

DoD Helps Protect Historic Working Ranches

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On June 4, 2021, the Arizona Land and Water Trust closed on a conservation easement to protect the Pyeatt Ranch. The conservation easement meets the goals of the Sentinel Landscape program to strengthen military readiness, conserve natural resources, bolster agricultural economies, and increase climate change resilience.

The Pyeatt Ranch is ideally situated west of Fort Huachuca, within the R-2303 restricted military airspace boundary, and borders another conservation easement and the Coronado National Forest. Permanently protecting this property from urban encroachment helps ensure the future of Fort Huachuca's military mission, testing, and training in signals intelligence and electromagnetic warfare. Additionally, the easement helps minimize future water resource challenges, benefits habitat for several threatened and endangered species, and ensures the land remains in agricultural production as it has been for the last 100+ years.

The Pyeatt family and ranch history run deep, beginning around the turn of the 20th Century. Manuel Murrietta is the 5th generation of Pyeatt's who have owned and operated a beef cattle business on the same ground for over a Century. The ranch was established by Manuel's great-great-grandfather, Henry Pyeatt. It was then purchased by Henry's son Roland "Buster" Pyeatt, who split the ranch into equal inheritable halves to his sons James and Ronald Pyeatt. James Pyeatt later bought his brother out and had the good fortune of having Manuel Murrietta as his grandson.

Manuel spent many summers and weekends helping his grandfather, James, on the ranch. He was the only grandchild interested in the ranch and wanted to see it remain a working cattle ranch for years to come. When the time came, the decision was made by both his grandfather and mother that Manuel should inherit the ranch. In 2001, after working for other ranchers in the Sonoita area, Manuel moved his family to the Pyeatt Ranch, where he and his wife updated the ranch house. Manuel and his family spent another 15 years working alongside James Pyeatt before his passing in 2016. Manuel cherishes the years spent with his grandfather and the memories he made.

Manuel first learned about conservation easements years ago when he heard of nearby ranches applying them. Expanding the Pyeatt Ranch operation had always been a dream of Manuel's. When there came an opportunity for him to work with the Arizona Land and Water Trust and apply for conservation easement funding supported by the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program, he stayed consistent and patient in the 2+ year-long process. When the transaction was complete, Manuel reinvested in the neighboring Sycamore Ranch, essentially doubling the size of the ranching operation. "It was a dream come true," said Manuel.

Today, Manuel manages the ranch, and when he and his wife and daughter need extra hands, they hire day labor. His wife works off the ranch and is an excellent help to Manuel during the evenings and weekends. Their management philosophy is, "To keep the land as good or better than it was before it was under their ownership." Manuel and his family are proud to carry on the legacy of a multi-generational ranch, supply beef to our country, and support national defense.

Manuel stated, "Expanding my view of management. For example, using conservation easements, restoration cost-share options, and leaning into partnerships have been the most valuable lesson I have

learned to make the ranch feasible and sustainable." The Pyeatt Ranch brings Arizona Land and Water Trust's total protected lands to 60,500 acres.