

# Land trust: Easement protects orchard, wetlands

The Taos Land Trust has announced the creation of a new conservation easement in Velarde, where it will protect more than 8.5 acres of orchard and Río Grande bosque.

The new easement was finalized Dec. 27, when fruit grower Eddie Velarde and Land Trust President Chris Smith signed the documents.

“The land, which lies within the Sebastian Martin Land Grant, has been continuously irrigated and farmed for over 400 years,” a Land Trust release states. “Mr. Velarde and his family have grown prize-winning apples, peaches, pears, apricots and other fruit on this land since the 1970s.”

Conservation easements allow landowners to maintain ownership of parcels of land while giving up development rights, effectively protecting lands in perpetuity, even if ownership changes. Landowners can receive tax breaks for creating such easements.

According to information from the Taos Land Trust, the Velarde orchard comprises about 2,700 fruit trees, and the easement also protects a stretch of woodlands and wetlands along the Río Grande. Rare birds, including the endangered Southwestern willow flycatcher, are known to nest in the area.

“This is a happy and historic day for me,” Eddie Velarde is quoted as saying during the signing of the easement. “Our family has cared for this land for generations. Now I know it will remain productive farmland and a safe home for wildlife forever.”

Landowners interested in creating conservation easements can contact the Taos Land Trust at (575) 751-3138 or through its website, [taoslandtrust.org](http://taoslandtrust.org).

—Staff Report



Photo courtesy Taos Land Trust

The conservation easement at the Velarde orchard also protects a stretch of woodlands and wetlands along the Río Grande.