

Meet Your Local Conservationist
Steve Turcotte, Winkelman NRCD



Tell me a little bit about yourself and your family?

I was born in Patuxent River Maryland, the son of a Navy test pilot. After his death my mother remarried and I was raised in Michigan. Before going off the college I worked on a dairy farm, an equestrian center, and as a horse camp counselor. I graduated from Marquette University and later on earned Masters degrees from the Naval War College and Salve Regina University. After college I was commissioned an Ensign in the US Navy. I spent the next 30 years as a Navy pilot, completing my career as an Admiral commanding 22 Naval Bases on the East Coast. Upon retiring from active duty, I moved to Tucson and ran a small aerospace manufacturing firm. Retiring again 8 years ago, I have since been concentrating on improving the ranch and working in the local community. My wife Jane is a clinical psychologist who has been working as a contractor in the VA Healthcare system. She is retiring this year and plans to spend more time helping at our ranch.

What is the history of your ranch?

My wife and I bought our ranch in Aravaipa Canyon from Jep and Peggy White, a 3rd Generation Rancher. They raised goats and cattle until 1942 and then went entirely to cow/calf. I have been working on improvements and adding additional land over the last 20 years. In 2013 I added land from the old Holy Joe Ranch and from the BLM. We are now a cow/calf operation under Aravaipa Land and Cattle and sell packaged grass fed beef at local markets under Aravaipa Canyon Ranch.



What breed of cattle do you raise?



In the past I have experimented with Braford and Brangus cross but have settled on Angus based with a little ear. Most of the ranch is rugged country, including upland and mountain range, but we have had good luck with this cross. The carcass data for grade and marbling has increased significantly and the cattle are doing well on the ranch.

What kind of conservation work have you done on your operation?

We have instituted a number of practices to include cross fencing to facilitate prescribed grazing, water development and conservation, and invasive species eradication. My end goal is to retain a sustainable, healthy, and diverse landscape while maintaining a stable livestock and wildlife population.



What, in terms of conservation work, is next for your operation?

We plan on adding additional wildlife watering facilities to aid in maintaining and improving big game species habitation and allowing wildlife use at livestock watering facilities throughout the year by leaving waters on and providing ramps. Additionally, I want to work on major soil erosion projects and finish the remaining cross fencing.



What sort of technologies have you implemented on your ranch and how have they changed over the years?

As we have been developing waters, the entire system is powered by solar pumps. The added waters, solar pumps and new pipe technologies have enabled me to place waters in places that were difficult if not impossible before.



How long have you been involved with NRCDS?

I first became involved with NRCDS 22 years ago while I was the commanding officer of NAS Jacksonville. I had an issue on one of my bombing ranges with Fish and Wildlife, Forest Service, and BLM. The local NRCDS helped me get the issue resolved. As a Navy Admiral I served on the Chesapeake Bay Commission and worked closely with several NRCDS's adjacent to the bay. Again, they were very helpful in getting conservation practices in place.



Why did you get involved with NRCDS?

When I purchased the ranch I wanted to become involved with local issues. I thought that I could bring my past experience in the Navy with government, land management, and NEPA/ESA to help our local area. I started attending NRCDS meetings and was subsequently asked to serve as a supervisor.

What changes have you seen in the Winkelman NRCD since you joined?

I think the biggest change in Winkelman NRCD is the amount of projects that we have started and finished in the last couple of years. The district has been involved with several major issues and contracts to include the Sunzia energy corridor, invasive species management, community learning garden, and several other conservation contracts that are active and/or becoming active. In addition, our Education Center is about to take custody of some land on the San Pedro River which will serve as a home base for conservation education.



What is your favorite thing about being involved with NRCDs?

Being involved with the local community and being able to make a difference. Our ability to work with Federal, State and Local agencies to put conservation practices in place on the ground is unique and very gratifying. I feel we owe it to land, the people, and our future generations.



Thank you, Steve Turcotte!