed problem. Further, the districts have a state organization AACD that can help to organize and coordinate such efforts on a statewide basis.

Position (2009)

Conservation Districts in Arizona are the logical vehicle for the implementation of measures designed to prevent and control invasive weeds on all categories of land ownership, and to coordinate efforts of interested individuals, agencies and organizations for their local areas.

Further, AACD can and should be the organization to receive and manage government funding, grants or other resources to coordinate implementation of weed management statewide through the conservation districts.

2. WEED MANAGEMENT AREAS

Background

There are few Weed Management Areas in Arizona and very little awareness of noxious and invasive weeds and their potential impact on conservation in Arizona.

There are limited efforts at the state level to deal with local noxious weed and invasive plant problems and the establishment of Weed Management Areas. There are existing conservation districts that define relevant communities and issues. The conservation districts best understand local people and problems concerning invasive plants and noxious weeds.



Position (2009)

AACD supports the concept of using Conservation Districts as the initiating body for creating Weed Management Areas when beneficial to landowners, land managers, and the conservation district. AACD supports the concept of using the Tonto Weed Management Area as a template and that AACD serve as an overarching group that helps with communications.

IV. AACD RANGELAND AND FORESTRY COMMITTEE

Members

Chair Apache;

Littlefield-Hurricane Valley, Santa Cruz, Tonto NRCD, Big Sandy, Chino Winds, Triangle, Navajo County, Navajo Mountain, Hopi, Hualapai, Ft. Defiance

A. RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

1. STATE AND FEDERAL GRAZING LEASES

Background

A large percentage of land in Arizona is rangeland or forestland grazed by domestic livestock. These lands are not only important for the economic benefits of livestock production, and Arizona's rural communities, these lands represent the highest single source of income from agriculture in Arizona. They are the habitat for most of the State's wildlife, the source of water for farms and cities, and provide open space for aesthetic enjoyment.

Most livestock production in Arizona is done on ranches which usually include a complex and interdependent pattern of privately owned land along with State and/or Federal grazing leases. The private land portions of these ranches are associated with prime riparian habitat for wildlife as well as property rights to both surface and sub-surface water. It is the proper management of these lands with domestic livestock that produces functioning stable watersheds, diverse habitat and a clean, dependable water supply downstream. Non-grazing on arid land promotes loss of biodiversity, erosion, fire and floods.

Many of these ranches are dependent on state and/or federal grazing leases to make a ranch a viable operating unit, both in terms of economics and balance of seasonal forage resources. Loss of these grazing leases would force most of these ranchers to sell their livestock and develop their land for non-agricultural purposes to recoup the value of their private lands.



The mission of the Natural Resource Conservation Districts in Arizona is to foster the sustainable, productive use and conservation of all natural resources. Accomplishing that mission requires developing goals, commitment, and investment with a long-term view rather than emphasis on short-term gains.

Emphasis on long-term conservation goals requires stability of tenure on the land for those making the investment of time and money to accomplish the goals. Recent and pending government policy changes and court decisions have weakened the security of tenure of grazing leases and increased uncertainty about future grazing fees and other costs of operating on both state and federal lands.

Position (2009)

The Arizona Association of Conservation Districts believes that equitable fees and security of tenure of grazing leases creates incentive for ranchers holding grazing leases to engage in practices and make investments that lead to long-term conservation benefits to the land.

Further the AACD believes that the policies which result in loss of state and /or federal grazing leases, or the threat of such loss will discourage ranchers from participating in conservation management, and will encourage the development or sale of private lands of non-agricultural purposes resulting in loss of open spaces and wildlife habitat through urban sprawl, and

The AACD urges state and federal lawmakers and land management agencies to adopt legislation and policy which will promote incentives for ranchers on both private and government leased land to invest in conservation practices and maintain the land in agricultural use.

2. GRAZING PERMIT BUYOUTS

Background

Federal rangelands administered by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are grazed by livestock by permits issued to private ranchers. Congress has directed that federal rangelands be grazed by livestock where the land has been determined suitable for grazing and when carried out consistent with land management objectives established by resource management plans. Federal grazing permits are essential to the economic viability of many ranches and to the balanced use of private, state, or other lands that are intermingled with the federal land. Federal policy generally allows the permit holder to take "non-use" (i.e. to remove all or part of the livestock) for a limited period for personal reasons, but provides that after a certain period the grazing may be offered to other qualified livestock operators if the permit holder does not make substantial grazing use the public land. In other words, a grazing permit authorizes the holder to graze public land under specified conditions and upon payment of a grazing fee, but the permit holder does not have the right to not graze the land unless the administering agency agrees this is necessary for resource protection. Anti-grazing interests are attempting to remove livestock grazing from public lands by various means. In



recent years, these interests have promoted the concept of “permit buyout” as a means of accomplishing this objective. Permit buyout involves two different approaches.

