

# The landscape we love

This is the first of what will be a monthly column in *The Taos News* discussing land and conservation. Over the coming months, I will talk about all kinds of issues related to the open lands we see off in the distance every day — the horizon of wild mountains and mesas stretching for miles — but also the cultural landscape of rural villages and acequia-irrigated farms that define our unique corner of the world.

And I will explain in excruciating (but important) detail the ins and outs of conservation easements and tax benefits and other approaches to protecting that landscape.

A couple of points to make now, to clear up persistent misunderstandings: A conservation easement does not mean the landowner gives up ownership or has to provide public access. And, with recent changes in state law, tax benefits are accessible to all landowners at every income level ... but more about all that later.

Today, I just want to talk about the land and why we do the work we do at Taos Land Trust to protect it.

The land is important to us in so many ways. We can't underestimate the power of the open landscape that surrounds us, that seeps into our consciousness and reassures or inspires or somehow keeps us hopeful and healthy each and every day.

It's easy for us here in Taos to slip out for a hike or a bike ride, go fishing after work, swim or float in the Río Grande.

For those who make a living on the land farming or ranching, you know it intimately because it's under your fingernails and part of who you are. A rancher friend, Andie Sánchez, once told me, "The more you work the land, the more you get to love it, because your heart is in your land."

I often think about all those

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## LOVE THE LAND

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people living in crowded, urban, steel-and-concrete environments and realize how lucky we are here to have the land.

The land also produces our food, the resources we need to survive, habitat for wildlife, the oxygen we breathe. And, in these days of climate change, the natural vegetation helps absorb all that excess carbon.

Around here, the land is part of our identity, it defines who we are. The land-based cultures of Northern New Mexico would not be what we see today, would not have those centuries of rooted local knowledge and ecological wisdom we venerate, without the land.

My family has Indo-Hispano roots in this landscape that go back more than 400 years. Taos Pueblo and other American Indian communities have been part of this landscape for much longer. And even if you just arrived with your U-Haul from somewhere else, the land takes hold of you.

Conservation easements and other legal and technical approaches are just tools to help us protect that land that inspires us, sustains us, gives us roots and identity.

But it's really about love for the land.

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