

Meet Your Local Conservationist Benny Aja



Tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, and your ranch.

I am a third-generation rancher from Williams, AZ. I have two daughters and two granddaughters. My grandparents purchased the ranch in 1944, 20 miles north of Williams, for their sheep operation. We no longer are in the sheep business but are raising angus cattle.

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

When my grandfather purchased the ranch he immediately began pushing and burning junipers – an invasive species. All of his neighbors said he was crazy but as they saw the transformation





from woodland thickets to grasslands, they began to do the same. Also, there were only four dirt tanks and three of those were washed out, so he repaired those and began building more. Today we have 18 dirt tanks strategically located throughout the ranch to increase water distribution and availability to both wildlife and livestock.

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

Through the NRCS EQIP program, we have continued treating the invasive junipers and have installed eight miles

of pipelines with five drinkers. In coordination with my local NRCS, I have developed an entire plan for the ranch to continue treating the junipers as well as adding to the pipeline throughout the ranch to further develop watering systems.

Can you speak a little to your involvement with your Conservation District?

I joined the Coconino NRCD Board approximately four years ago at the request of Mike Macauley, who was then the chairman. I look forward to continuing to serve on the board, working with our partners, and our very active Education Center.



Thank you, Benny Aja!