One approach is for a “conservation” group to buy an entire ranch thereby acquiring the private land and improvements as well as the federal grazing permit. Then they attempt to persuade the Forest Service and/or BLM to “retire” the permit, i.e. to put it into permanent non-use. An attempt was made to legitimize this approach in the revised BLM grazing regulations promoted by Secretary of the Interior Babbitt.

The second approach is the effort by a coalition of environmental/anti-grazing groups to get Congress to pass legislation providing federal taxpayer money to pay ranchers to relinquish their federal permits and to have the management agency put the permitted rangeland into perpetual non-use. In this case, the rancher would retain his private land. The anti-grazing groups have claimed that removal of grazing would save the government money because the costs of administering grazing exceed the revenues from grazing fees. Some ranchers have supported this approach, apparently for strictly financial reasons.

Position (2009)

1. AACD supports the right of any private individual or group to sell or buy private property on a willing buyer/willing seller basis. The buyer of a ranch should have the right to acquire federal grazing permits attached to that property if they meet all requirements to hold such permits.
2. AACD believes that the only interest acquired in the federal grazing allotment is the right to graze it under terms and conditions established by the land management agency, and any legal rights to water or improvements that may have transferred to the new owner by the previous owner.
3. AACD believes that grazing, and all other uses of public land, should be governed by laws enacted by Congress and by the public planning process established under those laws. Any decision to graze or not graze public land grazing allotments must be consistent with direction in land use plans. Neither individuals nor government agencies have the right to make land use decisions not consistent with existing land use plans, government policy and federal law.
4. AACD believes that future livestock grazing on the allotment should be determined by federal law and the land management planning process established by federal law. It is not the right of the permit holder or the land management agency to retire grazing without going through the appropriate legal processes. A permittee who does not wish to graze should be required to relinquish the permit, and it should be granted to another qualified applicant.

3. PURCHASE OF GRAZING PERMITS FOR PERMANENT RETIREMENT FROM GRAZING:

Position (2009)



1. Although lending institutions and the real estate market recognize that federal grazing permits have a value (i.e. the ranch is worth more with the permits than without it), the land management agencies have maintained that grazing permits are a privilege, not a right. The courts have upheld this interpretation. AACD believes that use of public money to purchase public land permits is not consistent with this interpretation. If the permittee has the right to sell the permit, then he/she should also have the right to compensation if the government reduces his permit for the benefit of other public land users.
2. AACD believes that a buyout program will encourage some ranchers to sell their permits for financial gain, then proceed to subdivide their private lands that are no longer viable as ranches. Encouraging such fragmentation of open space should not be supported by public money.
3. AACD believes that the supposed financial benefits to the government of removing grazing are based on unfounded assumptions for three reasons. One is that the benefits of livestock grazing on public lands to local communities and the nation cannot be quantified by simply comparing the costs and returns to the federal land management agencies. The benefits of public land grazing go far beyond the direct return to the federal government in grazing fees. Second, it is difficult to establish what portion of the land management agency's budget is actually devoted solely to grazing. One of the major costs of administering grazing on the public lands is related to litigation or the threat of litigation by the very groups who claim they have an interest in reducing the costs to the government. Third AACD does not believe that, even if grazing were eliminated on all public lands, the cost of administering public lands would be significantly reduced. Government just doesn't operate that way.
4. AACD believes that the permit buyout program has only one objective-the elimination of grazing on public lands, and therefore, the virtual elimination of livestock production in the western states. We believe that properly conducted range livestock production is not only ecologically sound but provides a source of income to both the federal government and local economies that otherwise would come out of the taxpayer's pocket.
5. AACD does not support "permanent retirement" from grazing of any land managed by the U.S. Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management.

4. INTERAGENCY MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR RANGELAND ASSESSMENT

Background

Rangelands are increasingly recognized as valuable not only for production of food and fiber but also for a myriad of other values and ecological services.

Sound public policy, budgeting and management of these rangelands depends on scientifically based information as to their condition and trends collected and interpreted in a consistent manner across all kinds of rangelands and categories of rangeland ownership. The development of such a process depends on communication and cooperation among the several federal agencies involved in management, research and technical assistance on rangelands.



