



### Gerry Miller award

It was not hard to decide to award this person. What was hard was to distill down what to tell you since he has done so much for so long. A native Nevadan from White Pine County, Gerry Miller has spent most of his life assisting farmers and ranchers and units of government solve local soil and water conservation issues, whether he is actually doing the work on the ground or pulling together partners for even larger success.

Gerry hails from a proud heritage which goes back into the 1800's in White Pine County. He spent summers on the family ranch, graduated from White Pine High School, served in the United States Army, graduated from University of Nevada Reno, and returned to eastern and northeastern Nevada where he still works to this day bringing his special style of inclusive conservation and boots on the ground.

I have been fortunate to know Gerry for decades after I first met him in the Nevada Section of Society for Range Management. He is a tireless promoter of conservation, the man who is always there to see the job through to completion, the man who takes care of all the details behind the scene, but also the man who has a new and innovative idea to try and the inspiration to include as many partners as possible along the way. Gerry is always for the producer, for the people involved; he likes people and to help people, which is most likely why he is so successful. He has a knack to make his activities inclusive of other groups, organizations and individuals while keeping the conservation districts in the forefront and leadership for any particular project or activity.

Gerry was a Range Tech for the Forest Service in Elko, a Resource Conservationist for Soil Conservation Service in Ely, the Resource Conservation and Development Coordinator out of Elko for a huge area of seven Nevada counties, a project manager for Elko BLM for Ruby Pipeline mitigation funds and now he is the Elko Conservation Staff Specialist for the CD Program in DCNR. In all these jobs he has always monitored the ground, driven the tractor or planted the tree if that is what was needed, shared his vast knowledge and historical experience and gave and gave and gave of himself and his talents.

Gerry has many passions, many of which are shown by how he volunteers above and beyond his employment. Gerry is passionate about weed control; he was a founding member of the Nevada Weed Association and helped form the Humboldt Watershed Cooperative Weed Management Area where he still sits on the Board of Directors as president. He has helped many others start additional CWMA's. He loves trees, in fact his email address is "nvtreeguy!" He has planted trees all over eastern and northeastern Nevada and received the National Arbor Day award in 2004. He always helps with National Public Lands Day and was and is actively involved with the Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group. He helped found the Coordinated Resource Management group in White Pine County that is still working hard. He has been an adjunct professor at Great Basin College for 25 years, teaching rangeland management, monitoring and plant ID. He conducted snow surveys for 30 years by ski and helicopter.

Recently, Gerry did the Habitat Quantification Tool evaluation for the first two Nevada Conservation Credit System ranches; he helped the Cottonwood Ranch and the Johns Ranch get on board and developed and implemented the idea to collect sagebrush seed on the ranch, grow it in the Humboldt Nevada Division of Forestry nursery, and then he directed the NDF inmate crews in planting the sagebrush close to the meadows to create more credits for the ranches in the future. He is always on the lookout for ways to make it better for the rancher.

Gerry has also been managing the grant for the Stewardship Group and doing much of the fieldwork for the research begun by Kent McAdoo to rehabilitate

burned sagebrush-bunchgrass sites by anchoring fall-harvested big sagebrush plant carcasses which provides local seed and organic matter, and acts as a snow catchment. This creates sagebrush islands that can help recover the burned ground. Much of this work he has done as a volunteer.

Gerry received the Distinguished Service to the Cause of Conservation Award from NvACD in 2008 but the time has come to put Gerry in the Hall of Fame. Gerry, thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all you have done for Nevada, for Nevada conservation districts, for NvACD. You have left your mark on Nevada and I don't think you are done yet. At least we hope not! We are so honored to include your name on the NvACD Hall of Fame plaque.

Nevada Association of Conservation Districts

GERRY MILLER

2020

Hall of Fame Award

Advocate, Mentor, Inclusive Conservationist

Always There, Always Cares

Tireless Believer in CDs

You've done a really good job for a really long time  
and we want you to know we appreciate it

NvACD Hall of Fame 2020 Award  
Kenneth Johns of the Clover Valley Conservation District

Kenneth Johns is 92 years young and semi-retired; he still lives on the property that he and his brother purchased nearly a hundred years ago in Clover Valley, Nevada which is now owned and operated by his grandson and wife; Heston and Ashley Johns and their three sons.

