

For land trust, another successful year of conserving land

Another year is nearly done, and the holiday season is upon us. And the hardworking staff at Taos Land Trust has had a busy one, as always.

Look for a new Taos Land Trust sign soon on the farmland across from the Arroyo Seco post office on the road to Taos Ski Valley. This project, being signed and finalized as I write, is the final phase of a conservation easement conserving 65 acres that stretch from the Ski Valley Road to Hondo-Seco Road. This landowner prefers to remain anonymous, but she has been dedicated to working with the land trust since 2000 to retire most of her development rights, one parcel at a time.

This year we also completed the Sunset Park conservation easement near the Taos Public Library in the heart of Taos. This 10-acre park, about the size of Kit Carson Park, is privately owned, but open to

the public for walking, picnicking, and enjoying beautiful views of Taos Mountain.

We officially opened another 23-acre public park at the Gates of Valdez, accessible from the Rim Road in Des Montes. Río Hondo Park includes a short but wild stretch of the Río Hondo — one of only a few sections open to the public between the Carson National Forest boundary and lower stretch near the Río Grande. This property was donated to Taos Land Trust in 1997, and we finally worked out the administrative details to be able to open it to the public for fishing, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, painting, or just relaxing and enjoying a gorgeous place (most access is available

FOR THE LAND



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any time during daylight hours; contact our office to unlock the gate for equestrian access).

In a groundbreaking partnership with the Taos Soil and Water Conservation District, funded by the State of New Mexico, we are very near completion of a project in Arroyo Hondo to permanently conserve a small

irrigated pasture, along with a pond, wetlands and riparian habitat along the Río Hondo. The lush and scenic parcel attracts plenty of wildlife and migratory birds, as well as supporting a small herd of cattle.

In the village of Velarde we are almost finished with another project that will conserve a parcel that includes a small commercial orchard and endangered species habitat in the thick riparian bosque

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along the Río Grande.

Like all our conservation easements, these properties will never be developed, and Taos Land Trust has a legal obligation to enforce those agreements in perpetuity ... forever.

Elsewhere, we are making good progress on an exciting 700-acre easement near Black Lake, which is some of the highest-quality wildlife habitat on private property in that area. We are in preliminary discussions with landowners as far west as Regina and north on the Colorado border near Amalia about projects that could each protect between 500 and 1,000 acres of ranchland and wildlife habitat.

You may have noticed new Taos Land Trust signs on the Ambrose Pasture just north of Overland Ranch. We completed that project in 2008 but just now got around to putting up the signs. Now you know that that 38 acres — like the 45-acre Attiyeh Pasture next door — will never be developed.

As icing on the cake, the Land Trust Alliance released its five-year census of national land conservation for the period between 2005 and 2010, and it is all good news:

■ 10 million acres across the country were permanently conserved by land trusts, bringing the total to over 47 million acres — an area over twice the size of all national

parks in the contiguous US.

■ In New Mexico, with only eight active land trusts, we conserved over 621,000 acres, a 30 percent increase.

■ New Mexico ranks seventh in the nation for total acres conserved.

■ Taos Land Trust completed 18 new easements during that period — over one third of the total of 50 completed since our founding in 1988.

Whew! We have had a busy year, a busy five years, and with your help we can continue this important work for the next five years and beyond.

For now, from the board and staff of the Taos Land Trust, we wish you a happy holiday season and a prosperous New Year.

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