An interagency Memorandum of Understanding was established in 1997 between the Forest service, Bureau of Land Management and Natural Resource Conservation Service to promote unified approaches to rangeland monitoring and assessment. That MOU is currently being considered for renewal and will provide the basis for interagency cooperation in the event that proposed language in the Interior Appropriations bill is passed and funded.

Position (2009)

AACD does hereby support the concept of this MOU and urges the Chief of the Forest Service, the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Director of the Bureau of Land Management to ratify and support this Memorandum of Understanding.

AACD urges the heads of the above agencies to seek to obtain support and involvement of other federal land management and research agencies such as the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Memorandum of Understanding and in the development of a National Rangeland Survey.

5. NATIONAL COOPERATIVE RANGELAND SURVEY

Background

The rangelands of the United States comprise over 40% of the nation's land, the sound management of these lands is critical for sustainable production of food and fiber, provision of clean water and air, enhancement of wildlife habitat, protection of endangered species, maintenance of open space, recreational uses, production of wood products, control of invasive weeds, reducing risks of damaging wildfires, and various other ecological services.

There is a continuing controversy over the ecological condition and trend of such lands whether in public or private ownership, this controversy is fueled to a considerable degree by lack of adequate soil surveys, ecological classification of rangelands, and mapping of rangelands based on this information.

There is no consistent procedure for carrying out rangeland classification, mapping and assessment to provide a nationwide evaluation of the ecological condition and management problems that can be applied across all types of rangeland regardless of the ownership or management objectives.

Until a consistent approach to collection and interpretation of data on all the nation's rangelands is developed, policy and budgets for the various agencies

involved in rangeland management, research, and technical assistance will continue to be based on inconsistent and incomplete information.

The development and implementation of such an effort would be best carried out by an interagency effort similar to the National Cooperative Soil Survey involving the U.S. Forest Service, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (representing private, state, and tribal



lands), the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the Department of Defense, and any other relevant federal agencies. Such an effort will require additional funding and personnel for these agencies.

Position (2009)

AACD urges its Congressional Delegation to support the language included in the Interior Appropriations House Report directing the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to establish an interagency committee to develop a National Cooperative Rangeland Survey, and encourage similar language in the Agriculture Appropriations Report.

We urge the Arizona Congressional Delegation to support adequate additional appropriations for that purpose in the next fiscal year.

6. FORAGE ALLOCATION

Background

The U.S. Forest Service, and some other agencies, continue to use forage allocation approaches to determine livestock stocking rates on public land grazing allotments. This approach involves estimating the total amount of forage available in a pasture for livestock grazing at a given time and dividing the forage by an animal unit dry matter requirement to come up with estimated stocking. This process involves estimating total annual production of vegetation, adjusting for relative preference of animals for different species, adjusting for effects of slope and distance from water on animal grazing distribution, allocating a portion of the forage base to wildlife, and allocating a portion of plant production to insure litter production, plant vigor and reproduction. All of these factors are based on generalities and assumptions rather than quantitative, site-specific measurement. As a result, the estimated "proper" stocking rates are highly subject the validity of such assumptions and have an unknown, but high probability of, error. The forage allocation approach can be useful if no other information is available or to set relative carrying capacities of different areas as a basis for evaluating effects of proposed range improvements, e.g. creating several pastures of roughly the same capacity. Deficiencies of this process are further discussed in the attached statement.

The range science profession does not support the use of forage allocation approaches or one-point-in-time inventories for establishing carrying capacity of rangelands unless no other information is available for that purpose. The range science profession supports a "stock and monitor" approach based on monitoring of animal numbers, utilization, trends in vegetation and/or soil conditions, and effects on other resource values such as wildlife habitat. This is called "adaptive management."

Position (2009)

AACD supports the use of a "stock and monitor" or adaptive management approach to adjusting numbers of grazing animals (both livestock and wildlife) permitted on public grazing



allotments. AACD does not support the use of one-point-in-time inventories of forage and forage allocation approaches to estimation of permitted carrying capacity for either livestock or wildlife on public lands unless no other information is available for that purpose. In almost every situation there exists a record of stocking rates, weather data, and various kinds of monitoring information that can be used to adjust grazing management to achieve goals of the agency and the livestock operator. Where such information is lacking or inadequate it can be supplemented by professional opinion. Where professional opinion rather than site-specific data is the basis for decision, that fact should be documented along with the professional qualifications of the individuals rendering such opinion.

