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## **Protecting Alegres Mountain in Catron County**

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Today, the New Mexico Land Conservancy and the New Mexico State Forestry Division in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service announced the permanent protection of over 2,000 acres of land on the southern and eastern flanks of Alegres Mountain in northern Catron County. Partial funding for the conservation easement was provided through the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department and the USDA's Farm and Ranchland Protection Program.

The landowners of the property, the Shortes family, were very concerned about the impending development and subdivision of larger ranches that have become a growing trend in northern Catron County in the last few years, peaking during the height of the real estate market a few years ago. "My family wanted to do something to preserve the legacy provided to us by my granddad, V.M. Shortes. He found the Pie Town ranch in 1971, and loved the history, the rugged beauty, the pristine nature of the place. The area has suffered from the influx of subdivisions, and has threatened the sacredness that first entranced my grandfather," said Zeke Shortes. Mr. Shortes went on to say, "A conservation easement will forever preserve the legacy and respect both my grandfather's wishes while allowing us to provide an unspoiled landscape for my family to enjoy for generations to come."

The completion of this easement marks the second conservation effort that the Shortes family has undertaken on their family ranch. In 2010, the New Mexico Land Conservancy, the New Mexico State Forestry Division and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service partnered with the Shortes family to protect nearly 3,000 acres of their ranch. Michael Scisco, Conservation Director for the New Mexico Land Conservancy, commends the Shortes family for committing to such a large scale conservation effort. "The conservation of larger ranches has multiple benefits not only to the wildlife and scenic character of special landscapes around New Mexico, but also provides

sustainability and security to agricultural operations by keeping land and water available for farming and ranching,” said Mr. Scisco.

The New Mexico State Forestry Division and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service were great partners and critical to the completion of this collaborative conservation effort.

“This conservation easement really shows the value of partnerships in land conservation” said Tony Delfin, New Mexico State Forester. “The state money used for this project leveraged a larger federal contribution and a generous donation of easement value by the landowners. Together with the administrative capabilities of the non-profit land trust we have successfully protected the forest values of wildlife habitat, watershed and scenic views on a large part of Alegres Mountain.”

“The Farm and Ranchland Protection Program was set-up to protect the nation’s important farm and ranch lands, and NRCS’s team here in New Mexico is proud of this project which so well realizes that national goal,” said Seth Fiedler, Resource Conservationist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The ranch includes important rangeland for productive cattle operations, but also contains mature high elevation forests with unique stands of mature piñon pine and alligator juniper with pockets of Douglas fir in canyon bottoms and Ponderosa pine at higher altitudes. Elevations top out at just under 10,000 feet and the ranch includes some portions of the continental divide. The ranch also contains excellent wildlife habitat for large game species and provides open landscapes for animals to move unimpeded by development or other deterrents. The recently completed conservation easement adds to over 6,000 acres of current protected private land around Alegres Mountain, bringing the total to well over 8,000 acres in the immediate area. Through the generosity of the Shortes family and the valuable public-private partnership between the New Mexico Land Conservancy, the New Mexico State Forestry Division and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, this conservation easement will forever help protect the agricultural, wildlife habitat and scenic open space values of this very unique and important landscape in northern Catron County.

Founded in 2002, the New Mexico Land Conservancy is dedicated to preserving New Mexico’s land heritage by working with private landowners, communities, conservation organizations, and public agencies to protect significant wildlife habitat, productive agricultural lands and, scenic open space at community, watershed and landscape scales for conservation purposes and human benefit.

The New Mexico Land Conservancy’s goal is to conserve, directly or in partnership with others, 250,000 acres of high conservation value lands throughout the state by 2027 through the use of conservation easements and other voluntary land protection methods. To date, the New Mexico Land Conservancy has helped private landowners conserve over 85,000 acres of land throughout the state, and continues to pursue new conservation opportunities in western New Mexico to help landowners conserve more land in this unique and special part of the state.

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