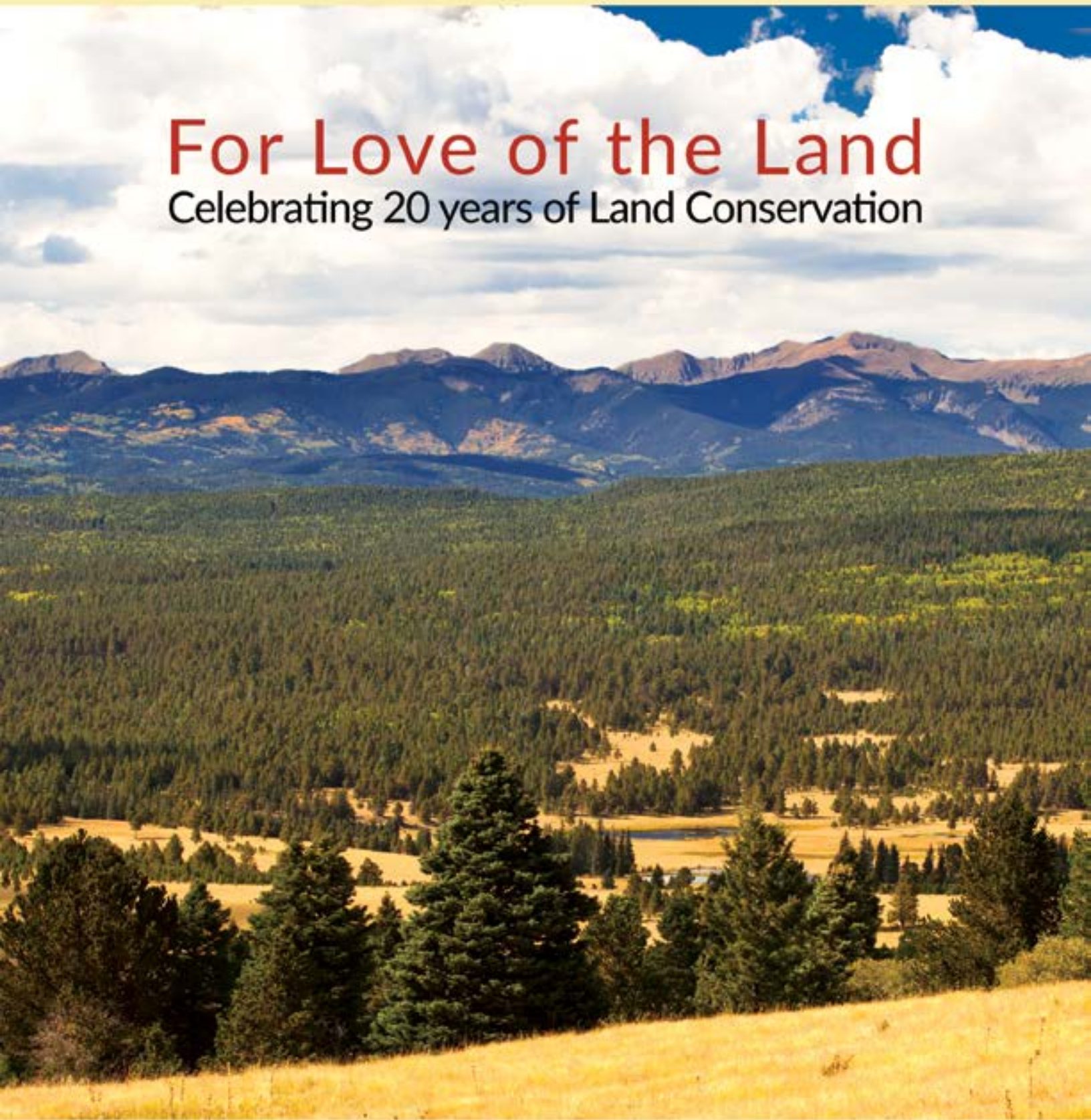


Fall/Winter Magazine 2022

For Love of the Land

Celebrating 20 years of Land Conservation



NEW MEXICO
LAND CONSERVANCY

Conserving Land. Preserving Heritage.

Board of Directors

Executive Committee

Walter Stern | Chair
Modrall Sperling Law Firm | Albuquerque, NM

Robert Anderson| Vice Chair
Corrales, NM

David Dunmar | Treasurer & Secretary
Barker Realty | Santa Fe, NM

Members at Large

Solomon Bitsie
Mexican Springs, NM

Linda Brewer
Bear Mountain Lodge | Silver City, NM

George Dennis
Wildlife Biologist | El Prado, NM

Ed Kraft
Zia Trust, Inc. | Albuquerque, NM

Gary Mendiola
Bar Guitar Ranch & Liquid Feed | Picacho, NM

DL Sanders
DL Sanders Law Firm | Santa Fe, NM

Michael Scisco
Terra Alta Real Estate | Albuquerque, NM

Jack Wright
Geographer | Las Cruces, NM

Advisory Board

Anthony L. Benson, PhD
Cerro de Taos Beef | Taos, NM

Sid Goodloe
Carrizo Valley Ranch | Capitan, NM

Elizabeth H. Richardson
Walnut Creek, CA

Staff

Scott Wilber
Executive Director

Ron Troy
Southern New Mexico Program Manager

Will Donahoo
Stewardship Manager

Eric Head
Conservation Specialist

Peter Michaels
Communications Manager

Megan Keller
Accounting & Office Manager

NMLC is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.
505.986.3801 (Santa Fe HQ)



Above: NMLC Executive Director, Scott Wilber on the Bioresearch Ranch

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to report that, with the completion of the Armendaris Ranch project and seven other conservation easements around the state this past fiscal year, we literally doubled our portfolio of conserved land from 324,000 acres to over 655,000 acres. And with another 400,000 acres in the queue over the next few years, we are well on our way of achieving the 25-year goal we set for ourselves back in 2005 as part of our initial strategic planning - to protect, directly or in partnership with others, one million acres of high-conservation value land across New Mexico and southeast Arizona. As part of this goal also comes the commitment to ensuring adequate stewardship and legal defense for these conserved lands, theoretically into perpetuity, because, for the most part, our conservation properties are protected by permanent conservation easements. So, while the property ownerships might change over time, the easements run with the land and all future owners are subject to their terms. Our ongoing role as the land trust is to ensure that the terms and intent of those easements are upheld by monitoring and stewarding them on a regular basis to ensure compliance, and legally defending them from potential, future violations.

When you have the responsibility of stewarding 655,000 acres spread across two states, sometimes in some very remote and inaccessible areas, this is not always an easy task. This is why we are increasingly turning to new methods and technologies such as aerial overflights, satellite imagery and remote monitoring. But while remote monitoring certainly has its useful applications, it can never completely replace the benefits of on-the-ground monitoring. There is only one way to truly know a property and that is through actual site visits, ideally at different times of the year, and intelligence gathered from regular landowner communications. Periodic on the ground monitoring allows us to reconnect with each property and landowner at least once a year and learn about bio-physical and land use changes on those properties directly from the landowners and/or land managers who are the ones that have the most intimate knowledge of the land because they are the ones out there on a regular basis. So, stewardship really involves a two-way information exchange between us and the landowners that is mutually beneficial because we can learn a lot about the land and resources from landowners and then ensure them through our monitoring that their use of the land – often under changing conditions and management over the years – is compatible with the terms, purpose and intent of their conservation easements.

Over the years, it has been essential for me and my colleagues to maintain a connection to the lands we have helped protect and relationships with their landowners. Given the sheer number and size of our conservation properties and the increasing demands of my position, I have no longer been able to get out to all of them or stay personally connected with all of our landowners. Fortunately, we have a very dedicated and capable staff that now does much of that work, but I have tried to make the rounds and keep in touch with as many of our landowners as I could over the years, particularly since many of these properties have now changed hands. I have to say that it has always been the best part of the job and, perhaps because I don't get to do it as often as I used to, when I do get out to a few properties every year, it really serves to remind



Continued next page . . .

me of why I got into the land conservation field in the first place and the importance of the work we do at NMLC.

One property, in particular, that I have personally tried to return to every year is the Bioresearch Ranch, located in the heart of the “Bootheel” in the extreme southwest corner of New Mexico. I have tried to get back to the Bioresearch Ranch at least once every year not only because of the incredible beauty and remoteness of this property, but because of the relationship I developed with the landowners.



The “ranch” consists of three non-contiguous, 640-acre blocks of land intermingled with U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and State Trust lands spread out from the Post Office Canyon parcel on the west side of the Peloncillo Mountains southeast of Rodeo, to the Miner Canyon and Black Mountain parcels on the east or Animas Valley side of that same mountain range. Given the limited and difficult access, currently the only way into the Bioresearch Ranch is through Post Office Canyon via a rugged 4wd track that leaves the state highway south of Rodeo and then traverses several miles across an adjacent ranch in Arizona before re-entering New Mexico, climbing up the western slopes of the Peloncillos and finally terminating at the ranch headquarters at the head of Post Office Canyon. From there, the only way to actually monitor the rest of the larger ranch is to hike from the headquarters over the top of the Peloncillos and then down a narrow side draw into Miner Canyon. From there, the “track” climbs out of the canyon and then drops down to the eastern-most parcel at the base of Black Mountain.