7. FORAGE UTILIZATION AND RESIDUAL VEGETATION MEASUREMENT

Background

Estimates of forage utilization and/or residual vegetation are useful tools in managing grazing of livestock and wildlife. Utilization is defined as the percentage of the current growing season's production utilized by grazing or browsing animals. Residual vegetation is measured as the weight per unit area of vegetation remaining after grazing or the "stubble height" of grazed plants remaining after grazing.

Percentage utilization can only be measured after the total growth of plants for the year is complete. Total production is best determined at the end of the growing season. Utilization, as defined above, cannot be measured during the growing season because the total growth for the season is not yet known. Any measure of utilization that is based on less than total yearly production should be referred to a "relative" or "seasonal" use to indicate it does not meet the definition of utilization.

Residual measurements, e.g. stubble height, concentrate on the amount of material remaining, not the amount removed. Some think residual measurements are better indicators for soil protection and wildlife cover than percentage utilization.

Two main factors influence the level of utilization measured: one is stocking rate and one is weather in relation to plant growth. Utilization and residual

measurements can be made by a variety of valid techniques. Some of these involve direct estimates of dry matter removed or remaining, and some involve indices such as percentage of plants or stems grazed and un-grazed. Key species should be relatively abundant and relatively preferred by the grazing animal.

Utilization by grazing animals also varies spatially over the range due to such factors as plant distribution, topography, water locations, weather, insects, predators, and fencing.



“Proper” or “allowable” utilization levels are sometimes established as guidelines for grazing management on rangelands. Proper utilization may refer to the amount of utilization on preferred forage plants that will provide for continued productivity, vigor and reproduction of the species. Proper use depends on the species of plant and its ability to withstand grazing, but even more so on the recovery time provided that plant to re-grow and recover from grazing before it is grazed again.

Utilization may not always be used as a means of addressing a plant’s physiological response to grazing, but rather to other needs such as bird nesting areas or bank protection.

The Interagency Technical Reference entitled Utilization Studies and Residual Measurements (adopted in 1996 by USDA Forest Service, USDI BLM, USDA NRCS and Cooperative Extension Service) lists three uses for utilization studies:

1. To identify use patterns.
2. To help establish cause-and-effect interpretations of range trend data
3. To aid in adjusting stocking rates when combined with other monitoring data.

The Society for Range Management has a position statement that agrees with these uses.

Position (2009)

AACD supports the measurement of utilization and residual vegetation as valuable tools for managing public grazing allotments, but not as management objectives or bases for compliance with term and conditions of permits. As stated in the Interagency Technical Reference on Utilization (1996) and supported by the Society for Range Management there are three legitimate uses for such data:

1. To identify use patterns.
2. To help establish cause-and-effect interpretations of range trend data.
3. To aid in adjusting stocking rates when combined with other monitoring data.

AACD believes that when utilization or residual vegetation guidelines are included in management plans or other documents the following criteria should be documented:

1. The method of measurement
2. The season of measurement, i.e. whether utilization (based on entire growing season’s production) or relative use (based on less than annual production) will be measured.
3. Where the measurement will take place, i.e. where are key areas and why were they selected.



4. Which species (key species) or group of species (browse, perennial grasses, annuals, etc.) will be measured, and why.
5. Studies that establish the relationship of the proposed measurement to the goals of management in terms of soil, vegetation composition or amount, wildlife values or other factors.
6. Consultation and agreement among grazing permittees and other parties with legitimate interests in the allotment on the protocol and interpretations to be used.

AACD does not support the use of rigid utilization and/or residual measurement standards to determine compliance with management plans or annual operating plans, or to trigger automatic livestock moves among pastures and/or removal from an allotment. Such actions should consider all pertinent information, including weather and forage conditions in the whole ranch operation, outlook for the rest of the grazing season, and the economic consequences of any proposed action.

8. RESTOCKING AFTER DROUGHT

Background

The current drought in Arizona has resulted in widespread reductions in grazing or total destocking of rangelands. Livestock reductions have been voluntary on private, state and some federal lands. In other cases, federal land management agencies have mandated reductions or destocking. Federal agencies have, or are considering, policies for restocking after the drought. These policies have important consequences not only for the federal lands to which they apply, but to associated private and state lands as well. Therefore, AACD believes it is imperative for federal land management agencies have a sound approach to this question.

