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Contact: Councilor Martin Heinrich 259-8155; Scott Wilber, New Mexico Land Conservancy 986-3801 in Santa Fe; or Kurt Menke, Tijeras Canyon Safe Passage Coalition 265-0243

**COUNCIL PRESIDENT HEINRICH PUSHES PROTECTION OF
HAWKWATCH LAND IN THE SANDIA MOUNTAINS**

ALBUQUERQUE – In partnership with the New Mexico Land Conservancy, the Tijeras Canyon Safe Passage Coalition and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, City Council President Martin Heinrich is urging the City of Albuquerque to purchase and protect a vulnerable 67-acre property, known as the Hawkwatch property, that is adjacent to the Tres Pistolas Open Space and the Sandia Mountain Wilderness.

The owner of the property, Hawkwatch International, has recently decided to sell what many people have mistakenly believed to be protected public land. In order to facilitate a solution that protects this important property, the New Mexico Land Conservancy acquired a one-year option from Hawkwatch International in July to facilitate the sale of the land to a conservation buyer.

“When people look at the Hawkwatch property, they often assume that it is already protected land, but if the City doesn’t step in and purchase this as Open Space, we could easily see this critical wildlife habitat being developed,” said Scott Wilber, Executive Director of the New Mexico Land Conservancy. The Conservancy is a statewide land trust, based in Santa Fe, dedicated to preserving New Mexico’s land heritage by protecting significant wildlife habitat, productive agricultural land and scenic open space for conservation purposes and public benefit.

The Hawkwatch property is one of the most important and imperiled wildlife connections in New Mexico, and has been recognized recently as one of North America’s five most important wildlife linkages. The corridor connects wildlife habitat in the Sandia Mountains to those of the Manzano Mountains. The New Mexico Department of Transportation and the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish 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.

However, 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 Hawkwatch property must be conserved if we are to maintain healthy, long term populations of wildlife in the Sandia Mountains. Protecting this land will help preserve the corridor that deer, bear and other wildlife need to move between the Sandias and Manzanos,” says Mark Watson, a Terrestrial Habitat Specialist with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

The Tijeras Canyon Safe Passage Coalition – a group of concerned citizens, conservation organizations and public agencies - has been working with the Department of Transportation and the Department of Game and Fish to improve this area for both the safety of motorists and wildlife alike. The Department of Transportation has agreed to install wildlife fencing, a box culvert and motion sensors, and clear brush under bridges to facilitate wildlife passage. The Department of Game and Fish has indicated an interest in installing a wildlife passage that would go under Old Route 66 at the base of the drainage transecting the Hawkwatch property, but it will only commit funding if there are assurances that the adjacent land is permanently conserved.

“Acquisition and permanent protection of the Hawkwatch property is a critical step toward creating a viable wildlife corridor between the Sandia Wilderness and the Manzano Mountains. The Sandias are becoming increasingly isolated because of habitat fragmentation from rapid development along the I-40 corridor through Tijeras Canyon,” says Kurt Menke of the Tijeras Canyon Safe Passage Coalition.

The cost of the area is estimated to be somewhere between \$600,000 and \$650,000. Heinrich is excited that a purchase of the property 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 part of the scenic view-shed along the I-40 corridor through Tijeras Canyon.

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“I’m very excited by this opportunity to step in and protect a vulnerable piece of land that is not only valuable to the residents of Albuquerque, but also to the wildlife that make Albuquerque’s surrounding open space such a treasure,” said Heinrich.

See attached map and photo. For further information, please contact Councilor Martin Heinrich at 259-8155 / TTY 768-2474.

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