Given the heat of the summer, this trip can really only be comfortably done between late fall and spring, but even then, it's not for the faint of heart or legs because the whole journey entails a 12-mile, mostly cross country trek across rocky and scrubby mountains slopes and canyons. Fortunately, in wet years, numerous natural springs along the way offer a much welcome reprieve from the heat of the sun and the ruggedness of the terrain. It is by no means a desolate land, but one that is filled with beauty and natural diversity – including over 500 hundred species of plants – representing almost all of the species of flora known to occur in the Madrean Oak-Encinal woodlands ecoregion – more commonly known as the Apache Highlands - ranging from grassy shrublands to oak and piñon-juniper woodlands. And this unique habitat supports a plethora of wildlife including a remarkable diversity of fauna from birds and reptiles to mammals such as Coue's white tail deer, javelina, desert bighorn sheep, mountain lion and even the occasional jaguar wandering up from south of the border. This wild land also has a long history of human habitation – the signs of which can be seen everywhere to the watchful eye from depressions in the exposed bedrock where the Apache used to grind hearts of yucca to flour, to the goat corals and rock dams used by early Hispanic homesteaders, to the remains of Shorty the Rustler's cabin, to the more recent detritus of migrants who frequent the trails between hidden natural springs to navigate across the border through the cover afforded by the mountains to pickup points along the state highways and I-10 to the north. These are all things that cannot necessarily be seen, experienced or understood from the air.

Each annual trip across the mountain and back has been an opportunity to learn, reflect and recharge. Although one is physically left spent at the end of the round trip trek, which usually takes 8–10 hours with stops for monitoring and observation along the way, this temporary fatigue is far outweighed by what the journey provides in terms of stimulation and recharge. Upon returning to the headquarters at the end of each one of these trips, I am also always reminded of the incredible love the landowners, Bob and Katie Scholes, had for this place and their passion to conserve it for nature's sake. The Scholes first acquired the property with some friends in the early 1970s with the goal of creating a nature preserve along with an ecological research center dedicated to study, monitor, better understand this diverse landscape. The culmination of that work was a donation by them of land in Owl Canyon which became part of the BLM Central Peloncillos Wilderness Study Area, the designation of the Bioresearch Ranch as a BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and US Forest Service Research Natural Area, and ultimately a conservation easement to NMLC to ensure that the remaining land would forever remain intact, natural and undeveloped. Bob and Katie both lived on the property, well into their 90s before passing away, but they passed on an incredible legacy to their daughter and son-in-law who continue to own and care for it.

Among the many projects we have completed over the years, the Bioresearch Ranch stands out as an example of individual and selfless commitment to preserving land for no more reason than its intrinsic value to nature. When the rhyolite cliffs looming above the canyon catch the long solar rays and take on a warm, reddish hue at the end of the day, I feel their spirit lives on.

As I prepare to step down from my post as Executive Director next spring after 17 years to pursue a new chapter in my life, I look forward to one more journey across the Peloncillos before I leave and the opportunity for some final reflection upon all that we have accomplished over the last 20 years. There is still much to be done, but I am confident that the Board and staff will ably carry on the good work that we have collectively started. Conservation is a job that really never ends – especially in a world of increasing population and environmental change. But, in the end, the Bioresearch Ranch, along with the other lands we have helped to protect and conserve, will thankfully remain as lasting examples of New Mexico's remarkable natural and cultural heritage. None of it would have been possible without the commitment and generosity of our landowners, and I am honored and grateful that they entrusted our organization to help them preserve these special places.

For the land,

Scott Wilber



For Love Of The Land

“Without love of the land, conservation lacks meaning or purpose, for only in a deep and inherent feeling for the land can there be dedication in preserving it.” — Sigurd F. Olson

This quote by writer and environmentalist Sigurd F. Olsen embodies a philosophy at the core of New Mexico Land Conservancy's vision and journey which began twenty years ago. What started as a concept for a statewide, non-profit organization that would build support and capacity for land conservation around New Mexico has evolved into a vital land trust that has conserved over 655,000 acres of land across New Mexico and southeast Arizona, almost two-thirds of its twenty-five year goal of one million acres set back in 2005.

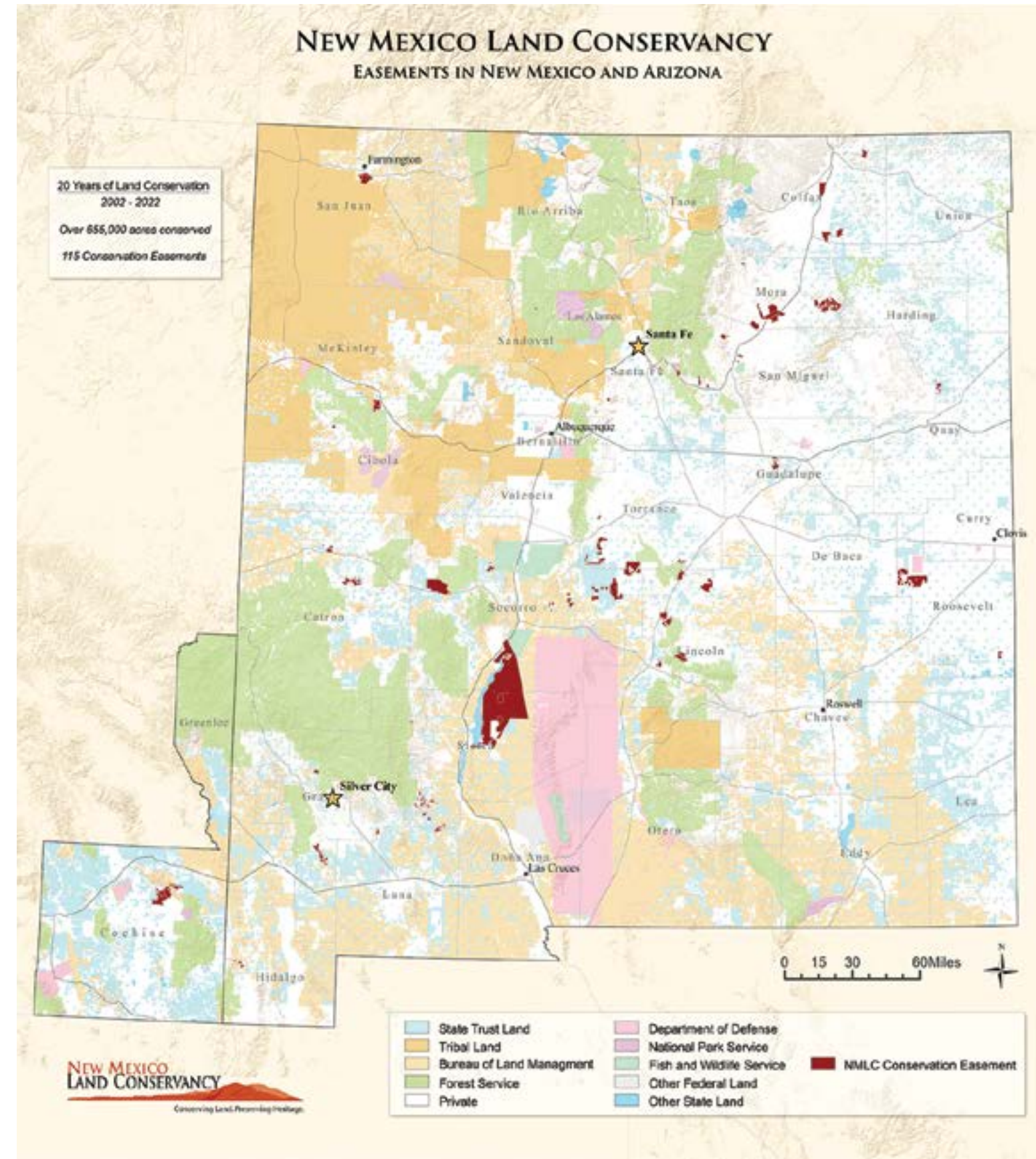
The mission of preserving New Mexico's land heritage by helping ranchers, farmers and other landowners to keep their lands intact while providing for public benefit and enjoyment by protecting significant wildlife habitat, productive agricultural lands, cultural and historic resources, open space, scenic vistas and recreational lands has only become more important as environmental and economic pressures have increased in our southwest region over the past decades.

In reaching twenty years of service to the mission of land conservation, NMLC and its stakeholders have an opportunity to celebrate past successes and also to reflect upon possibilities for growth and evolution ahead. The achievements have been remarkable in the number of acres protected, the high conservation value of the land, and the commitment of our organization and participating landowners to the long-term stewardship and restoration of those lands.

In this issue of our annual Fall Magazine, we would like to share the theme of “For Love Of The Land” with you through a prose and pictorial montage of New Mexico Land Conservancy's projects and personalities that have been the fabric of our history over the past two decades.



Photo by Nick Jacobson



Reflections Of A Founding Board Member

Elizabeth Richardson, former Board member and founder of the New Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC), recently spoke about her early involvement and experience with land trust work. “I was interested in preserving wilderness land and habitat for wildlife.” Although her graduate level education was in public administration (MPA) and finance (MBA), her heart was in the land. Her career in conservation started with a job at Colorado Open Lands, first doing communications work and then moving into stewardship and becoming Stewardship Coordinator. She also served on the Board of the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts and, through her experience with these two organizations, Elizabeth learned about conservation easements, public relations and fundraising. “It was a great experience to travel around the state of Colorado and see amazing, beautiful properties. I got to meet landowners who really wanted to improve and protect their land - this was really satisfying, fulfilling and enjoyable.”

