



NEW MEXICO
LAND CONSERVANCY

Conserving Land for Water's Sake

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B Square Ranch

—A Conservation Bonanza



The B Square Ranch in San Juan County near Farmington, NM is nothing shy of a conservation bonanza!

Now protected from subdivision and further development by two conservation easements completed by and donated to NMLC by landowner Tommy Bolack this past September, the 12,451-acre property covers an array of conservation values—cultural, archaeological, agricultural, wildlife habitat, water resources and scenic open space.

“I have other conservation initiatives in place already,” said Tommy. “The conservation easements go hand in hand with what I want to have happen, so it’s a double whammy for conservation. I am relieved to know the ranch will now be protected after I’m gone.”

The B Square Ranch is Tommy’s legacy, the result of a lifetime of cultivating, expanding and improving upon the humble beginnings of the first 80-acre tract his father, Tom Bolack, bought in the 1950s when Tommy was a boy. Over the years, through various land swaps and purchases, the B Square has grown into a thriving agricultural enterprise and a haven for wildlife, featuring

six miles of the San Juan River, seven small lakes and more than 1,500 acres of natural bosque habitat along the riverfront that support an estimated 60,000 migratory birds and waterfowl during the winter months. Several hundred acres of irrigated fields and open-water wetlands also contribute to what Audubon New Mexico designated as one of New Mexico’s 63 “Important Bird Areas” in 2020.

Significant pre-Colombian cultural sites on the ranch have been used for research for decades through the Anthropology Department at San Juan College in Farmington. The ancient Anasazi or Puebloan people favored the San Juan river valley because it afforded excellent access to water and fertile agricultural lands, prime hunting grounds along the river corridor as well as the defensive protection of the cliffs and uplands flanking the valley.

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Photos: top, B Square Ranch includes approximately 1,500 acres of irrigated agricultural land, 7 lakes, and 6 miles of the San Juan River. The City of Farmington can be seen extending to B Square’s boundary. Bottom left: Research is conducted on the significant Pre-Colombian sites on the ranch through the Anthropology Department of nearby San Juan College. Tommy’s Bolack Electro-mechanical Museum, features one of the world’s largest collections of glass insulators (one of several display cases pictured here).

B Square Ranch (cont.)

Tommy established a nonprofit 501(c)3 foundation, which upon his death, will assume management of the property—including the agricultural operation, the Bolack Museum of Fish and Wildlife and the Bolack Electromechanical Museum—with specific management parameters spelled out in detail to ensure that the conservation values of the ranch are maintained.

“I may not have my own posterity,” said Tommy, who has no immediate heirs, “but there is a larger posterity, and I leave the ranch to that future.”

From high up on the bluffs overlooking the San Juan River and the irrigated farmland on the B Square, it is easy to see the City of Farmington, population 43,200 and growing, nudging right up to the ranch boundary. “I envision the B Square someday like a Central Park in the middle of all the development and chaos,” Tommy said.

Tommy’s business model for growing and managing the ranch is firmly rooted in mixed use with conservation always at the forefront of his decision making. His agriculture operation consists primarily of cattle and alfalfa, and Tommy propagates game birds including his prize Rio Grande turkeys, a species he reintroduced on his ranch and that now thrives throughout San Juan County.

Under the conservation easements, the property will continue to be managed for farming and ranching. The agricultural component is important because it provides much-needed supplemental forage for migratory waterfowl during their winter stopovers.

Historically, portions of the ranch have also been used for fossil fuel production, although this activity has now significantly diminished. Notwithstanding, responsibly managed oil and gas leases have represented a critical revenue source for the large, multi-use property. It was NMLC’s overall assessment that the full spectrum of natural, cultural and scenic conservation values on this property far outweighed and had not been significantly impacted by the relatively small portions of the land devoted to extraction.

At the heart of his decision to put his legacy ranch under conservation easements, Tommy said, “We are artists of the earth—we have a mandate to protect the natural resources from which we draw life.”

NMLC’s Executive Director, Scott Wilber, said “The permanent conservation of the B Square Ranch will be a tremendous asset for the people of San Juan County and the state of New Mexico, and we applaud Tommy for his vision and generosity.” #