Kenneth Johns has always known animal hair, grass, and machinery, and was without a doubt the backbone of the Clover Valley District's equipment program. For years he volunteered his time to spray every weed he could find within the Clover Valley District boundary and when there was a Conservation District social Kenneth always showed up with his Dutch ovens and you walked away with a smile.

Kenneth was one of those original cat skimmers bidding on contracts to plant crested wheat seedings in the mid 1950's, in open-cab dozers, double disking the rank 'ole sage and then with open-cab tractors pulling doubles of those nearly indestructible rangeland drills in some of the toughest conditions in Northeastern Nevada for BLM rangeland seedings. Does he have some stories!

On his own property he and his brother built a Pelton wheel electric generation set-up to provide electricity before the rural electric cooperative reached their place. Kenneth, and as the Johns Ranch still does, always assists with the maintenance of the Hole in the Mountain Sno-Tel site.

Kenneth was always a leader in soil and water conservation at the Johns Ranch. They still run blue ribbon angus operation and the Ranch was the first to sign up for the Sagebrush Conservation Credit program. They also work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service for soil and water conservation.

## **Laura Van Riper**

With the National Riparian Service Team,  
Distinguished Service to the Cause of Conservation

NvACD awards Distinguished Service to the Cause of Conservation to Laura Van Riper. Many, if not most of you, are fortunate to know Laura and her passion for the challenging work she does for Nevada and the West. I was fortunate to have the help of Mike Lunn, a mentor and long-time working partner and friend of Laura, to provide much of the information I will share.

Mike said, “When Laura moved to Missoula Montana from the metropolitan areas of the East Coast some twenty years ago there was little reason to suspect that she was going to be anything other than a flaming environmentalist with a PhD! Her one real experience with agriculture and that lifestyle occurred on an educational trip to Africa where she learned about the importance of community and of strong woman leadership. By the time she moved to Missoula she had only met one rancher and that was on her way through North Dakota on the trip.” But, Mike went on to say, “Some people seem to have a plan laid out for them that’s beyond their understanding and knowledge. Laura is one of those people, and the western United States and the rangelands and the people who live there are better off because of it.”

Laura received an MS and PhD from the Forestry School at the University of Montana, where the trajectory of her life took the turn that has come to benefit us all. The recently retired Chief of the Forest Service, Jack Ward Thomas, became her major professor and he invited Wayne Elmore, then leader of the National Riparian Service Team, to speak to his class of graduate students. At that early time the NRST work was primarily technical in nature, but Wayne had a natural gift for working with people. He explained that part of what he hoped to do as team leader was to bring on a social scientist who could help assess the work of the team and make recommendations for how it might be improved as they moved forward. He asked if there were any students interested in such a job. As we know, Laura raised her hand saying yes! So, Laura became a SCEP student,

completing her doctorate while working part-time for the BLM on the National Riparian Service Team. The recommendations she made about purposeful integration of community involvement later became the hallmark of the team. The Situation Assessment Tool she developed establishes a foundation of trust for the rest of the team to come in and be accepted so they can share their knowledge and approaches to help resolve the resource issues.

Mike gave me a list of the many places and issues where Laura has been involved. It goes for six pages and he said it only begins to touch on all she has done. Some of the highlights: she led the work at the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado in 2005 where her Situation Assessment became the standard feature and process of NRST intervention. 2005 marked her first work in Nevada in the Martin Basin where she demonstrated that the process must include the option of meeting as often as it takes. This is Laura's norm; she doesn't just show up and then leave, she stays for the long haul. She worked on the Big Hole River and for the Rancher Stewardship Alliance in Montana, on the Custer National Forest in South Dakota, in the Klamath Basin in California and Oregon and the Dixie National Forest in Utah. Mike and Laura worked with the Three Rivers Alliance in NE Colorado on water effects to the Ogallala Aquifer. She was there to help mitigate effects of the designations of national monuments including the Upper Missouri River Breaks in Montana and the Grand Staircase in Utah. For two years starting in 2010, Laura brought her skills to the San Pedro National Riparian Conservation Area in Arizona where Laura's gift to tell people things they do not want to hear, including a State Director, finally allowed public consensus for a management plan as required in the enabling legislation, after 15 years without one.