Eventually, through her friendship with former Executive Director Claire Swanger, she became a member of the New Mexico Land Conservation Collaborative (NMLCC) Board. In the early days, this was the original name for NMLC, and the mission was different. NMLCC was intended to be an umbrella organization that would provide capacity building, fundraising and policy support for other New Mexico land trusts. “After Claire left in 2005, we worked on refining this concept and decided to proceed in the direction of doing actual conservation easement and land conservation work instead of just being a resource organization. Once we clarified our new mission, we were able to move forward with building a donor base and doing the actual conservation work.” This was a major step in the evolution and



Snowgeese. Photo by Mark Watson

advancement of NMLC and laid the groundwork for its future. Elizabeth continues to serve NMLC as board advisor and has seen public awareness of land conservation increase over the past decades. Conservation easements as a tool for protecting land has become more accepted and widely employed. “I’m proud of NMLC’s conservation work and the accomplishments of non-profit land trusts in other states around the country. I also think the work of the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) is really important.” The LTA, a national organization that serves the roughly 1,600 land trusts around the country and provides resources to support the work of land conservation, has also created a rigorous formal accreditation that NMLC has now achieved twice.

“NMLC has become a very successful organization and Executive Director Scott Wilber has played a huge role in this. Accreditation has enhanced our reputation, and the number of easements completed has enabled NMLC to build its capacity.” When asked about the future of land conservation, Elizabeth thought that, despite the challenges of climate change and economic and political stresses, progress was still being made. “Land conservation is absolutely essential to mitigating climate change. The recent passage of the 30 x 30 initiative – the national goal of protecting 30% of the nation’s public and private land and water by 2030 - was a big landmark and will hopefully make a significant difference. I’m very proud of my work in this field and only wish I had gotten involved with land conservation earlier in my life.”

Jack Wright - Former NMLC Chair Back On The Board

PM: What was your first involvement with land conservation and NMLC?

Jack: That goes way back to 1976 when I had a small business in Montana doing base-lines (Baseline Documentation Reports) for the Nature Conservancy and other land trusts. In 2002, I was contacted by the New Mexico Land Conservation Collaborative (that’s what NMLC was called initially.) The original concept and mission was to be an organization that would help support and build the capacity of other land trusts in New Mexico. I didn’t think this was a good approach and was hesitant to get involved at first. I thought it would be better to actually become a statewide land trust that could collaborate and work with other organizations, but mainly put easements and projects together on its own to conserve land.

This shift was vital and the success of NMLC has a lot to do with this clarity of mission. When Scott Wilber was hired by NMLC, he brought an amazing set of skills that matched perfectly with the direction we decided to go in.

PM: How did your background and experience influence your work with NMLC?

Jack: I had been working in land use planning in Montana when I was twenty-six years old and saw that the regulatory model created a lot of problems and conflict with people. The voluntary compensation model around private land conservation was just what I was looking for to create better solutions for land use issues. The concept of providing financial incentives and working with people who made a living off the land to compensate for changes in land use like a park or wildlife pre-

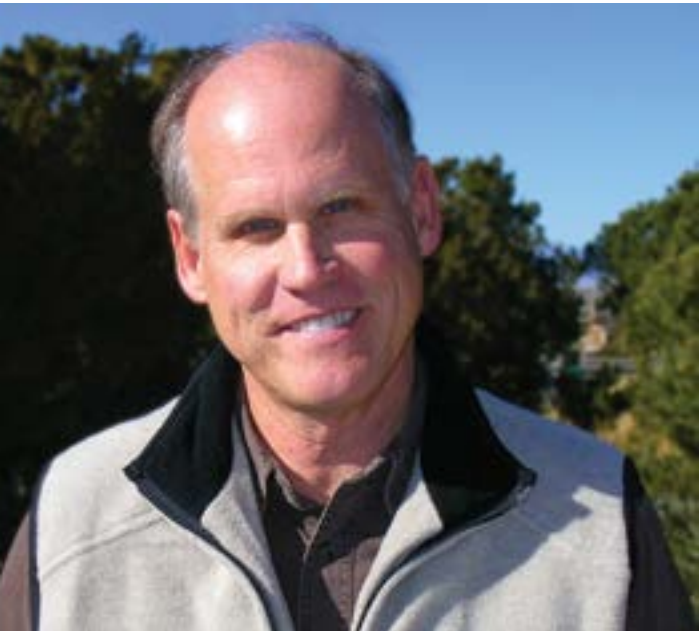
serve. You had to negotiate to achieve private land conservation. This model of conservation easements is more like the Buddhist “Middle Way” because it’s more about communication, conversation and reconciliation between viewpoints rather than regulation – it’s economic Tai Chi...

PM: Is there any connection between your book “Saving The Ranch” and the development of NMLC? It was published during the early years of the organization.

Jack: The book does layout steps that a landowner can follow to put a conservation easement in place. The connection is that this is what we have tried to accomplish with NMLC— it’s an organization that provides a “one stop shop” where all the necessary resources are made available to someone who wants to conserve their land. NMLC can refer landowners to appraisers or attorneys experienced with conservation easements. We can assist people through the entire process.

PM: What were some of the major challenges that NMLC faced in its early years?

Jack: Financial problems were a primary concern. The federal tax deduction for conservation easement donations was much less at that time and it was not a permanent incentive and there was no state tax credit then, so the financial incentives were not as attractive to the landowners. The capacity was low since there was hardly any staff. When Scott and Michael Scisco came onboard it made a big difference. The more capacity we had the more projects we could do - they figured out how to make the deals pay for themselves.



“Conservation is entirely about ethics – since nothing lasts forever in the long-term time scale, what we do in our lifetime is an ethical choice that has inherent value...”

PM: What are some of your reflections on the evolution of land trusts and any landmark achievements for NMLC or conservation in general?

Jack: The major landmarks for NMLC were narrowing the concept from a resource organization to a proactive land trust, and actually putting their own projects together and using easements to conserve and protect land. Then, increasing capacity so that there was enough staff to accomplish and expand the work. The Montosa Ranch project was a significant stepping stone as it put NMLC “on the map” in the conservation world, leading to other large easement projects.

The enactment of the NM state tax credit in 2004 and its expansion to allow transfer of tax credits in 2008 changed the playing field for NMLC and land conservation in general. This offered a much stronger incentive to landowners who were thinking about putting their property

into a conservation easement. Scott was very influential on the state level in getting this legislation passed.

PM: What about the future of land conservation and its possible role in mitigating climate change?

Jack: In spite of all the negativity that you hear regarding climate change, land conservation can be inspirational - big expanses of land intact with wildlife is a noble thing to witness, it gives people hope. This, in itself, is a good thing. On a more granular level, the positive net effects of reducing subdivision and providing for large parcels of conserved land enhances carbon sequestration.

Conservation is entirely about ethics – since nothing lasts forever in the long-term time scale. What we do in our lifetime is an ethical choice that has inherent value...



Above: Haslam Farm, Corrales. Photo by Stacia Spragg

“In a place like Corrales, saving even twenty-five acres of agricultural land is a great thing.” — Lisa Brown



Corrales Farmland Preservation

Although relatively small in total acreage, the Village of Corrales Farmland Preservation easements are particularly important because of their conservation value relative to aggressive development trends in Corrales. These projects were some of the first projects to be completed by New Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC). Despite being surrounded by the Albuquerque metropolitan area, Corrales has been able to maintain much of its rural character and support for farmland preservation efforts has been substantial.

Located along the Rio Grande, Corrales has been a hub of agricultural activity since it was first farmed by the Tiquex Pueblo people prior to 500 AD. This heritage has continued through the Spanish colonial era to present times. The Bosque or riparian woodlands of the Rio Grande provide habitat for a large variety of migratory and year round avian residents including owls, kestrels and sandhill cranes. But this biodiversity has been compromised by the effects of human development.

In the words of Lisa Brown, former member and chair of the Corrales Farmland Preservation Commission, “in a place like Corrales, saving even 25 acres of agricultural land is a great thing.” Lisa, a former water rights attorney, has lived in Corrales most of her life and watched the growth of a grassroots movement with wide local enthusiasm for the conservation process that has unfolded in the past two decades.

NMLC completed its first five easements (within the Village of Corrales) between 2005 - 2008, protecting 33 acres of farmland and scenic open space. These initial easements were partially funded by a \$1.15 million federal grant from the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service through its Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. This grant was matched by the village through a municipal bond issue approved by voters. As noted by Lisa Brown, this is quite significant as the use of a bond to fund conservation easements was innovative in New Mexico and showcased the high level of public support as this measure passed by 80%.

Dorothy Smith, a Corrales resident who opted to sell a 6.3-acre easement on her Ventana Grande land, put it this way, “there’s no turning back when you turn farms into subdivisions. People have got to start thinking about saving farmland now. When you look back at all the farmland that has been lost to houses, you realize that you’ve got to do more with what you have.”