Reduction in stocking rates due to drought is the result of one or more of three main factors:

1. Reduced forage production – Dry conditions (below average effective rainfall) reduce the amount of forage produced by plants during the growing season. Such reduction is part of the “normal” cycle of plant production. A “drought” occurs when forage production will not support normal stocking rates without jeopardizing animal production and/or vigor of forage plants, thus requiring a reduction in stocking until the sufficient forage is available to support average numbers.
2. Lack of water - Stocking may have to be reduced if water is not available in certain parts of the range.
3. Plant mortality – Extreme and/or extended drought may result in death of some forage plants. Obviously, this reduces forage production. The length of time the range needs to recover from loss of forage production due to death of forage plants depends on the kind of plants involved, i.e. how quickly new plants become established when good conditions return.



The most difficult aspect of dealing with drought is the problem of identifying when a drought begins, and when it ends. Generally, the sooner reductions are made for drought the less reduction is required and the less impact there is on both livestock and the range. Ranchers are sometimes more reluctant to reduce stocking on federal grazing permits than on their state and private lands because of the perceived uncertainty of restoring numbers after the drought. There is no way to know when the drought has ended. If a reasonable amount of moisture is received in a growing season, forage is produced that could be utilized to some extent, but that does not mean the drought is over. From a practical standpoint the decision to restock or increase stocking has to be made on existing conditions and the foreseeable prospects for forage production. A flexible and cooperative approach to both destocking and restocking will be beneficial to the livestock operator and the condition of the rangeland.

Position (2009)

AACD believes that a realistic restocking policy after drought will increase the incentive for permittees to reduce stocking on federal permits when drought occurs. Decisions to either reduce stocking due to drought or increase stocking rates due to end of drought should be made cooperatively with each individual permittee and should consider the entire ranch operation including private and state lands. Decisions should be made on a site-specific basis and should consider the existing forage conditions in all pastures to be used within the foreseeable future. Rigid requirements on utilization levels, ground cover, forage production, or other factors applied over a broad area should be avoided.

After each growing season the permittee and the agency should decide whether numbers can be increased or should be reduced given the amount of forage produced and available over the entire ranch and a plan worked out for utilization of existing forage. Use of all classes of forage (perennial grass and forbs, annuals, and browse) should be considered. In Arizona, this decision may have to be made twice a year, i.e. in fall and in spring. Both the agency and the permittee should monitor conditions to adjust the plan as needed. AACD believes that this flexible, cooperative approach will improve the ability of both ranchers and agencies to deal with drought.

9. ROLE OF GRAZING IN WILDFIRE CONTROL

Background

Drought conditions across much of the West have created conditions conducive to intense fires that are difficult to control. Damage to resources and property and risk to human safety have been substantial. Costs of suppression have amounted to millions of dollars. In addition, diversion of federal and state land management personnel and budget into emergency fire suppression has seriously hampered the ability of these agencies to carry out their other land management responsibilities and this has resulted in unknown but substantial costs to the people and communities depending on use of the lands affected.



Drought has exacerbated fire conditions, but it is not the underlying cause. Years of strict fire control have allowed increase of woody plants and fuel loads in many areas. Although these effects have been recognized by some agencies for several years, the necessary effort to use prescribed fires has been stymied by lack of budgets, environmental restrictions (e.g. Clean Air standards), concern over liability for property damage, public opinion, litigation aimed blocking forest logging, thinning and grazing in forests, and the lack of flexibility in moving quickly on burning projects when conditions are favorable.

Other land management factors that have contributed to increased risk of fire and intensity of fires are lack of thinning in forests and reduction and/or elimination of livestock grazing over large areas of public lands and lands owned by “conservation” organizations with policies opposed to grazing and/or tree cutting. In addition, large areas of range and forestland have been converted to rural subdivisions where grazing or tree cutting are eliminated, resulting in increased fire danger for residences.

AACD believes that any comprehensive fire management policy should include consideration of the beneficial effects of planned grazing. Properly managed grazing for livestock production will not prevent forest and range fires, but it can reduce the intensity of fires and make fires easier to control. Such grazing management not only reduces the costs of preventing and controlling fires, but facilitates the use of prescribed burning, while returning money to the land owner. Grazing can also be prescribed specifically for purposes of creating or maintaining fire breaks as has been successfully in some areas.

Position (2009)

AACD takes the position that any comprehensive fire management policy for Arizona should include consideration of the role of livestock grazing in reducing fire risks and mitigating the damage caused by fire.