Mike wrote, 2013 is the year (quote) "Nevada pretty much started to suck all the air out of the room in terms of Laura's work." Agee and Connie and I called Laura at Mike's recommendation after a SANE meeting without ever having met her. She immediately understood our concern that there needed to be understanding of locally led conservation among agency leadership, in the hope and expectation that understanding would lead to support.

Laura began with a one-day collaborative workshop for the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council, then kept right on going with training for facilitators, workshops to expose more people to collaboration techniques and potential, helping establish the Jordan Meadows Collaborative Group, who just won a national award by the way, leading a three-day consensus workshop for more than 80 leaders in 2016 which grew into the Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network that she still facilitates. She facilitated the ROGER group, Results Oriented Grazing for Ecological Results until last month, she is involved with the Outcome Based Grazing, and she conducted listening sessions with nearly 200 people across northern Nevada in 2015 as requested by the Nevada BLM State Director.

This worked into one of the more challenging assignments she was given involving the highly volatile situation in Battle Mountain and the Argenta grazing allotment. This was a very complicated situation and relationships between the BLM and permittees and the community were badly frayed. Lawsuits had been filed, threats had been made and there were serious concerns that it could easily blow completely out of control. She and the team only learned about it in January and by the end of March she had successfully worked with all parties to develop a settlement agreement that allowed grazing to occur that year and the conditions under which it would be managed. It was implemented early that summer and her role was pivotal in the success of the three-year settlement. The skills and work that Laura does in the BLM are both critical and in very short supply in natural resource agencies.

How does she get it all done? I honestly don't know. Yet she is always prepared, always positive, always someone you want to be around, always willing to say what needs to be said, yet always respectful and willing to work the proven process until the people present feel it for themselves. She has even trained us independent Nevadans to sit comfortably in a circle! Jared Talley described her as selfless; I would have to agree. Mike Lunn explained, "The fact is, it takes a really special person to do the kinds of work that Laura has devoted her career to do; it's very difficult on family relations, constantly involves working with people

already in difficult situations so they have difficult attitudes. Then she helps these same people realize what they are capable of when they work together and listen with respect, while she, herself, seemingly never has any certainty to her job responsibilities or even location. She is simply the best!” Mike went on to say, “She is willing to speak the truth to a lot of people in higher positions that don’t want to hear it. At the same time, she is trusted and respected by more people than just about anyone I’ve ever known working for federal agencies.”

Laura herself wrote for a BLM In-Honor-of-Women’s-History-Month post almost 10 years ago, (quote) “I would encourage other women to pursue similar career interests as there is a great need within natural resource agencies for applied social science skills. (She went on to describe her work, then concluded) ...This won’t be easy, so individual resolve and persistence will be critical for success.” She said it herself then, and we can each see it in her now – individual resolve and persistence; thank heavens God gave Laura an extra dose.

Laura’s good friend Robin Boies said that Laura sees her current work in Nevada as a connection and fulfillment of the work attempted by her mentors Bob Chadwick, Wayne Elmore, Steve Leonard and Mike Lunn in the early years of the NRST. They could never crack Nevada open in a bigger way, but Laura’s willingness to give a longer-term commitment has opened the door for positive change in Nevada.

Thank you, Laura, for persevering in Nevada. Thank you for believing in us hard-headed Battle Born and still fighting Nevadans. Thank you to your family for sharing you with us. Nevada Association of Conservation Districts is honored to present you the Distinguished Service to the Cause of Conservation Award. The plaque reads:

We are ever grateful for your perseverance and selfless dedication to  
community-based conservation and conflict resolution  
in Nevada and throughout the West.

You have transformed the human and natural landscapes of Nevada.