Other properties included in this initial group of conservation easements are the Minge Property (2.4 acres), the Kendall Property (2 acres), the Gonzales Property (5.5 acres), the Corrales Gateway - Trees of Corrales Property (18 acres), one of the largest remaining agricultural properties in Corrales. Due to the success of these early projects, another bond measure was passed by the Village of Corrales in 2018 that enabled the purchase of three more conservation easements: the Haslam Property (12.81 acres), Lopez Farm (3 acres) and Phelps Farm (9.9 acres).

In thinking back about the overall trajectory of conservation projects in Corrales, Lisa observed that, “the work is not done just because we have a bond in place – NMLC had to negotiate with the landowners and complete the easements. At least, now, when you drive into Corrales from the north you can see the preserved farmland and open space, and can exhale...”

Sid & Cheryl Goodloe – Carrizo Valley Ranch

Although originally from Abilene Texas, Sid Goodloe did not come from a ranching background. His father was a lawyer and real estate appraiser who traveled to ranch properties and Sid would frequently go with him. This exposure to ranching began a long trail to his life as a rancher, conservationist and advocate for watershed and land restoration. As a young man, he worked for ranchers during summers where he began to learn about ranch management and confirmed his desire to enter this world.

After graduating from Texas A & M University with a B. S. in Animal Science and M.S. in Range Science, he eventually got involved in managing ranches and moved to New Mexico. In 1956, Sid purchased Carrizo Valley Ranch, 16 miles north of Capitan, New Mexico. He started raising Hereford cattle and struggled through the drought of 1956-57 by feeding the livestock burnt cholla cactus. This hard experience motivated him to research the conditions and land management practices affecting the local watershed. For more than fifty years Sid has been learning about the watershed and trying to find ways to restore it and its grasslands.



“Watershed rehabilitation is our bottom-line goal here on the ranch,” said Sid Goodloe during a day-long workshop on his ranch as part of a “healthy soils” educational series organized by the Western Landowners Alliance. “We want to return the water to the aquifer and to produce more feed for wildlife and livestock,” he explained. His view is that past overgrazing of livestock and disruption of natural fire cycles has degraded grasslands in New Mexico and allowed the proliferation of piñon-juniper thickets that lead to further watershed depletion.

Through a combination of his own observations and information learned from reading works of writer and conservationist Aldo Leopold, Sid became more interested in developing new land management methods that would reverse this deterioration. His encounters with scientist and livestock producer Alan Savory (cofounder of the Savory Institute) led to the adaption of a holistic, systems approach to ranch resource management.



“Watershed rehabilitation is our bottom-line goal here on the ranch...”



Sid considers high intensity, short-duration grazing to be the foundation of his ranch management practice. “We started this in 1971 and it’s changed everything – the condition of the pastures, the biodiversity,” Sid reflects. “We move cattle about once a week and, when we have better grass production, we move them more often.”

With the accumulation of more information and experience, Sid became an advocate and educator in the use of holistic resource management methods to restore land and watersheds. He has been a Board member of the New Mexico Cattle Growers’ Association and the Quivira Coalition. When he came to realize the value of using conservation easements for protecting ranch and grasslands, he and his wife Cheryl founded the Southern Rockies Agricultural Land Trust (SRALT) as a means for assisting other family ranch owners in their efforts to preserve and sustain healthy agricultural land for future generations. They helped to place over 13,000 acres under easement around the state.

But having to contend with the responsibilities of operating a land trust – including ongoing stewardship of conserved lands, possible legal defense of easements

and land trust accreditation – while also trying to run a ranch – prompted Sid and Cheryl to transfer their easements to the New Mexico Land Conservancy in order to ensure their integrity in perpetuity. They continue to maintain a close relationship with NMLC and Sid Goodloe is currently an advisor to our Board of Directors.

We are also proud to share the news that Sid Goodloe has recently been named the 2022 New Mexico Leopold Conservation Award recipient by the Sand County Foundation. This award is bestowed on people who embody conservation ethics in their on-the-ground efforts to revitalize and protect valuable land resources. When asked about his reaction to being honored with the Leopold Conservation Award, Sid responded, “I’m humbled, I’ve been doing this ranching work for 60 years and it’s gratifying to see a good year of grass and to know that I’ve had some impact on other people through years of sharing my ideas and knowledge. I wish I had come across Aldo Leopold’s writing earlier in my life, it could have saved me a lot of extra trial and error work.”

“We need to think of the land as a community instead of a commodity. Ranching is more about being a land resource manager than anything else.” — Greg Moore



Greg Moore – Wagon Mound Ranch

Greg Moore is a rancher whose philosophy and practices set him apart from the crowd.

“I try to graze lightly on the land. You can’t farm or overgraze these prairies – the people who tried to do that in the past were forced to because they were making monthly payments and those methods failed. We need to think of the land as a community instead of a commodity. Ranching is more about being a resource manager than anything else.”

Greg is originally from East Texas but, since 1975, he has owned the Wagon Mound Ranch located 14 miles east from the town of Wagon Mound in the southern shortgrass prairie of Mora County. Between 2011- 2014, he worked with NMLC to place conservation easements over his 23,000-acre ranch in three phases. It is a place of expansive vistas, cattle, wildlife and grassland. When asked about his methods he stated in no uncertain words:

“If you take care of the water and soil, then grasses and forbs will thrive. Once this happens wildlife and livestock will do well and so will people. It’s a matter of keeping things in natural balance. I avoid a mechanical mindset – you can’t do these things by formula. You have to observe what’s going on with the environment and try different approaches to solving problems. You always need to have an experiment going to test your ideas and see if they actually work to solve problems and maintain the balance.”

And, in fact, he has taken quite a few risks in his endeavor to learn about the best ways to manage his land.

“At this point there’s a lot of information available in the academic world and through reading and internet research, but I didn’t have anybody to tell me about the things I’ve learned. I had to figure out a lot of it myself. This knowledge is around, I didn’t reinvent the wheel. Using

managed grazing that didn’t deplete the grass and forbs improved the condition of the land and the livestock. If you want to sustain riparian areas, you need to protect them during the growing season. If you create good conditions for healthy land, then this will benefit the wildlife. Whatever animals are out here, I’ll make sure they have a home. I’ve done this with beavers in the streams, with



the prairie dog town and by reintroducing the black-footed ferret.”

His reasons for using easements to protect Wagon Mound in the future go hand in hand:

“To sustain the land and bring the prairies back to the way they were in the 1800s, you can’t overgraze and that means you have to have large areas of land for cattle. You can’t properly manage ranchettes, they get overgrazed. I want to see the changes made to this ranch live on in the future, so it seemed logical to protect the property with conservation easements. There are tax and financial incentives, but the main thing is to prevent subdivision which would undo all that I’ve done here. At least I can go to my grave knowing that this ranch won’t be converted into ranchettes and subdivisions.”



Jim Winder - Rancher, Developer, Conservationist



Jim Winder is a rancher, a developer and conservationist who has managed to combine all three pursuits in a synergistic mode. Since the economics of ranching are challenging at best, he sought ways to preserve ranch land that seemed destined for subdivision because cows couldn't support them financially. With some innovative thinking and experimentation, over time he struck upon a concept that has enabled the perpetual conservation of over 28,000 acres. "When I first got interested in using conservation easements, I saw how ranches that were struggling economically often sold out to development, so I started looking for some kind of solution."

Jim and his partners have collaborated with NMLC to use both conservation easements and limited development to pay for property that can be used for multiple purposes. His projects have typically been able to maintain about 95% of the subject properties as open space. As more of scenic New Mexico is developed, it seems inevitable that ranches will be lost to this process. "In my opinion, if you don't have a property in a conservation easement, you're at risk of development. The trick is to find a means for creating a development plan that allows for homes and infrastructure with minimal impact on natural processes, wildlife and scenic landscapes."

Deer Canyon Preserve consists of over 13,000 conserved acres of land mingled with residential development. The property is in Torrance County near Chupadera Mesa and provides scenic open and

wildlife habitat for elk, mule deer, black bear and mountain lion. There are also golden eagle, turkey and a variety of native bird species. "The property buyers are attracted to the value of the conservation easement. It protects the property forever. A simple deed restriction is only as good as your ability to enforce it. What ultimately matters most is the permanence of the conservation easement and the oversight of the land trust. We haven't had violations and most of the current owners are now second and third generation."

Jim Winder collaborated with NMLC to place conservation easements on a number of properties including Cougar Mountain Ranch's 6,160 acres in Lincoln and Torrance Counties, and Berrenda Creek with 7,447 acres and the North and South Lake Valley ranches consisting of just over 1,300 acres in Sierra County. "We chose to work with NMLC because it was growing the fastest and it seemed the most stable. You need to have an organization that will have the continuity in the future for stewardship."

"Conservation easements have come a long way and more and more mainstream ranchers are starting to participate. Initially, it was mainly non-traditional, "hobby" landowners, but now it's more common for the regular ranch owners to use them."

Josh Miner - Fort Union Ranch



Fort Union Ranch is a 95,000-acre property in Mora County owned by the Union Land and Grazing Company, most of whose majority shareholders are descendants of Civil War General Benjamin Butler. This company has owned and managed the property for 136 years. The Fort Union National Monument is completely surrounded by the ranch which affords panoramic views of the expansive shortgrass prairie landscape and nearby Turkey Mountains. The ranch also contains many traces of the old, historic Santa Fe Trail. The diversity of terrain includes wetlands, grasslands, piñon-juniper woodlands and coniferous forest, providing habitat for many types of wildlife such as pronghorn, elk, deer, black bear, mountain lion, wild turkey and a plethora of grassland birds.