10. INTRODUCTION OF LIVESTOCK INTO THE SAN PEDRO RIPARIAN NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

Background

The San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) is the first of only two Riparian National Conservation Areas in the nation. The Arizona-Idaho Conservation Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-696) established SPRNCA to protect the riparian area and its aquatic, wildlife, archeological, paleontological, scientific, cultural, educational, and recreational resources. SPRNCA is located in Cochise County, AZ and contains approximately 56,500 acres of public land. Forty miles of the San Pedro River fall within it. A large portion of SPRNCA is within the Hereford Natural Resource Conservation District (NRCD).

WHEREAS the land within the SPNRCA, most of which was used for grazing, was acquired from private landowners by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Currently, within the Hereford NRCD portion of SPRNCA there are four ranchers with allotments totaling 6,521 acres. All grazing was removed from the remaining areas of SPRNCA,



WHEREAS as stated in the BLM Fact Sheet on the BLM's Management of Livestock Grazing, updated March 2009, livestock grazing can result in impacts on public land resources, but well-managed grazing provides numerous environmental benefits as well. For example, while livestock grazing can lead to increases in some invasive species, well-managed grazing can be used to manage vegetation. Intensively managed "targeted" grazing can control some invasive plant species or reduce the fuels that contribute to severe wildfires. Besides providing such traditional products as meat and fiber, well-

managed rangelands and other private ranch lands support healthy watersheds, carbon sequestration, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitat. Livestock grazing on public lands helps maintain the private ranches that, in turn, preserve the open spaces that have helped write the West's history and will continue to shape this region's character in the years to come.

Resolution

AACD support the positives of livestock grazing and recommends that it be used as a management tool to enhance and maintain SPRNCA natural resources within the Hereford NRCD.

B. AGENCY TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

1. CERTIFICATION OF RANGELAND PROFESSIONALS

Background

The Society for Range Management and the Wildlife Society have established programs to certify individuals as professionals in each of these natural resource disciplines.

The purpose of these programs is to assure minimum educational and experiential background for people working in the profession of range management and wildlife management, to encourage continuing education and professional development and to provide a standard of ethical conduct in professional activity.

Ranchers and other landowners are concerned that people involved in rangeland grazing and wildlife management planning and decision making in federal and state agencies should have obtained the required knowledge and skill through education and experience to act in a competent manner.

It is imperative that rangeland and wildlife professionals continue to build on and update their knowledge and skills by continuing education.

Position (2009)

The AACD acting on behalf of public land grazing permittees and private landowners urges the Chief of the Forest Service, Director of the Bureau of Land Management, Chief of the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the Arizona State Land Commissioner to use whatever means they may legally and ethically employ to encourage their professional employees



involved in rangeland and wildlife management and decision making to become certified by the appropriate professional society, and

Further, AACD urges that individuals within these agencies who are certified or who are working toward obtaining certification be supported by providing time and /or financial support for them to obtain necessary training and continuing education credits.

11. STANDARDS FOR NATURAL RESOURCE SPECIALISTS INVOLVED IN RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Background

The federal government has established educational and other requirements for employment in various professional classifications, including rangeland management specialist, these requirements are administered by the office of Personnel Management for all federal agencies.

The purpose of such requirements is to ensure minimum qualifications for individuals employed for technical rangeland management and/or technical assistance in the federal agencies.

Landowners, grazing permittees and other people whose livelihoods may be affected by the decisions or advice given by federal employees on range management issue have a right to expect a certain level of professional qualifications.

There is evidence that in recent years some agencies have not strictly adhered to the standards of professional employment established by the Office of Personnel Management, and that has resulted in actions inconsistent with accepted professional principles to the detriment of some landowners or public land permittees.

Resolution (2009)

The AACD does hereby request the Congressional Delegation of Arizona to investigate the extent to which federal agencies are adhering to the OPM standards for employment in the position of range Conservationist, and further to direct these agencies to follow these requirements in the future.

12. CERTIFICATION OF RANGE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

Background



Ranchers and other landowners in Arizona’s Conservation Districts, and Tribal Soil and Water Conservation Districts are directly affected by the professional qualifications of government employees and contractors who provide technical input and decisions making to rangeland assessment, management planning, environmental analysis, and government policies regarding livestock grazing.

Although the requirement for special expertise is recognized and required for many actions (e.g. soil surveys, archaeological clearances, fire control) range management planning and decisions have often been done with little or no input by qualified range professionals, and without certification, there is a tendency for agencies to more loosely interpret what constitutes qualifications as a “range specialist” or “resource specialist”

The Society for Range Management has a program (Certified Professional In Range Management) for certification of range management professionals, with minimum standards for educational background and actual experience plus required adherence to a code of ethics and standards of professional conduct.

