

Winkelman Natural Resource Conservation District

January 2014

From the Frog Pond

Your Board hired a new clerk, Diana Stirling. Diana lives in Mammoth and works part time for CAC. She brings a lot of talent to the District as she has experience in writing grants and is very tech savvy. She is fast becoming a valuable asset for the Board.

Our thanks go out to Vicki France our long-time clerk. She is wishing to spend more time in the White Mountains where she has a home. Vicki has been diligent over the last several years in keeping me out of hot water with state recording requirements and making sure we follow the open-law requirements of a local government. Thank you Vicki for a job well done.

The joint Winkelman/Redington refuge committee has been meeting regularly and is making progress on hopefully finding innovative ways to create opportunities for our producers to stay on the land and keep the San Pedro valley open and productive. Last month we met with Steve Spangle, head of Environmental Services for Arizona, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. He is very supportive of what we are doing and said he will personally do all he can to help us make it a success. Steve has come on board as one of our advisors. Steven Williams, head of the Natural Resource Division of the Arizona State Land Department has also joined the committee as an advisor. The Land Department has a very large presence in the Valley.

Elsewhere in this newsletter read the latest announcement from U.S. Fish and wildlife Service. They are stopping planning for the refuge in light of a new process for planning new refuges in the future.

The Ed Center recently bought

one of those cargo containers to keep our records in. Right now they are scattered all over the district and in the basement of the Plant Material Center. It is located at the Hedrick Ranch outside of Mammoth so will be much easier to get to when we need something.

We are still waiting for a Record of Decision (ROD) on the SunZia Project. Although the BLM admitted they are required to coordinate with us and did meet with us before the final EIS came out, they were woefully short on what is required by law for them to do to meet the requirements of coordination. Until the ROD comes out there has been no harm so can't make a decision on our next move. The White Sands Missile Base has put a kink in their plans and they are doing a study to see how the transmission lines will affect Base operations.

We are currently working on Local Work Group stuff. The new direction for NRCS in determining EQIP funding is to have the Districts tell them what the resource priorities are in the District and what practices will address those priorities. Every cooperator has received a couple of notices by now so it you haven't let board members know what you think the district should concentrate NRCS and other funding on, don't be surprised if your favorite EQIP practice doesn't let your operation rank high enough for funding.

Walt and Francie Meyer and I attended a Pinal County Board of Supervisors Work Meeting last month to let them know what the county could expect if the Sonoran Desert Tortoise is listed in 2015. We asked them to spend a lot of county money helping us make sure the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service uses the latest and most accurate science to

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Who we are

Bill Dunn, chair
Francie Meyer
Steve Turcotte
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Diana Stirling, clerk

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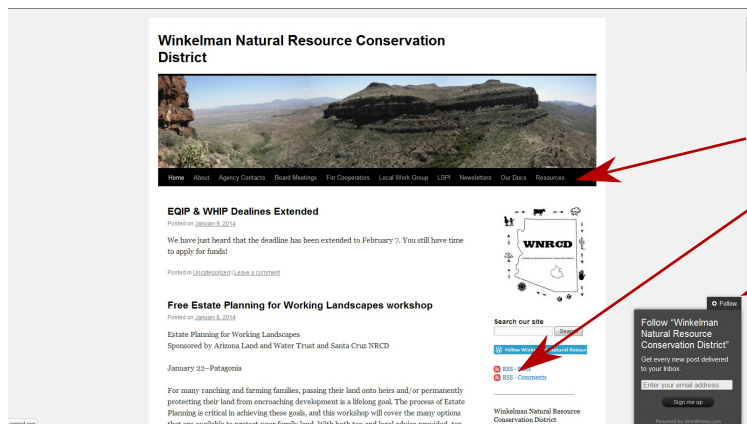
make their determination. We have also met with researchers at the U. of A. to ask their help with the tortoise science. Also, we are nearly finished with the tortoise Best Management Practices document and will be sending it out for peer review soon. This will be Winkelman's document that the participating agencies are signing onto. All of this is to ensure that our producers aren't adversely affected by whatever tortoise decision comes down in 2015.

Until next time.

Bill

wnrcd.org gets a new look!

Take a look at our new site! The address is the same, but we've created a new look. We'll post the latest news and information on the home page so you can easily stay up to date.



The menu is across the top. You'll notice that some of the menu names have changed.

You can subscribe to posts with an RSS feed if you have an RSS reader installed. You can also comment on posts and subscribe to other people's comments. Just click on the RSS button of your choice.

If you want new posts to arrive in your inbox, click the tiny Follow button at the lower right corner of the page. A dialogue box opens where you can enter your email address. A confirmation message will be sent to your inbox. Simply confirm and adjust your settings if necessary. You do not need to have a Wordpress account in order to follow our site.

This is a work in progress (not everything from the old site has been moved yet) and your comments and suggestions are welcome. Send them to clerk.wnrcd@gmail.com.

EQIP and WHIP applications due January 17

Applicants interested in potential 2014 funding for NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Initiative must have their applications submitted by January 17, 2014 for the first funding cycle. If funds are still available, applicants have a second opportunity to submit applications, with a deadline of April 18, 2014. There are two application cycles for 2014 financial assistance; however applications are accepted throughout the entire year.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a conservation program that provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers who face threats to soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastureland, private non-industrial forestland, and other farm or ranch lands.