NMLC began assisting the landowners in 2014, employing a series of phased easements to conserve this heritage ranch for both its environmental and historic value. Board president and landowner Josh Miner described the company's motivation for adopting land conservation as part of the overall management strategy as ecological and financial. "Acting as appropriate stewards benefits the economic health of our business and the public good."

Josh had previous involvement with conservation and land resource management through work with the Sonora Institute, the Quivira Coalition and The High Plains Grasslands Alliance, organizations that assist western ranch and agricultural landowners with management planning, and restoring and building resilience on working landscapes. "Jamie French, one of our board members, was also chair of the Land Trust Alliance board, so we've had direction and input from people who are motivated by conservation." Jamie French was instrumental in connecting Union Land and Grazing Company (ULGC) with NMLC. "We were looking at the possible use of easements and Jamie steered us to Scott Wilber who spoke to our board."

"Our collaboration with New Mexico Land Conservancy has been very successful, we got exactly what we asked for. Scott and the staff have led us through the process very smoothly with very few bumps in the road. NMLC has always been able to suggest new ways of approaching things and innovative solutions to challenges."

One of the significant projects that came to fruition was the Wolf Creek easement and restoration. In 2018, NMLC was awarded a \$100,000 grant from US Fish & Wildlife Service through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act to protect critical waterfowl resting and migration habitats on Dry and Wheeler lakes, and the Wolf Creek riparian corridor. This involved the use of fencing to prevent cattle from stream access, one rock dams, weirs (small dams to slow water), and the planting of willow and cottonwood trees. "We engaged Bill Zeedyk, the renowned stream restoration wizard, to design this plan. Six or seven years ago, there was virtually no vegetation on the banks - now it's green and lush."

Josh also noted, "We have found it's just as important to conserve the land as to receive funding through these projects. Land conservation has become critical to our operation. It's part of our ability to keep this property intact as it has been since 1885." To date, NMLC has worked with the ULGC to place nearly 30,000 acres of the ranch into conservation easements, and is currently working on a new easement with funding from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and exploring new funding opportunities to conserve more of the ranch.



Josiah Austin - Cienega Ranch

"I like to sit on my front porch with a cup of coffee and watch a sea of grass blowing in the wind while thinking about how it will be out here for future generations."

If you were sitting on that porch with Josiah Austin and asked him about his ranching philosophy, this is what he would tell you, "I believe the ranch has to be a working landscape where all the parts perform together to keep things balanced. The land needs to be productive but all the wildlife from the deer and elk to the birds, insects and fish have to prosper."

This is the vision that has guided over twenty-five years of conservation endeavors on various ranches he has acquired along the western flanks of the Chiricahua and Dos Cabezas Mountains in southeastern Arizona in an ongoing experiment with innovative land management practices.

"Land restoration and infrastructure are a big part of my strategy. Restoring and protecting the native grasses is important, they're part of the whole natural system.

This year the grasses are doing well. The water cycle needs to be better – I try to find ways to improve this. Slowing the water down is important to stop the soil loss. I've tried loose rock dams and gabion rock walls to control water speed and run-off. I try to improve the cattle herd every year – I am very interested in genetics to improve breeding. All of this is an ongoing process, a lot of trial and error, but over time you can see progress. When I pass this ranch on to someone else, it has to be in better shape than it is now."

Josiah has been very proactive with reintroducing threatened or endangered species on the ranch. Some prime examples are the Chiricahua leopard frog and the Yaqui and Gila topminnows which help control mosquito larvae in cattle troughs. Other species he's considered reintroducing are black-footed ferrets, prairie dogs and pronghorn. He has installed extensive water infrastructure throughout the property and "tire drinkers" made from repurposed mining truck tires placed on poured foundations with concrete ramps in the water

to enable animals to get out of these man-made watering holes if they fall in.

Another major element in Josiah's approach is to expand the size of the conservation footprint by acquiring adjacent lands to preserve by reinvesting proceeds from prior easement sales. This allows him to increase the size of unfragmented land to enhance habitat and greater connectivity for local and migratory wildlife.

"Twenty or thirty years back, there was a lot of skepticism about conservation easements, but that's changed. As we go forward, the idea of conservation will be more accepted. I want to protect the land for future generations and from future generations, that's why I have used conservation easements."

Three conservation easements totaling almost 28,000 acres have already been completed on Cienega Ranch, all held by NMLC. Josiah Austin is continuing to work with The Trust for Public Land and NMLC, along with U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and a fourth easement will be completed in the near future.

"I like to sit on my front porch with a cup of coffee and watch a sea of grass blowing in the wind while thinking about how it will be out here for future generations."





Bluewater Heritage Ranch

Preserving Heritage - Ensuring a Family Legacy

There is a reason that Bluewater Heritage Ranch has the word “heritage” in its name - this theme runs through its history and will continue into its future. The ranch has been in the Nielson family for more than 150 years and current owner, Russ Nielson, is determined to preserve the legacy of his ancestors. “Some of this ranch has been in the family since 1894 but there have been sections added and changed over the years. Now there are about 7,600 deeded acres. There’s been four generations on this land and I’d like to keep it going.”

Russ has 11 children and 46 grandchildren. “I don’t want to see this land subdivided. I was doing some succession planning and I’ve told my grandchildren – don’t ever sell the ranch. I try to bring them up here to get them involved, to have them learn about conservation and land management.”

Bluewater Heritage Ranch is located in Cibola County southeast of Grants, NM. Running along the northeastern-facing slopes of the Zuni Mountains, its piñon-juniper savannas have been used historically for livestock production and continues today as a working ranch. Russ Nielson hasn’t always been a rancher. “I was in the lumber and construction business, but my dad was a rancher and when he got older and I saw he was winding down, I decided to step in and help run the ranch. I had to learn along the way. My dad did some conservation work with U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), but he never got too sophisticated with his management. He did some restoration and ranch improvement work, but as far as resource management, he basically had two pastures where he would move the cattle back and forth, so it wasn’t true rotational grazing.”

“I first got involved with land resource management and conservation when researching modern techniques and practices. It was through Holistic Resources Management (formerly known as the Savory Institute) that I met Kirk Gadzia, a rangeland consultant who helped me work out a pasturing plan for rotational grazing. Now I have 13 pastures for the cattle. I had to figure out the pasture division and fencing - it was about learning how to treat the land properly to sustain the grazing.”

“I also started to apply for different grants to make improvements. I worked with the Environmental Quality & Incentives Program (EQIP) and the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED). I got a grant for surface water improvement through NMED in 2018 and planted 300 trees along Bluewater Creek. A lot of these died off in the recent drought, so I got another grant to plant another 50 trees with a drip system. I also got a 319 Grant through the Environmental Protection Agency and that funded the baffles and riffles for riparian mitigation to slow the water down.”

Through research, Russ learned about conservation easements and contacted the New Mexico Land Conservancy for more information. Russ learned about the New Mexico state tax credit program for conservation easement donations and the possibility of partial funding through the NRCS’s Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). The NRCS ACEP is a competitive program, and he was advised by NMLC to start with a donated “pilot” easement which could then be used to leverage future funding through NRCS.

Russ wants to make sure Bluewater Heritage Ranch remains whole and in the Nielson family for generations to come. “This ranch has been in my family for a long time, the heritage and legacy are important. We have a family gathering on the ranch once a year and have a Heritage Night with a big bonfire. One of my biggest fears is that in the future my family will only see the dollar value of the land.” The conservation easements ensure that the ranch will remain intact and viable as a ranching operation.

Reflections From Southern New Mexico

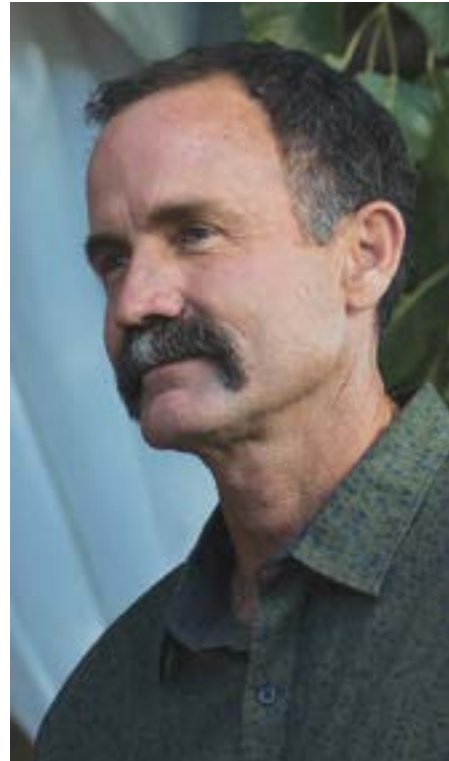
By Ron Troy, Southern New Mexico Program Manager

When I was hired on seven years ago as the New Mexico Land Conservancy's Southern New Mexico Project Manager, I was impressed at the 62 conservation easements encompassing 145,000 acres that NMLC had already secured since our inception in 2002. The hard work of our small organization was especially apparent in southern New Mexico. Somehow, through the efforts of a very few individuals based in Santa Fe, NMLC was able to secure 80,000 acres of land protection in southern New Mexico alone.

