

ERNIE ATENCIO

Taos Land Trust preserves our *Tierra Sagrada*

A friend of mine describes where he grew up in the Río Grande Valley — the verdant bosque along the river filled with birds and wildlife, the acequias and fields, the endless open space — as his *Tierra Sagrada*, Sacred Land. This is the place that taught him important life lessons and to care for the natural world, he says, and how to be a good and compassionate person. Anything that can create and transform people in that way is truly sacred.

Northern New Mexico is an extraordinary landscape unlike any place on the planet, in part because of an old and intimate relationship between land and people. A thousand years of Pueblo Indian culture and 400 years of rooted Indo-Hispano presence are imprinted on the land in ancient irrigation systems, agricultural villages and sacred sites. It's both a natural and cultural landscape.

More recently, others have added layers: Mountain men and adventurers, with a vast western landscape to choose from, were so enchanted with this area that many of them stayed; A hundred years ago, a community of artists and writers discovered the unique beauty and pure light of Northern New Mexico that has since become the muse for generations of creative people; Another wave of long-haired, free-spirited immigrants looking to drop out and reconnect with the land discovered the magic of this region in the '60s and '70s. And the tourists keep coming.

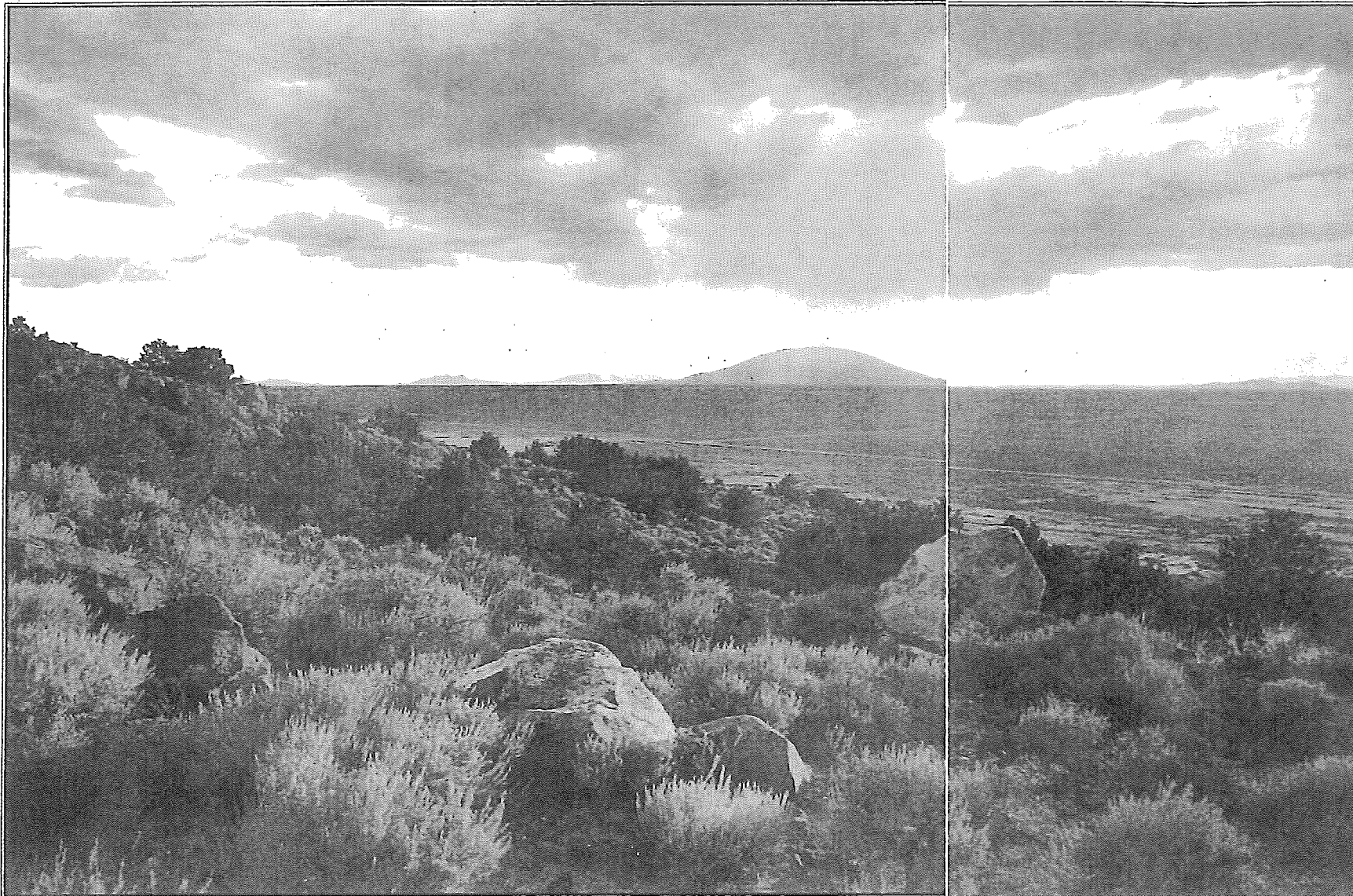
Since its founding in 1988, Taos Land Trust has been working to preserve that landscape, our shared *Tierra Sagrada*, throughout Northern New Mexico. The traditional land-based cultures stewarded the land and water for centuries. Now we have the opportunity to continue that legacy and conserve the very best qualities of this sacred landscape for many generations to come.

Over the years, the land trust has worked with dozens of landowners to create voluntary conservation easements that permanently protect family lands and keep them open and intact from one generation to the next. In a very fruitful partnership with the Trust for Public Land, Taos Land Trust was instrumental in the federal purchase and protection of the Taos Valley Overlook and Ute Mountain, both of which are now owned by you, the public. Overall, these projects have permanently protected more than 24,000 acres of wildland habitat, ranchlands, irrigated farms and beautiful open landscapes across six counties in Northern New Mexico.

The organization is also involved in a one-of-a-kind collaboration with the Taos County Economic Development Corporation and the Taos Valley Acequia Association called *De la Tierra a la Cosecha* (From Earth to Harvest), promoting profitable family farming and ranching and local foods, which in turn helps keep people working the land and keeps the land open and undeveloped. The staff and board of the land trust keep their fingers in every long-range land conservation planning activity going on anywhere in the region.

Taos Land Trust uses a lot of modern legal and technical approaches, but those are just the tools that work in this day and age to help protect what's important to us. It's really all about *Tierra Sagrada* — Sacred Land — that which sustains us, gives us roots and identity and gives us hope.

Ernie Atencio is an anthropologist, writer, and executive director of the Taos Land Trust. Taos Land Trust conserves open, productive and natural lands for the benefit of the community and culture of Northern New Mexico. For more information visit taoslandtrust.org.



Ute Mountain

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