

NEW MEXICO LAND CONSERVANCY

Preserving New Mexico's Land Heritage

PRESS RELEASE

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Nationally Recognized Arizona Ranch Protected with Conservation Easement

Santa Fe, New Mexico

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The New Mexico Land Conservancy recently announced the completion of its first conservation easement in eastern Arizona on the nationally recognized EC Bar Ranch, located along the northern edge of the White Mountains just south of Springerville in Apache County.

The conservation easement donated by EC Bar Ranch owner, Jim Crosswhite, protects 94 acres of restored riparian habitat along a three-mile stretch of Nutrioso Creek, an important perennial stream and tributary of the Little Colorado River. Nutrioso Creek and the surrounding riparian area provide significant habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife, including several state and federally threaten and endangered species.

As a former marathon runner, a long-time personal goal of Crosswhite's was to circumnavigate the entire Himalayan mountain range by self-supported running. However, when he acquired the EC Bar Ranch in 1996, he gave up that goal for one that has proven much more formidable: restoration and protection of a severely degraded riparian stream to the highest possible water quality and ecological standards.

"I am not a life-long rancher, biologist or restoration expert. My only qualification for restoring and protecting Nutrioso Creek was a history of doing what others didn't want to do," said Crosswhite.

Through significant land management and restoration efforts over the past 13 years, Jim Crosswhite has achieved many "firsts" and set an example for how to combine sustainable grazing practices with conservation in Arizona. As a result of his work, 13 miles of Nutrioso Creek have been removed from list of non-compliant water bodies under the Clean Water Act by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the EC Bar Ranch has attained the highest water quality and aquatic/wildlife habitat standards for any landowner, public or private, in Arizona. And, for the first time ever, as part of a Safe Harbor

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Arizona Ranch Conservation Easement con't

Agreement with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the federally endangered Little Colorado River Spinedace was relocated from the segment of Nutrioso Creek on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest to the EC Bar Ranch.

Crosswhite credits much of his conservation success to collaborative partnerships with a variety of federal and state agencies, private organizations, and most recently the New Mexico Land Conservancy. However, after many years of discussions about the use of a conservation easement to protect the wildlife habitat, open space, and agricultural values along the riparian corridor of Nutrioso Creek, Crosswhite noted that no state agency, environmental organization or land trust in Arizona was willing to hold an easement over his ranch.

“Fortunately, the New Mexico Land Conservancy recognized the value of protecting Nutrioso Creek and agreed to complete the EC Bar Ranch conservation easement, while I applied restrictive covenants and other deed restrictions to control land use on an adjoining subdivision,” Crosswhite added. “My vision for the ranch is finally being realized - to protect and preserve open spaces, wildlife habitat and a rural lifestyle in perpetuity through a collaborative partnership involving a working ranch, a conservation easement and a subdivision.”

Scott Wilber, the New Mexico Land Conservancy’s Executive Director, said, “We were pleased to have the opportunity to complete our first easement in Arizona, particularly with a landowner as dedicated to conservation as Jim Crosswhite.” Wilber added, “Doing this easement was just a logical and natural extension of the work we were already doing with private landowners in western New Mexico.”

Always thinking of his next “marathon”, when asked about the future of his conservation work, Jim Crosswhite says he would like to continue to implement water quality and wildlife habitat improvement practices, such as removing invasive plants to improve habitat for the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and other birds. “I look forward to doing more outreach to educate the public about restoration and private land protection strategies,” said Crosswhite. “I also would like to help Arizona figure out how to create tax incentives similar to New Mexico’s for landowners who donate conservation easements to qualified organizations such as the New Mexico Land Conservancy.” For over 10 years, Crosswhite has maintained a website at www.ECBarRanch.com and has hosted numerous field trips to provide information about conservation projects on his ranch.

Founded in 2002, the New Mexico Land Conservancy works with private landowners and organizations, public agencies and community groups to protect significant wildlife habitat, productive agricultural lands, scenic open space, cultural and historic sites, and recreational lands for conservation purposes and human benefit. The Conservancy’s goal is to conserve, directly or in partnership with others, 250,000 acres of high priority, high conservation value lands by 2016 through the use of conservation easements and other voluntary land protection methods. To date, the New Mexico Land Conservancy has protected over 72,000 acres of high conservation value lands throughout New Mexico and Arizona. For more information, visit www.nmlandconservancy.org.

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