I was equally impressed at the lofty 25-year goal of protecting one million acres across New Mexico and eastern Arizona by the year 2030. When I came on board in 2015, I had seen a lot of our Rocky Mountain West – our farms and ranches, our fish and wildlife habitat – get cut up quickly and converted into ranchettes, recreational retreats and housing subdivisions. When I joined NMLC, I was hell-bent on permanently protecting these natural and agricultural lands one acre at a time! NMLC with its demonstrated success combined with the hard work and agility that comes with successful conservation efforts was the perfect venue.

Going into my eighth year, I'm proud to be a part of NMLC and the 125 conservation projects we have completed comprising over 655,000 acres that are now permanently protected. Notably, these protected lands are located in some key areas of New Mexico and Arizona. In southwest New Mexico, we have conserved ranchland in the Zuni Mountains and along the northern edge of the Gilas and the eastern flanks of the Black Range down into the Burro and Peloncillo mountains. We have also protected beautiful riparian properties along the Mimbres River, Bear Creek, the Burro Cienega and Ancheta Creek. We have protected inholdings within the Gila and Cibola national forests. Right in and around Silver City, where our southern New Mexico office is based, we have used generous grants to help purchase land for trails and open space in and around Silver City, and to help initiate a comprehensive trails and open space plan for Grant County. Along the Rio Grande and the Chupadera Mesa in south central New Mexico, we have been working with the Department of Defense to protect over 365,000 acres around White Sands Missile Range. In southeast New Mexico, we have conserved over 30,000 acres of productive ranchlands in the heart of prairie chicken habitat. More recently, in southeast Arizona we have been working in tandem with Trust for Public Lands and have protected nearly 30,000 acres along the western flanks of the Chiricahua and Dos Cabezas Mountain Ranges, and provided advice and guidance to a new land trust – the Chiricahua Land Conservancy based in Portal – in the early stages of their development.

I am very proud of the number and diversity of properties that NMLC has been able to protect in southern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona. None of this would have been possible without the commitment and forward-thinking vision of the



many landowners we work with or without the generosity of the many donors and foundations that have supported us over the years. It has been a team effort and has involved the hard work of many individuals including our contractors and governmental partners. I can't say enough about the commitment to and passion for conservation that the individuals we work with possess. It is in the spirit of collaboration between our landowners and a dedicated group of conservationists that has led to our many successes in this important part of the state and southwest region.



To Know the Land is to Love the Land

By Ron Troy, Southern New Mexico Program Manager

Arian Pregonzer knows the land as well as anyone, in fact you could say she knows it all the way down to the nucleus of the atoms within the chemical elements that make up the land. That's because Arian is a nuclear scientist. Be it microbial biology in the desert southwest or nuclear proliferation around the globe, Arian's entire life has been centered around gaining a better understanding of our planet and how to protect it.

I had the good fortune of meeting Arian back in 2019 while working to place a conservation easement on her 160-acre inholding within the Cibola National Forest in the Bear Mountains near Magdalena, New Mexico. This land, now known as Solitaire Springs, was Arian's treasured recreational retreat – a place she could seek solitude from her busier day to day life in Albuquerque where she lived and worked at the Sandia National Laboratories. Arian and her first husband built a home at Solitaire Springs among the ruins of homesteads that were built there over a century ago by settlers that had also sought the precious and rare water resources that complemented the property.

Using Solitaire Springs as a base camp, during her spare time, Arian volunteered to conduct a wilderness inventory of the nearby Sierra Ladrones for the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NMWA). In addition, Arian also developed a comprehensive wilderness inventory of the surrounding Bear Mountains for The Wilderness Society and NMWA, all the while working on the non-proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons at a global scale.

At age 70, you can still find Arian leading backpacking trips for the Sierra Club to some of her favorite haunts: among them, the San Juans, the Sierra Nevadas and the Grand Canyon. Unfortunately, with her husband's age and declining health, the couple's use of Solitaire Springs had begun to wane in recent years. It was in this context that Arian decided to donate her Solitaire Springs property to the New Mexico Land Conservancy. We couldn't be more thrilled and appreciative of this generous gift and affirmation of the importance of our conservation work at NMLC. Thank you, Arian, and may you live well past 100 years and continue your efforts to protect this amazing planet.



“For me, Jacobo’s story expressed how the terra incognita of the mountains seemed, in those days, a living thing, how the land, from the perspective of those who struggled in its grasp, was always dominant.”



“Our aim was to settle where we could live simply, cheaply and deliberately. Having no desire to preach, we were not looking for Walden, only for solid ground. And at eight thousand feet high in the mountains of northern New Mexico, in a village tucked far out of sight of the highway, we thought we might have found it.”

Otro Lado is the name of a private irrigation ditch which is part of the traditional acequia system that feeds precious water to lands bordering the Rio de las Trampas (River of Traps) near the traditional village of El Valle in northern New Mexico. Appropriately, it is also the name of property currently owned by William deBuys, Alex Harris, Margaret Sartor and Dorothy Decker.

Otro Lado is a remarkably beautiful place, almost magical in its montane remoteness. Surrounded by the Sangre de Cristo mountains, it resonates with the traditional acequia culture practiced in the area since the 1600s. This is captured by the evocative prose of William DeBuys and stark, stately images of photographer Alex Harris in the southwestern classic “River Of Traps.” This book, and the lives of the three men whose story it tells, are deeply entwined with the land of this place. It is a tale of Jacobo, an old farmer who befriends two young, Anglo outsiders and shares his knowledge and memories of a waning culture.

“For me, Jacobo’s story expressed how the terra incognita of the mountains seemed, in those days, a living thing, how the land, from the perspective of those who struggled in its grasp, was always dominant.”

Otro Lado (which means the “other side”) consists of coniferous forest dominated by ponderosa pine, riparian woodlands, irrigated pasture and a high mountain stream. The property consists of mostly natural habitat along the Rio de las Trampas and forested areas that border the Carson National Forest. Wooded sections near open meadows provide habitat for a variety of animal species including mountain lion, elk, mule deer,

A River Runs Through It - Otro Lado



black bear, beaver, bobcat and coyote. There are many bird species such as red-tailed hawk, piñon jay, lark sparrow and western meadow-lark.

“Among the living, only Jacobo’s generation had tasted the older stream. The old ones had been born and raised... in a land where time was not confused with money and where money, by itself, was not considered unequivocally good. Their generation was the last to tend its ideas, like its sheep, in valleys remote from the markets of the world.”

Otro Lado is located within what was once part of the Trampas Land Grant, established in 1751. The Rio de las Trampas was historically used to power a gristmill downstream of the property and remains of the mill structure are still present. Tradition holds that this land was the first farmed in the valley.

The New Mexico Land Conservancy worked with the owners to place a conservation easement on the 21.5 acre property which was completed in December of 2021. This easement will protect the agricultural, scenic and wildlife habitat values of a unique and sublime place.

Quotes from the book “River Of Traps” by William deBuys and Alex Harris.



“Jacobo’s goals were material, but not material alone. They were shaped, in large measure, by love of land...”



Lost Draw Conservation Bank - Adam Riggsbee

Adam Riggsbee is the founder and President of RiverBank Conservation in Austin, TX. Established in 2009, RiverBank has created several stream, wetland and species mitigation banks projects across Texas.

In 2017 Adam contacted NMLC's executive director, Scott Wilber, to explore the possibility of a partnership to establish a conservation bank in southeast New Mexico where several large wind farms were projected to come online, endangering the habitat of the Lesser Prairie Chicken (LPC).

Actually a member of the grouse family, the LPC is known for its elaborate ritual mating dance performed in communal areas called leks within its typical grassland habitat. Recent estimates are that only 38,000 "chickens" remain within a five-state range which includes areas of New Mexico earmarked for oil, gas and wind energy development in the southeast part of the state.

The birds had been listed as a federally "threatened" species under the Endangered

Species Act, but later de-listed in 2018. Some experts speculate that the bird could be relisted again in the next few years. Rangeland fragmentation is a major problem which has led to the isolation of LPC communities causing inbreeding.

The concept of conservation banking is to mitigate the anticipated impacts to habitat from current and planned development by permanently protecting and then enhancing habitat for imperiled species in other areas that are more viable for long-term conservation.

The proximity of other existing LPC conservation areas such as the Weaver Ranch, TNC's Milnesand Prairie Preserve and several state-managed conservation areas made the establishment of a conservation bank on the Lost Draw Ranch an optimal choice. This allowed for aggregation of conserved land, creating a 60,000-acre contiguous area of LPC habitat.

Adam felt the opportunity to do a conservation bank involving an easement was com-



elling because, compared to stream and wetland mitigation banking, the land parcels were much larger and the impact more significant. RiverBank had a lot of experience with land trusts in Texas but when it came to working in New Mexico, recommendations led him to NMLC.

NMLC collaborated with a group of partners for almost two years to complete the Lost Draw project in 2019. This included RiverBank Conservation, Common Ground Capital, Tomahawk CB LLC, US Fish & Wildlife Service and landowner Mack Kizer.

Adam Riggsbee had high praise for Mack Kizer whose property became the new habitat for the Prairie Chickens, "Mack was very friendly and easy to work with, and he is excited to be contributing to the protection of these birds. He really loves the chickens and I still get calls from him about their progress."