Resolution (2017)

The Arizona Association of Conservation Districts supports the following actions:

1. All local, state, tribal and federal government agencies engaged in administration of or technical assistance on rangelands should insure an adequate number of qualified range specialists to carry out this mission.
2. All local, state tribal and federal government agencies engaged in range management programs should require or give preference to CPRMs applying for range management positions.
3. All local, state, tribal and federal government agencies should support continuing education and professional activity by those in range management positions.
4. All local, state tribal and federal government agencies should require that a CPRM have a major role in any data collection or interpretation, environmental assessments, management planning, monitoring and decision making that involved rangelands. As a minimum, a CPRM should review all such documents and the review comments made part of the document.
5. Credentials of all consultants and contractors performing duties similar to those above, whether employed by government and tribal agencies or private entities, should be CPRMs or should have at least the equivalent level of qualifications.
6. Individuals or groups that volunteer to furnish data to land management agencies or other interests should have the protocols, data and any interpretation of data reviewed and approved by a CPRM or equivalent.

Furthermore, AACD takes these positions because it is our ranching members, local economies, the tax base, and local culture that pay the price when plans and decisions are based on inadequate professional qualifications.

C. FOREST MANAGEMENT



1. MANAGEMENT TO IMPROVE FOREST HEALTH

Background

A series of disastrous wildfires and widespread die-off of forest trees due to bark beetles, both exacerbated by several years of extreme drought, have focused attention on the need to improve management of Arizona's forestlands. These forestlands are mainly under the control of the U.S. Forest Service.

Historically, Arizona's forests burned at intervals of 5-20 years due to the dry conditions and high incidence of lightning. These fires maintained a relatively open forest with a grassy understory that provided good soil protection. Fuel loads were light and intense crown fires were unusual.

Currently, much of the U.S. Forest Service's budget is consumed by its fire suppression efforts each year. During the 20th century the forests have been managed mainly under a policy of fire suppression to protect property and timber and to encourage reproduction of trees. The result has been a tremendous increase in the density of forest trees, increased shrubby vegetation, decreased grass cover, and increased amounts of litter and other fuels on the forest floor. These conditions greatly increase the intensity of fires when they do occur. High intensity fires often kill all the trees and leave the soil exposed to erosion. They are also a threat to human life and property, especially since the spread of residential areas into the forest.

Increased tree density has had other damaging effects. Competition among the trees for moisture and nutrients results in slow growth and increases the frequency of drought stress. Drought-stressed trees are more susceptible to disease and insect attack, as illustrated by the infestation of bark beetles in the current drought. Denser tree canopies increase loss of water to interception and evapotranspiration, resulting in lower flow of springs and creeks and reduced ground-water recharge. The increased tree cover has also reduced forage for livestock and habitat for many species of wildlife.

Foresters have realized for some time that forest thinning and prescribed fire was needed to improve the condition of the forests in Arizona. However, their ability to implement these practices has been hampered by public opinion, inadequate budgets, concern over liability for loss of property, and threats of litigation based on endangered species and air quality standards. The virtual elimination of harvest of forest products in Arizona has not only contributed to the increase in forest density but also has reduced income to the government and to local communities that could offset some of the expense of prescribed burning and forest thinning.

National Association of Conservation Districts Selected Policy Statements on Forest Management
(Quoted from NACD Policy Positions 2002)

"The BLM, through the FEHRF, should utilize silvicultural treatments consistent with the 1998 congressional expanded authority to improve the health of forested ecosystems



on public lands. Projects should also restored watershed conditions and improve forest ecosystem health and integrity through density reduction and an aggressive fuels management program..." (Section II, B, 4)

"NACD urges the USFS to support salvage timber sales and other sales wherever stands of trees require this to maintain a healthy, viable forest and the reduce the amount of dead wood accumulation with National Forests (Section II, B, 6)

"Because of past management practices and fire suppression, many of our forest administered by Federal agencies have accumulated fuel loads and developed stand structures susceptible to catastrophic fires that destroy the soil and increase the risk of insect and disease attack. Silvicultural practices such as prescribed fire, density control of harvest of commercial forest products con reduce the frequency and intensity of extreme fire events, while benefiting local, regional, and national economies. NACD supports changes in legislation and

agency policies budgets that allow conducting effective prescribed fire, pre-suppression activity, and silvicultural treatments to accomplish that end." (Sect II, J, 1)

"NACD supports the Secretary of Interior and Secretary of Agriculture in their efforts to conduct fuel reduction treatments in the urban wildland interface within the vicinity of federal lands that are at risk from wildfire." (Sect II, J, 5)

"There are more than five million acres of overly dense stands of public forestlands at high risk of loss due to catastrophic disease infestation and wildfire. NACD encourages Congress to pass legislation that commands federal agencies to take aggressive action to restore Western forests without size restrictions on cut trees and promotes a policy of private enterprise." (Section II,J,7)

"The National Association of Conservation Districts urges the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to develop management policies that include consideration of the beneficial effects of planned grazing. NACD also urges Congress to support adequate additional appropriations for the purpose in the next fiscal year."

