

# RIO GRANDE AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST

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# Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust

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## RGALT EARNS NATIONAL ACCREDITATION

The Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (RGALT) is pleased to announce it has achieved accreditation – a mark of honor in land conservation. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission awarded accreditation, signifying its confidence that RGALT lands will be protected forever.

Accredited land trusts across the country have permanently conserved more than 15 million acres of farms, forests and natural areas that are vital to healthy, vibrant communities.

“The recent RGALT accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance is an enormous step; as a small organization, with relatively few resources, RGALT has made outsized accomplishments on par with those of much larger land trusts,” said John Leeper, RGALT board treasurer. “The accreditation is recognition of this amazing track record of agricultural land preservation,” Leeper added. Board secretary, Bill Hume, stated, “I am elated at our accreditation success. It is my hope that the accreditation will increase our capacity to preserve even more of the rich natural and agricultural environment that makes our state such a great place to live.”

“It is exciting to recognize RGALT with this distinction,” said Tammara



RGALT Conservation Easements protect agricultural land and wildlife habitat along the Rio Grande

Van Ryn, executive director of the Commission. “Together, accredited land trusts stand united behind strong national standards ensuring the places people love will be conserved forever. In all, over 75 percent of private lands conserved by land trusts are now held by an accredited land trust.”

The process to earn accreditation is rigorous and strengthens land trusts with systems that help landowners and communities achieve their goals. RGALT executive director, Cecilia Rosacker said, “Our work uses legally

binding conservation easements and is subject to IRS scrutiny—which is not something to be taken lightly. For me, accreditation was great because it allowed my board to gain a better understanding of the depth and detail that goes into our conservation easement projects that protect important conservation lands forever.” Hume added, “The process obliged us to mature our group from a kitchen table operation to a formal, structured organization which improved our policies and procedures, organized records, and the planning structure for future initiatives.” More information about land trust accreditation can be found at [www.landtrustaccreditation.org](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org).



## RGALT News Preview

- National accreditation achieved!
- 6 new CEs protecting 590 acres!
- Save the Date for 2016 Harvest Dinner!

## SAVE THE DATE! 2016 HARVEST DINNER



RGALT Harvest Dinner photos courtesy of Wes Naman

**Sunday, September 11, 2016**

Stay up to date by visiting [www.rgalt.org](http://www.rgalt.org) and signing up for our e-newsletter!



# 6 NEW CONSERVATION EASEMENTS IN 2016!

According to RGALT Executive Director, Cecilia Rosacker, it was 4 years ago that the first NAWCA project conversations began. Johnny Pack contacted RGALT; he was interested in protecting his riparian land 3 miles north of Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Reserve in Socorro County. Johnny worked with RGALT to educate and encourage his adjoining 4 neighbors to jump on board in protecting their land forever. RGALT was soon working on 5 conservation easement on their properties--a combined 546 acres to be protected.

These conservation minded landowners had already been working on improving their properties. Since 2003, the landowners began work with the Socorro Soil and Water Conservation District (SSWCD) to restore and enhance the habitat of the property. SSWCD received state and federal funds to eradicate the invasive tamarisk (salt cedar.) They then received federal funding for follow-up treatment of the invasive vegetation and for native habitat plantings, such as Goodding's and seep willow, New Mexico olive, wolfberry, and skunkbush sumac shrubs. Their lands had been managed as a larger parcel in regard to invasive species eradication and habitat restoration.

With restoration in place it seemed only logical the next step was protecting their properties, ensuring the benefit of wildlife, riparian, and reduce wildfires.

These privately owned riparian properties fit the scope of North American Wetlands Conservation Easement funding, the protection of wetlands and riparian lands. RGALT worked with their numerous partners to put together a NAWCA Standard grant proposal, and it was 2 years later we had the grant funding.

The natural riparian processes maintain quality roosting, nesting, and feeding habitat for thousands of migratory birds along the Rio Grande flyway. The river and floodplain along the CEs also support two endangered species: the Southwestern willow flycatcher and the Rio Grande silvery minnow.

The CEs contribute to the ecological viability of the Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge located downstream, and the Bureau of Land Management "Quebrada's Scenic Byway" directly to the east.

Altogether, RGALT holds almost 1,000 acres under conservation easement in this immediate area, contributing to a large landscape protection that benefits the migratory bird, other wildlife corridors and Rio Grande riparian. Protected forever, it also will contribute to the scenic vistas and open space along one of our greatest heritage centers, the Rio Grande, for generations to come.

RGALT also requested NAWCA funding for a 6th CE in Contreras, Socorro County. The La Joya Farms CE is 44 irrigated acres, protecting the farmland and water rights. The La Joya Farms is 350 acres and includes 2 previous RGALT CEs (103 acres) adjacent to the new CE. It is scenic open space consisting of irrigated farmland and riparian wildlife habitat directly adjacent to Rio Grande.

The CE is surrounded by USFWS-Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge and is across the river from La Joya and Bernardo Waterfowl Management Areas, both of which are part of the Ladd S. Gordon Waterbird Complex. Its protection contributes to the viability of the surrounding refuges and wildlife areas.

RGALT will continue landscape conservation work in the middle Rio Grande with a second round of NAWCA grant funding for even more CEs in the area in the coming year.



Scenic view from a landowner's conservation easement land



Landowners consider reintroduction of Pecos Sunflower

# RGALT AWARDED NATIONAL FISH & WILDLIFE GRANT

RGALT received a USFWS - National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant (\$80K over two years). The grant will provide capacity funds for RGALT and their partner Rio Grande Return (RGR) to continue their efforts to protect and restore the Middle Rio Grande (MRG) corridor. The funding provides for outreach to private landowners along the MRG. The project focus area stretches 80 river miles in Socorro and Sierra Counties. This part of the Middle Rio Grande is unique in that riparian habitat and stream function most resembles historic conditions and it contains one of the highest concentrations of private lands within the Rio Grande's active floodplain. Additionally, within these particular 80 miles of Rio Grande is a Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) program priority area for southwestern willow flycatcher; protection and restoration of its remaining wetlands is a national priority.

Over the past several years, RGALT, RGR and numerous other partners have worked to successfully protect and enhance over 8650 acres of wetland and associated upland habitat along the Rio Grande. RGALT provides private landowners the option to protect their private lands forever through the use of conservation easements (CEs). The next step is bringing in partners to work with landowners to enhance and restore the conservation values particular to each property. RGR is a non-profit organization devoted to the restoration and protection of the Rio Grande through the promotion of sustainable and healthy relationships between the wildlife and the human communities it supports.

The success in developing these public/private partnerships within the Middle Rio Grande (MRG) demonstrates a model for a state-wide collaborative program to protect and enhance agriculture and wildlife habitat on public and private lands.



CE landowners protect wetlands in the Middle Rio Grande corridor



Looking forward to seeing you at the Harvest Dinner in September!



Until next time, RGALT friends!