Adam feels this was a very successful collaboration and that it was great to work with NMLC. "The staff was knowledgeable and efficient and helped to move the project along. The potential to increase the scale of this is high. Keep up the good work."



Henry Carey - Founder of the Forest Trust

Forest Management and NM Land Conservation Pioneer

PM: When was the Forest Trust founded?

Henry: That was in 1984, it was the first local land trust in New Mexico. Its original mission was forest management, but it later evolved towards conservation easements. The land trust notion came out of a situation with a landowner who didn't want to pass his property on to family. I saw the need for a forestry organization and the easements grew out of this as a way to protect forest resources. Conservation easements serve as a drag anchor to slow environmental change and degradation.

PM: What is your philosophy and experience with land conservation?

Henry: A lot of the progress came out of serendipity, the people you know and meet that get involved with projects and concepts. I was a pretty close friend of Dale Ball who was a banker from Iowa. He came to Santa Fe and bought a bank. This led to a series of circumstances and eventually the creation of the Dale Ball Trails. The Atalaya Trails were pieced together after an initial partial easement. The Dorothy Stewart Trail was funded by donations and the trail easements were sold by the foot.

PM: What are your thoughts about NMLC's development?

Henry: In the early years, funding wasn't as generous as it is now, and the tax benefits were not as substan-

tial. A big part of the success of NMLC had to do with the blending of private and non-profit interests. The NM Land Conservation State Tax Credit was a major factor in the ability to attract landowners and get easements placed. NMLC figured out how to do deals and create the necessary income for the non-profit to survive.

PM: Why did the Forest Trust transfer easements to NMLC?

Henry: I began to realize the easements weren't assets but liabilities. I decided to pass them on to an accredited organization that was more focused on stewardship." There's a long-term financial responsibility that comes with monitoring the easements way into the future. NMLC was in a better position to do the stewardship going into the future. The Forest Trust eventually evolved into a spinoff business managing lands for absentee landlords. You always have to find ways to bring money in to support operations.

PM: Where do you think land conservation and NMLC are headed in the future?

Henry: I don't see any major turns in the road. The LTA standards and practices and the insurance available make a big difference in supporting conservation organizations viability down the line. NMLC is doing great work!

Photo by Adam Schallau



Snow Geese at Bosque del Apache. Photo by Mark Watson

Our Promise to Steward into the Future

By Claire Catlett, Northern New Mexico Project Manager

When we protect land, we protect it forever. In every conservation easement deed, you will find these words: "To Have and To Hold, this Deed of Conservation Easement unto the Land Trust, its successors and assigns, forever." Forever is our commitment to future generations that the land we love today is here tomorrow with all the conservation values protected as promised by our conservation easements.

Forever comes with a lot of risks, no matter how principled and committed we are to our promise to hold our easements in perpetuity. There are direct hazards like droughts, fires and floods. There are other indirect risks to conservation easements that can stem from land use and ownership, and those risks grow over time as successor landowners come to own conserved properties that were not the original grantors of those easements. As our conservation portfolio surpasses 655,000 acres in New Mexico and Arizona, the stakes are high as a single adverse decision from a legal case could endanger the permanence of dozens of easements.

As NMLC reaches our 20th year, we are preparing for these stewardship risks - such as a natural disaster or an easement violation - as a fully accredited land trust committed to the highest standards of real estate, legal and non-profit excellence to ensure our conservation

transactions are based on due diligence that will withstand the challenges of time. We are qualified by the Internal Revenue Service and the State of New Mexico to accept and hold charitable donations of land and conservation easements, as well as steward our protected properties to ensure the conservation values are being protected in perpetuity.

Since 2013, NMLC has been enrolled in Terrafirma, a national conservation easement defense insurance company owned and operated by the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), which provides a maximum aggregate limit of \$500,000 of insurance coverage for qualifying legal defense claims associated with any violations of the easements in NMLC's current portfolio. NMLC provides monitoring, stewardship and legal defense for all of the conservation easements that we currently hold. We also maintain a special Stewardship Fund, managed separately from our operating accounts, in which we have set aside and pooled funds for these specific stewardship purposes.

We are ready to defend conserved properties when confronted with a challenge and we are vowing to keep our promise of perpetuity for the people, communities, environment and future of New Mexico.

Monitoring From The Ground Up

By Will Donahoo, Stewardship Manager



Canadian Geese visiting a grassland pond in New Mexico. Photo by Mark Watson

With the coming of fall, I've had the opportunity to reflect on this year's monitoring season and the ways in which our notion and methods of stewardship have grown in lockstep with the places we've helped to conserve. 2022 presented its share of challenges. The Calf Canyon/Hermits Peak and the Black Fires directly impacted many NMLC landowners and conservation easements along with countless other people, communities and landscapes. Concerns around drought and water scarcity in the early part of the year gave way to issues of flooding following the arrival of the monsoons. These challenges led us to reimagine where and how we conduct our annual monitoring and afforded us the opportunity to work on issues beyond the traditional bounds of stewardship.

Much has changed in the past 20 years. NMLC hired its first two stewardship interns in 2010 to help monitor our growing portfolio of conserved lands and in 2015, with 65 completed easements comprising 150,000 acres of land across the state, we hired our first full-time stewardship position. Some of our early easement monitoring photos were captured on film and documented with handwritten notes. Over the years, we've experimented with chartering flights to capture aerial imagery and monitoring properties by plane. Today, our work is supplemented using iPads in the field and software which allows us to record notes, generate maps and quickly summarize field visits within annual reports. With over 655,000 acres held in conservation easement, there is a lot of ground to cover.

This year, through a grant from the Land Trust Alliance, NMLC has added remote satellite monitoring to our toolbox. Satellite imagery affords us the ability to view the entirety of a conserved property at one time, virtually visit locations inaccessible by vehicle or foot, and easily identify changes at the scale of a structure or across an entire landscape. Vegetation and infrared layers and up-to-date imagery allow us to answer questions about how drought or management activities have impacted a property, and quickly assess and respond to natural disasters such as fire or floods.

Remote monitoring is intended to supplement not replace the time we spend meeting with landowners and visiting each of the places we help conserve. Since joining NMLC earlier this year, I've had the opportunity to visit many of our conserved properties throughout the state and to learn from the people who are working every day to make a positive impact on the land. Remote monitoring will allow us to better focus our time spent on the ground and, with any luck, will give us the capacity to build stronger relationships with landowners and support the work they are doing, be that answering questions, helping with new restoration projects or better responding to the impacts of our changing climate.

While the methods may change, NMLC remains steadfast in our commitment to the places we've helped conserve. It's exciting to ponder how the role of stewardship will change and evolve over the next 20 years.



Chantell Victorino

2022 Stewardship Intern

PM: What in your background influenced you to apply for the intern position with NMLC?

Chantell: I was born and raised in New Mexico and I'm originally from Acoma Pueblo. As a pueblo person, I have a strong connection to the land. Growing up we are taught by our elders the importance of caring for the land and treating it as if it were a living being. This philosophy is really important to Native American people. Before I got into my academic studies I would participate in farm and ranch work in my pueblo community. I knew that I wanted to work outdoors and be involved with nature and the environment. Through community connections I made, I was offered an internship with the Intertribal Agriculture Council. I spent this time learning how to navigate a world I wasn't quite a part of yet. I didn't want to go to college without a plan, so I took the time to find direction. I attended classes at the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) and graduated with a degree in Natural Resources Management and Environmental Science.

Because I really like being outdoors, in between semesters I worked with the Forest Service as a wildland firefighter on the Gila National Forest. After graduating from SIPI, I transferred to the University of New Mexico (UNM) and have been studying Geography as a major with a minor in Environmental Science. I'm interested in pursuing a graduate degree in Community and Regional planning with a focus on natural resources and environmental planning.

As a senior at UNM, I was looking for an internship to gain more field-based experience and I saw a job posted on our campus board for the position with NMLC. I sent a letter of intent and resume to Claire Catlett, the Northern New Mexico Project Manager, which led to an interview and eventually a job as intern.

PM: What was your experience at NMLC like?

Chantell: I knew a little bit about land conservation but nothing about conservation easements, so there were new things to learn. I got interested in the whole process once I understood the basics of easements. Monitoring was a great experience because I got to see New Mexico in a different way. When you're just driving through the state on highways you never get to view such incredible diversity in landscape as when you visit these beautiful ranch properties. It was a life changing experience.

PM: What was it like interacting with the landowners?

Chantell: I didn't always get to meet the landowners, but when I did, it was impressive to see how much they really care for the land and their commitment to the land. These are hardworking people who love what they are doing. At first, I thought that maybe tax incentives had something to do with the motivation for acquiring easements, but this was before I got out there to monitor. Once I did, I realized it was more than that, it was caring for the land and protecting it for future generations and I was able to experience their love for the land firsthand.

PM: Are there any particular properties or landowners that stand out in your recollections?

Chantell: The last property that I monitored was a special experience. This was the Sierra y Llanos Land and Cattle property in Las Vegas. It's owned by Werner Muller who was a professor of geography at Highlands University, so we instantly made a connection and had a lot to share. He talked about regenerative agriculture, a practice he is currently utilizing on his property. Through his work, he was able to transform his land from a dried-up, overgrazed property to healthier greener land. We were up on a high point and I could see the difference between his place and the neighboring properties where the grasses were not as lush. This made a huge impression on me.