Position (Revised 2016)

The objectives of the Conservation Districts in Arizona are to promote conservation of soil and wildlife, to promote the sustainable use of natural resources for the benefit of people, and to support the economy and tax base of local communities. Therefore, the AACD fully supports the policies and positions of the National Association of Conservation Districts (cited below) and efforts by the state and federal government to improve the management of our forestlands. Further, AACD urges the Arizona Congressional Delegation and Governor of Arizona to support federal and state policy and legislation that will facilitate thinning, prescribed burning, and prescribed grazing to improve the condition of Arizona's forest and rangeland watersheds. AACD also supports development of markets for sale of products derived from such treatments and/or exchange of wood and forage for services performed by



private entities to offset the costs of these management actions. Income from these sources will save the taxpayers money and benefit the economy of local communities.

We also urge our delegation to establish a separate fund for fire suppression apart from the Forest Services' other funding that will eliminate their practice of "fire transfer".

13. LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

BACKGROUND

In fiscal year 2017 various federal agencies received funding from LWCF amounting to over \$900 million. Of that, \$506.5 million was appropriated to buy private land to add to the federal estate.

State Foresters receive much of their operating expenses through the U.S. Forest Service, preventing the state foresters from making locally relevant management decisions. If the states were to receive funding from LWCF, they would be less dependent. Also, the Forest Service budget would be considerably less as there would be a major infusion from off-budget monies to use to fight fires.

Currently, there is an effort to make the land acquisition portion of the LWCF permanent. It almost passed last Congressional session. We may not have another opportunity to change this.

Resolution (2017)

We urge Congress to appropriate all funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which receives its monies from off-shore oil royalties, and to divert those funds to individual state Foresters for their use in fire suppression, fire management, and conservation efforts instead of using those funds for buying private property.



V. AACD EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Members

Chair Coconino;

West Pinal, Florence-Coolidge, Verde, East Maricopa, Chino Winds, Yuma, Laguna

A. CONSERVATION EDUCATION

1. CONSERVATION DISTRICT EDUCATION CENTER AUTHORITIES

Position

AACD advocates legislation to update the powers and duties of our Education Centers by adopting the following policy:

The Education Centers sponsored by Natural Resource Conservation Districts in Arizona are empowered to increase public knowledge of natural resources by:

- 1) Exposing children and adults in the district to science based natural resource education that includes a discussion of economic and social implications;
- 2) Offering technical guidance and training to producers;
- 3) Publishing scholarly materials;
- 4) Giving District Supervisors and Cooperators opportunities for education and training, both inside and outside their District;
- 5) Conducting or sponsoring scientific studies in areas that affect the District's natural resources.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL SPECIAL PLATE FUND

Background

Arizona Revised Statute 37-1015 Environmental special plate fund; distribution states in part:

B. Subject to legislative appropriation, the department shall distribute \$5,000 annually to each natural resource conservation district with an established education center for the purpose of developing and implementing an environmental education program that is conducted in a balanced manner, that is based on current scientific information and that includes a discussion of economic and social implications.

Since the Environmental special plate fund has in recent years failed to reach the amount necessary to fund all of the education centers that have been created by the various conservation districts at the yearly \$5,000 level, money has been appropriated from the funds made available by the legislature for the operations of the districts. Thus, the district operations have been necessarily curtailed to comply.



Position

The Arizona Natural Resource Conservation Districts State Association resolves to support legislation that would require the difference between the Environmental special plate fund yearly receipts and the yearly requirement of \$5,000 for each education center to be funded through the Governor's general fund and not through a reduction of the district funds.

3. TAX DEDUCTION FOR EDUCATION

Background

Currently Arizona's 140 Resident Personal Income Tax Return allows for tax-deductible contributions to the Arizona Game and Fish Department non-game programs, State Parks and others.

Policy

AACD encourages language in Arizona's 140 Resident Personal Income Tax Return to allow tax-deductible donations to Arizona Natural Resource Conservation District Environmental Education Centers.