Additionally, NRCS offers special initiatives through EQIP, including:

- On-Farm Energy Initiative: assists producers conserve energy on their

operations

- Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative: assists producers to install high tunnels designed to extend the growing season
- Organic Initiative: assists producers to implement conservation practices on certified organic operations or those working towards organic certification
- Air Quality Initiative: assists producers to address air quality concerns on the operations (location requirements apply)

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) is a voluntary program focused on the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher for protection and restoration of breeding habitat and combatting habitat losses. Through WHIP-WLFW, the NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to eligible private and Tribal land users for the development of upland, wetland, aquatic, and other types of wildlife habitat.

Visit

**<http://www.az.nrcs.usda.gov/>
to learn more about NRCS
financial assistance
programs.**



A note of apology: To those of you who asked to receive this newsletter digitally, I had a computer crash and I lost the list! If you'd like to get the newsletter and other announcements via email, please send your request to clerk.wnrcd@gmail.com. I'm sorry for any inconvenience caused. ~Diana

The Meyer Tortoise Study

The story behind our initiating the tortoise study is kind of unusual, I think. At the time the study began, we absolutely had no idea that the Sonoran desert tortoise would become such an important issue.



In the late 1970's, you may remember, jojoba oil was purported to be a possible replacement for whale oil. It's use would "save the whales." Jojoba is a very common native shrub in this area and it produces a nice little acorn-type nut that is very palatable to livestock and wildlife and even to humans. I am sure they were an important food for early Americans. Raw, they are a little alummy tasting but taste pretty good when they are roasted. In fact, my dad, who was an old cowman, called them coffee beans. Jojoba oil began to be used in cosmetics, soaps, shampoos, etc. And, therefore, the price of jojoba nuts, from which the oil is derived, went way up. As a result, someone here locally (we never did find out who) was contracting groups to camp out in the desert and pick tons and tons of jojoba nuts. Of course all this picking was illegal and it took place on public, state and private lands. We had as many

as 200 illegal pickers in various camps on our ranch. The neighboring ranches who had jojoba were all affected, too. Most of the pickers appeared to be immigrants (legal or illegal?), some claimed to be from Honduras, some from Guatemala. Some were afraid of the others. It was a nightmare because they cut fences, made new roads, burned the native vegetation (why? we could not figure it out) and left piles of garbage. We never knew when someone might be on the hillside overlooking our home. It kept us constantly on the move keeping track of what they were doing. But the worst was that many were not supplied with adequate food and water so they were hungry. We lost quite a few calves, of course, but they literally raped the resources in an effort to get enough to eat. They robbed wild bee hives, captured rabbits, and even captured live rattlesnakes to take back to camp to eat. We have photos of two buckets with live snakes with sticks in their mouths and half hitches around their jaws to keep them from biting. And, we noticed tortoise shells in their campfires. The pickers were obviously eating the desert tortoise as well. From what we have learned, tortoises are a common food source in parts of the world.

Seeing those shells, reminded Walt of the many years of seeing tortoises on the ranch. His naturally inquisitive mind began to

wonder about the tortoises and what effect this onslaught was having on them. The Sonoran desert tortoise study resulted. With Walt's pretty extensive science education including wildlife classes, he understands the importance of a sound monitoring protocol. So he developed one and began finding and tagging tortoises. Eventually, in consulting with our local Game Warden, Collins Cochran, Walt realized that he should have a scientific collectors permit from AZ Game and Fish, which he promptly got. The study has been ongoing now for over thirty-three years. It is totally self funded and has yielded lots of data. We even have fecal analysis data to indicate what tortoises eat. The tortoise study has been lots of fun and we have learned a lot. There have been years when we do not intensively monitor but other years that we do. In any event, the whole family is interested in the study (even the granddaughters) and we intend to keep it going into the future.



~Francie

Quick facts:

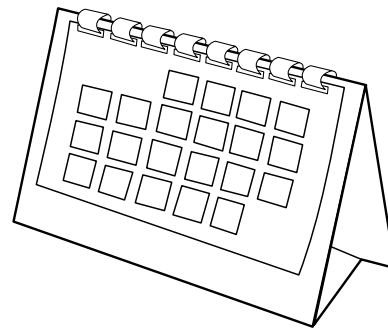
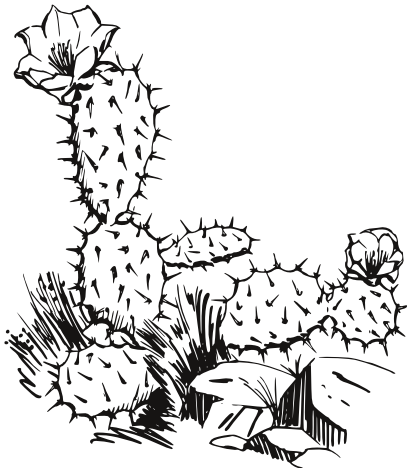
- * The Meyer Study covers 14,905 acres
- * It's the longest continuous Sonoran desert tortoise study in Arizona
- * More than 700 tortoises have been tagged
- * Elevations in the study area are between 2,000 and 4,100 feet
- * The study area includes 5 ecological site complexes
- * The Meyer Study has been entirely self-funded

Mark your calendar . . .

January 15 Quarterly meeting

**10:00 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church
225 East Butte Avenue
Florence, Arizona**

Lunch will be pot-luck.



Get the *latest news* about

- * the Lower San Pedro Initiative
- * the tortoise monitoring project
- * the Local Work Group
- * the upcoming WNRCD election
- * what's happening with our Board members and cooperating agencies

The Education Center meeting will be held after the business of the regular quarterly meeting. Check wnrcd.org for the agenda.



Winkelman Natural Resource Conservation District
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Happy New Year!