PM: What are your overall thoughts about the internship with NMLC?

Chantell: I wish that more people knew about land conservation so they could get involved with the conservation easement process. I think easements are incredibly beneficial in protecting New Mexico's historical and cultural sites which, on a personal level, means a lot to me. It gives landowners the ability to protect land and get some compensation for the loss of value that occurs when they give up their subdivision rights. I really enjoyed working at NMLC – I learned a lot and the experience confirmed my desire to continue to pursue an education in community and regional planning and focus on natural resources and environmental planning. Ultimately, I hope to have a career in land conservation and historic preservation.

George Dennis

Meet Our Incoming Chair-Elect

PM: Tell us a little about your background and what pointed you towards a career in biology and wildlife management?

George: I grew up in the mid-West and, from a young age, I watched Jacques Cousteau and saw all the interesting things he was doing in his television show and documentary films. It really captured my imagination. Eventually, we moved to Texas, and I began attending classes at Texas A&M and graduated with a degree in Marine Biology. It was hard to find jobs in this field, but I was fortunate to land a position with a consulting firm that had contracts with offshore oil rigs that involved quite a bit of diving. Sometimes I was out there on those rigs for two or three weeks at a time.

I went back to school and started working on a master's degree and then a PhD in Puerto Rico where I was fortunate enough to receive a National Sea Grant fellowship in Washington D.C with the National Undersea Research Center, a division of the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration. That led to a job with the Caribbean Marine Research Center (CMRC), one of the undersea research centers.

PM: At this point, your education and experience could have led to a number of career paths. How did you come to be at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

George: That's another long story... the Executive Director I was working under was let go due to internal politics at the CMRC. This led me to working with the Biological Research Division of the US Geological Survey which segued into work with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on a large restoration project in the Florida Everglades - a circuitous path.

During a lull in Everglades restoration I got involved with conservation of the Florida Scrub Jay, an endangered species. I also worked with the Florida Panther, which at the time was critically endangered due a number of factors including habitat fragmentation. We created a conservation bank by maintaining a working ranch to mitigate the adverse effects of land development decreasing the panther habitat. This was the first time a conservation bank was used to protect this animal.

PM: What brought you to New Mexico?

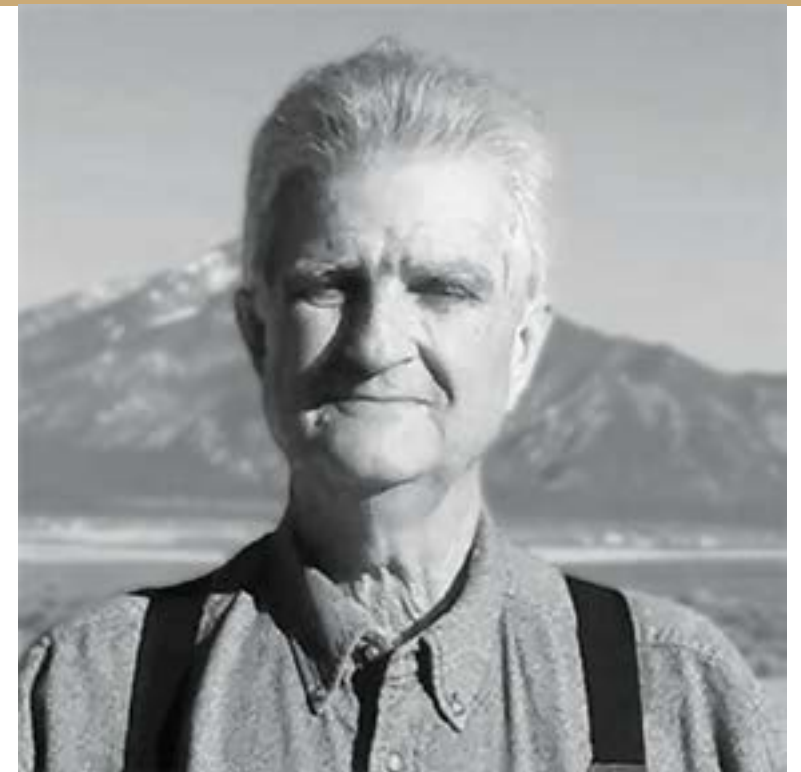
My wife and I decided we had gone through enough hurricanes in Florida, so we thought New Mexico was worth exploring. We fell in love with the landscape and people. I was able to continue employment with FWS and became a project manager working throughout New Mexico.

PM: How did you get connected with NMLC?

George: Through my position at FWS, I met Scott when managing some projects involving conservation easement and restoration work in southwest NM. As a result of a Natural Resource Damage Assessment and related settlement between the Freeport McMoran mining company, the State of New Mexico and the Department of Interior, a wildlife habitat protection fund was created to select and support a number of conservation and restoration projects around Silver City related to mitigating the impacts of Freeport's mining operations which had affected the Gila and Mimbres river watersheds and associated bird habitat. The Ancheta Springs, Prevost Ranch and SW Sufi-Bear Creek projects were three projects that were approved for funding that involved conservation easements with NMLC. I was very impressed with Scott's knowledge and how effective NMLC was in obtaining funding and completing these projects. After retiring, there was an opportunity to fill a position on the NMLC Board, so I decided to participate.

PM: What are your thoughts and feelings about being the Chair Elect?

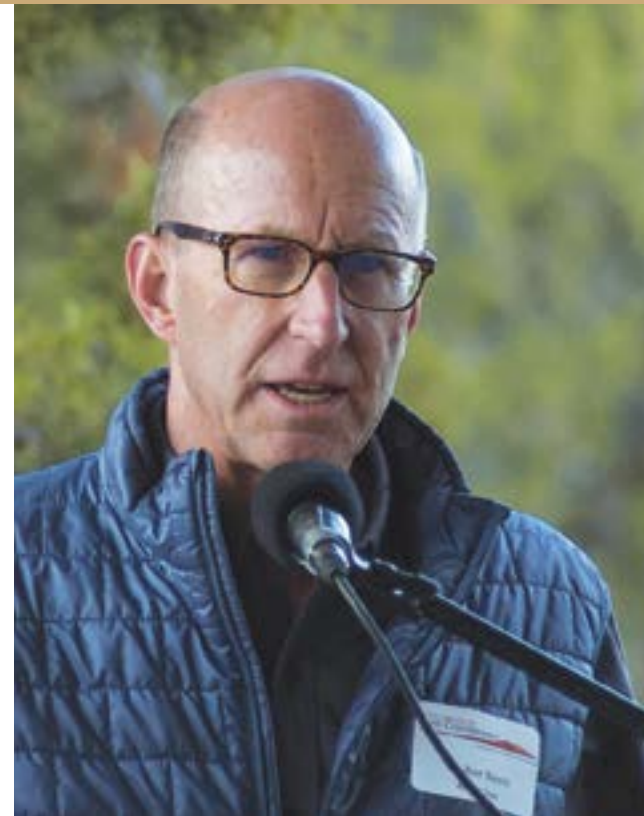
George: I feel humbled and, since I don't have prior experience with non-profit board management, I appreciate the fact that Scott and current Chair Walter Stern will continue their good work a little longer so that we have continuity in leadership going forward and I can benefit from their experience and knowledge. I think my style of management and communication, which is not confrontational and more about seeking consensus, is going to fit in well with the organization, as it seems to operate with the same philosophy.





Celebrating 20 Years of Land Conservation

On October 1st 2022, a beautiful New Mexico autumn evening, NMLC celebrated 20 years of land conservation work. Many of our dedicated landowners, partners and supporters joined the staff and Board members to celebrate this milestone at our Santa Fe headquarters. A good time was had by all, with outstanding musical entertainment provided by The Riffers, upscale barbecue by The Cowgirl and refreshments courtesy of The Mineshaft. With only a brief threat of wind and rain that diminished as the high spirits of the festivities prevailed, our event was a resounding success. There was a sense of accomplishment mixed with nostalgia as Board chair Walter Stern and Executive Director Scott Wilber spoke to the crowd about past endeavors, future goals and a “changing of the guard” as both leaders will be moving on from service to the organization next year. Love of the land is the common theme that brought NMLC and our supporters together, and this vision will continue to sustain our efforts in the years ahead...



A gift that keeps on giving . . .

When you include the New Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC) in your estate plans, you are making a gift for future generations to enjoy the unique and special places we all cherish. A planned gift, like permanently protected land, is a lasting contribution to ensure that NMLC has the resources to conserve and steward these special places. Making a planned gift to our organization may provide you and your family with valuable tax benefits. Gifts to NMLC are not subject to gift or estate taxes. There are several ways to include NMLC in your estate plans: for example, bequests and gifts of retirement plans, life insurance policies and real estate. Please contact your financial advisors to discuss options that meet your financial planning needs and philanthropic vision. We are here for the long run protecting New Mexico's land heritage in perpetuity for you and your family, and for New Mexico's future.

Visit: www.nmlandconservancy.org



Village of Los Ojos Church and Chama River near the Ancones Ranch. Photo by Adam Schallau.

PO Box 6759
Santa Fe, NM 87502
505.986.3801
info@nmlandconservancy.org

NEW MEXICO
LAND CONSERVANCY



Conserving Land. Preserving Heritage.