

PRESS RELEASE

New Mexico Land Conservancy
PO Box 6759 Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502
Tel: 505-986-3801 Fax: 505-986-3806
www.nmlandconservancy.org

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

Scott Wilber, Executive Director
New Mexico Land Conservancy

PHONE: (505) 986-3801

EMAIL: scottwilber@nmlandconservancy.org

HAWKWATCH PROPERTY IN TIJERAS CANYON NEWEST OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION BY CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE

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ALBUQUERQUE – In partnership with the New Mexico Land Conservancy, the Tijeras Canyon Safe Passage Coalition and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, the City of Albuquerque completed the purchase of a critical 63-acre property in Tijeras Canyon, known as the Hawkwatch property, which is adjacent to the City’s Tres Pistolas Open Space and the Sandia Mountain Wilderness.

The City acquired the property from Hawkwatch International, a Utah-based raptor conservation organization, which had tried unsuccessfully to sell the property for several years to generate revenue for its operations. **“We are very pleased to be transferring this property, which is very close to where we conduct annual Spring counts of migrating birds of prey, to the City of Albuquerque for the purpose of maintaining it as wildlife habitat and open space,”** said Thom Benedict, Hawkwatch International’s Executive Director.

The acquisition of this property culminates a one-year effort by the New Mexico Land Conservancy to find a conservation buyer for this property. **“I think that many people assumed that the Hawkwatch property was already protected land, but if the City hadn’t stepped up to purchase it as open space, this critical wildlife habitat could easily have been sold for development,”** said Scott Wilber, Executive Director of the New Mexico Land Conservancy, a statewide land trust organization based in Santa Fe.

To buy time to protect this important property, the New Mexico Land Conservancy negotiated a one-year option agreement with Hawkwatch International in July 2006 to facilitate the sale of the land to a conservation buyer. After finding an ally in City Councilor, Martin Heinrich, the Conservancy and its partners then worked with the City of Albuquerque to secure funding for the

acquisition through the passage of an open space bill in November 2006 and subsequently complete the transaction. **“Many different people and organizations deserve credit for making the Hawkwatch acquisition a reality. This project is an excellent example of how good collaboration and public-private partnership can achieve a successful conservation outcome with many ancillary benefits.”**

“I am very proud of all the folks who worked to protect the Hawkwatch site. Together we were able to preserve one of the best remaining open space jewels in the Sandia Mountains,” said City Councilor, Martin Heinrich, who spearheaded the appropriation used to buy the area.

The property will be managed by the City’s Open Space Division and, in addition to its wildlife values, it will serve many public benefits to Albuquerque area residents including improved public access from Old Route 66 to the Sandia Wilderness by hikers, bird watchers and sportsmen. The property is also part of the scenic view-shed along the I-40 corridor through Tijeras Canyon and the gateway to Albuquerque for motorists coming from the east.

“Tijeras Canyon is one of the most important and imperiled wildlife connections in New Mexico,” said Kurt Menke, Co-Chair of the Tijeras Canyon Safe Passage Coalition – a group of concerned citizens, conservation organizations and public agencies working to protect wildlife and motorists alike in Tijeras Canyon.

One of the main goals of the coalition is to create a viable wildlife corridor between the Sandia Wilderness and the Manzano Mountains. Menke noted that the busy transportation corridor along I-40 and associated developments through Tijeras Canyon are making it increasingly difficult for terrestrial animals to travel between the two mountain ranges. The location has become a hotspot for wildlife collisions along Old Route 66, where wildlife are funneled down via the canyon drainage to the north and are crossing Old Route 66 in attempts to access food and water in Tijeras Creek below.

The New Mexico Department of Game & Fish and the New Mexico Department of Transportation have identified the Hawkwatch property as one of the few viable locations for wildlife to pass under I-40 and Old Route 66 in Tijeras Canyon. The two departments have agreed to install wildlife fencing, a box culvert and motion sensors, and clear brush under bridges to facilitate wildlife passage. **“Acquisition and permanent protection of the Hawkwatch property is a critical step toward creating a viable corridor that deer, bear and other wildlife need to move between the Sandias and the Manzanos. The Sandias are becoming increasingly isolated because of habitat fragmentation from rapid development along the I-40 corridor through Tijeras Canyon,”** said Mark Watson, a biologist with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

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See attached map and photo. For further information, contact:

Scott Wilber, Executive Director
New Mexico Land Conservancy
(505) 986-3801
scottwilber@nmlandconservancy.org
www.nmlandconservancy.org

Kurt Menke, Co-Chair
Tijeras Canyon Safe Passage Coalition
(505) 281-8165
kmenke@edac.unm.edu
www.safepassagecoalition.org

Mark Watson, Terrestrial Habitat Specialist
New Mexico Dept. of Game & Fish
(505) 476-8115
mark.watson@state.nm.us
www.gmfsh.state.nm.us