

Securing a Family Legacy

A Tribute to Wess Wells (April 11, 1949 — July 1, 2020)

By Ron Troy, Southern New Mexico Program Manager

New Mexico lost a good man this year. Sadly, Wess Wells passed away this summer, but not before ensuring that the Wells Ranch would remain in the family with the help of a conservation easement.

I first met Wess Wells over a steak lunch in Socorro, NM. He and his cousin Jeff Wells were dressed meticulously, touting their kerchiefs, boots and hats and could have just as well been headed for their Sunday rituals. Both were lean, weathered and carved by the arid Chihuahuan grasslands that provided their livelihood. Though tough country, their love of land was steadfast – the land, the cattle, and working side by side from a young age is what really made them stand proud.

Wess had heard through the grapevine that several area ranchers were placing conservation easements on their ranches in an effort to protect them from future subdivision and development. He went to NMLC's website that night and scrutinized our webpages like he would a freshly killed calf. I think by the end of that evening, Wess knew as much about our staff, operations and conservation easements as I did myself.

Wess recognized immediately the advantages for his family of placing a conservation easement on his ranch, and he wanted it done quick. What I didn't know at the time is that Wess had been diagnosed with cancer and had been living on borrowed time for a few years. Wess was a visionary, a successful rancher and businessman, and when he decided to get something done, that is exactly what he did.

Wess saw how the cash benefits of a conservation easement could help him reduce the price of the ranch enough to sell it to his cousin Jeff Wells at an affordable price. He realized how

the cash benefits a conservation easement could provide, along with the proceeds from the ranch sale to Jeff, would help provide for his other family members upon his death. He also saw that he could reduce the estate tax that his heirs would be burdened with upon his death by placing the ranch under a conservation easement. And, his heirs could further offset the capital gain generated from the sale of the ranch with the federal and state tax benefits associated with his donation of the uncompensated portion of the conservation easement value.

Wess granted NMLC a 4,680-acre conservation easement across one of his two family ranches in June 2020. Unfortunately, a few weeks later, Wess passed away, but with his legacy secured.

What I will remember most about Wess is how positive and appreciative he always was. Right to the end, Wess would tell you how good life was and how thankful he was for even the small things a person would do for him. When I think of Wess, I think of gratitude and how nice it was to know him, even for a short time. I am thankful for his example, to always see the glass half-full or even that we have a glass at all, and how appreciative we should be of all the people around us and the little, thoughtful things they provide us with. Hopefully Wess is resting a bit more peacefully knowing his family legacy will endure. **Thank you Wess!**



Left: Wess Wells. Below, back row, from left: John & Tami Sue Blaschke (Wess' oldest daughter); T'Layna Mae Wells (Wess' youngest daughter); Dianne Wells (Wess' Wife); Wess Wells. Front center: Braxton Blaschke (Wess' only grandson).

