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Fostering a land legacy for future generations

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“I am protecting these acres as a gift to our ancestors, remembering and appreciat-ing all the hard work they put into this land,” said Crestina Trujillo Armstrong when she and her brother, José, put their 38-acre ranch in San Cristòbal into a conservation easement with the Taos Land Trust.

Taos Land Trust continues to honor ancestors and our children by fostering a legacy of open and productive land throughout Northern New Mexico.

The landscape we protect is both natural and cultural, shaped by generations of care-ful stewardship and sustaining the biodiversity and cultural diversity of our region for a thousand years. It’s the heart of the distinctive beauty and the cultural traditions that make Northern New Mexico the vibrant and powerful place that it is.

Whether your ancestors have been here 1,000 years, 400 years or you just arrived two weeks ago, our shared landscape of open, productive and beautiful land is one of our most important assets and we all have a stake in protect-ing it.

Founded in 1988, Taos Land Trust is the only organiza-tion in Taos and neighboring counties that is exclusivelydedicated topermanent land conser-vation. Our mission is to conserve land for the benefit of the people, communities and natural systems of the Taos area.

That includesland for wild-life, growing food, recreating and sheer beauty — it’s all interconnect-ed and it’s all important.

To fulfill our mission, we work with landowners to pro-tect their family lands through permanent conservation ease-ments, we partner with other organizations to purchase and preserve for the public places like the Taos Valley Overlook and Ute Mountain.

We’re engaged in innovative collaborations with other groups and we stay involved in long-range planning activi-ties that affect the future of our the land. Through these efforts we have been responsible for permanently protecting more than 23,000 acres of wildlife habitat, productive ranch land and farms, riparian areas and inspiring open lands.

Conservation easements are very flexible and effective toolsfor permanentland protec-tion that can also provide significant tax benefits.

Conservation easements allow land-owners to decide how their land will be cared for in the future by voluntarily retiring certain development rights, but they still own the land and are not required to provide public access. They can continue to actively manage for farming, ranching or sustainable forestry, can reserve limited home sites for kids and grandchildren, can sell it or pass it on to heirs, but the protection stays with the land forever no matter who owns it.

As one example, Abenicio Romero and his late wife, Rebeca, had seen plenty of change in Taos during their 80- some years, but wanted at least one place stay the same. Their 15-acre property in Cañon was once surrounded by open land, says Mr. Romero.

“We used to grow corn, pinto beans, we grazed cattle, and the Acequia Madre del Pueblo flows through the middle.”

Now a conservation easement protects that acreage, forever preserving an important part of the rural character of Taos, a haven of open space and habitat and agricultural potential in the middle of our rapidly developing community.

This easement also gives Mr.

Romero the peace of mind that the land will pass to his heirs intact with fewer worries about estate taxes.

We’ve worked with dozens of landowners over the years to complete conservation easements, but the very first one was on the property of the late, great Taos author Frank Waters and his wife, Barbara.

On completing the conservation easement, Waters commented on the notion of land conservation, “We are part of the living earth itself. Let us preserve it.”

Yes, let us preserve it. But so far we are losing the race.

According to a recent report from the national Land Trust Alliance, each year about two million acres of land across the country go under to development. The pace of permanent land conservation is accelerating but still lagging behind, with an average of only 750,000 acres a year protected by conservation easements.

New Mexico, however, ranks among the top 10 states in terms of total acres conserved during the past five years.

Look around at all the “for sale” signs on beautiful open lots, and it’s obvious that there is still much to do, but Taos and Northern New Mexico should be proud to be part of this growing conservation movement that is making a real and lasting difference in the world.

For more information about Taos Land Trust, conservation easements, other land conservation projects

or how you can help, contact (505) 751-3138 or info@taoslandtrust.org, or visit

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