

September 22, 2022

*Dear Friends, Supporters and  
Compadres in Conservation:*



As we approach our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the New Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC), I have some exciting as well as some bittersweet news to share. First, I am pleased to report that – with 655,000 acres of high conservation value land permanently protected across New Mexico and southeast Arizona - we are nearly two-thirds of the way to the ambitious 25-year goal that we set for ourselves as part of our first strategic planning session back in 2005 when I first took over the helm of what was then just a fledging land conservation organization. I am also excited to project that, with all the project work currently in the queue, we will likely reach that one-million-acre goal even before the end of that 25-year period, making our own small but hopefully meaningful contribution to the more recently established, state and national “30 x 30” goals of protecting, conserving and/or restoring 30% of our land and water by 2030.

In short, I am incredibly proud of what this small organization has been able to accomplish in such a short span of time. None of this work would have been possible without the continuous and persistent efforts of a dedicated and capable staff and Board, along with the support of willing and committed landowners, good partners and generous supporters of our mission and work.

Notwithstanding, there is still much to be done, but after what will be 19 total years at the conservancy, I will not be the person leading NMLC into the next chapter of its organizational development. After much reflection over the past year, I have made the difficult decision that, as of the end of March 2022, I intend to step down as the Executive Director to pursue a new chapter in my own life. Having the opportunity to lead the growth and development of this organization – and to work with such a remarkable group of people on such a worthy mission – has been an incredibly rewarding experience and one to which I have dedicated over half of my professional life. Therefore, it was not a decision that I made lightly and, as my end date now rapidly approaches, I realize that it will not be easy to walk away from the organization and the work when that time finally comes.

But change is inevitable, and I want all of our landowners, partners and supporters to rest assured that the organization is in a good position for the next chosen director to step in and lead the organization forward. I am confident in saying this because, in addition to our land conservation goal, one of the other primary goals that we set years ago and have strived to achieve is a capacity goal – to build a solid, well-respected, financially viable and sustainable land conservation organization that would be able continue its mission and appropriately monitor, steward and legally defend the lands it has helped conserve well into the

future. To that end, over the past 20 years, we have developed strategic plans, a body of organizational policies/procedures and received back-to-back accreditations from our national Land Trust Alliance. We have also raised and set aside over \$1 million to adequately steward our easement portfolio and secured over \$3 million in additional cash and non-cash assets. Moreover, to pave the way to a successful leadership transition, we have developed and now intend to follow our succession plan which lays out an Executive recruitment process that involves organizing a search committee, contracting a search firm and undertaking a national search. The Board is fully committed to this process, and I am confident that they will ultimately succeed in finding and recruiting the right person to replace me.

As I wrap up my work at NMLC over the next 6 months, I am grateful to the Board for the confidence and trust they have placed in me, and to our capable staff for enabling us to achieve all that we have collectively managed to accomplish over the past 20 years. I am fortunate that the Board afforded me the flexibility to do many things the way I saw fit, pursue interesting opportunities and take some risks, but there is obviously more than one way to run a successful organization and accomplish a mission. Over the last two decades, much has changed in New Mexico and the Southwest, the country and the larger natural environment upon which we all depend in terms of threats, challenges, trends and opportunities. My departure should not be seen as a loss or setback for the organization, but, rather, as an opportunity for new strategic thinking, approaches and creativity.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank everyone who has been part of my experience at NMLC. It has been an amazing journey and as I prepare to ride off into the sunset (hopefully toward new pastures), it is important to remember that the sun always rises and there will be a new dawn for NMLC. At a distance, I look forward to watching the organization evolve and seeing what it can do over the next 20 years. For those of you who have supported us up to this point, I hope you will stay tuned for the next chapter and continue your support of the organization's ongoing efforts to conserve land with the goal of preserving New Mexico's unique and incredible natural and cultural heritage.

Gratefully,

*Scott Wilber*

