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2017 HARVEST DINNER TICKETS ON SALE NOW

20th ANNIVERSARY
RIO GRANDE AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST
 annual
harvest DINNER



HISTORIC GUTIERREZ HUBBELL HOUSE
South Valley Albuquerque
 Enjoy LIVE MUSIC • SILENT & LIVE AUCTIONS
 FARE INCLUDES LOCAL MEATS, VEGETABLES, FRUITS, DAIRY AND SPIRITS
SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 17, 2017
4pm to Starlight

JOIN US AT THE 2017 HARVEST DINNER!

Help us celebrate two decades and kick off our next twenty years of conservation in the Middle Rio Grande Valley!

Guests will enjoy a meal of local fruits, vegetables, meats and spirits prepared by the chefs of Seasons, Savoy, and Zinc Wine Bar and Bistro. Enjoy live music, a silent and live auction, and the company of our diverse supporters.

Early bird tickets are on sale now on our website, www.rgalt.org.

Tickets are \$125/ticket or two tickets for \$225. Sponsorships are also available for interested individuals or organizations.

CONSERVATION HEROES: THE GONZALES'

Ernest Gonzales adored the section of the Rio Grande that passes through what used to be his 46-acre piece of property in Socorro County, New Mexico. Located on the east side of the Rio Grande floodplain just outside of San Antonio, New Mexico, this land provided him with a weekend sanctuary where he found refuge in the sights and sounds of bald eagles, northern flickers, songbirds, Rio Grande turkeys, and the occasional mule deer moving through the towering cottonwood-willow forest.

Over the course of his life, Ernest watched the bosque transformed by the infiltration of salt cedar (Tamarisk) and Russian olive, two highly invasive species in the middle Rio Grande valley of New Mexico. Gradually, the vegetation overtook the open understory of the forest, resulting in a dense, impassable jungle of alien plant species. As he aged, he dreamt of restoring this section of the river to its prior state: a land characterized by native plants like Goodding's willow, coyote willow and cottonwood and shrubs and

grasses like alkali sacaton, blue gramma, four-wing saltbrush, wolfberry and New Mexico olive.

In 1998, Ernest passed away at the age of 73, leaving behind his land and the dreams he had for it to his wife Gertrude and their five children, Christina, Eva, Henry, Salomon and Tommy. When I met with Salomon and Christina in early 2017 — two of Ernest and Gertrude's now-grown children — they talked about how visiting the land provides a spiritual connection to their father and his legacy. "We remember coming down here when we were little and watching how much our dad loved spending time on this land. Once we all had families, some of us stayed in the area and some of us moved away. Really, we all stopped coming down as much. After our father died, we realized that coming out to this land provided



Salomon and Christina Gonzales visit their land in Socorro, Spring 2017

a spiritual connection to our father. We also realized we wanted to carry forward his legacy and his dreams of conserving the Rio Grande bosque."

EMBARKING ON COUNTY CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM

Bernalillo County is the home of NM's largest metropolitan area. Albuquerque is a unique city with traditional farming communities dating back as far as the 1700's. Agricultural lands on the urban fringe along the Rio Grande floodplain provide the potential for food production and habitat connectivity for wildlife passing through the urban landscape. With almost half of NM's population living in Bernalillo County, these farming lands are at risk of being lost due to urban expansion. Pressures to sell agricultural lands to development or sever water rights from the property threaten the livelihoods of plants, wildlife, and people living in the area.

In response to these challenges, RGALT is excited to announce our new program, the Bernalillo County Conservation Easement Project. RGALT will work in partnership with the Bernalillo County Parks and Open Space Division on this program, a voluntary, incentive-based effort that will provide private landowners with technical and financial assistance to protect agricultural lands, habitat and open spaces in the county. Lands with conservation easements can also provide more affordable land access to young and new farmers. Forever protecting these important lands will result in a high quality of life for county residents, provide community development and empowerment,

support species diversity, protect NM's agricultural heritage and the local food economy, and promote social, ecological and economic resilience.



An agricultural field thrives in Socorro County

CONSERVATION HEROES: THE GONZALES' (CONTINUED)

The siblings began organizing family workdays with their children, nieces and nephews, and in-laws in 2007. "When we first started coming out here, the salt cedar was so dense you basically had to crawl through it. We hardly recognized the property. At first, we had a goal of simply cutting a narrow path all the way down to the river along the fenceline. We'd call everybody down here for a weekend, tell them to meet us in the morning, and then we'd work 8, 9, sometimes 10 hours a day chopping down those trees one by one. For a while, it felt like we were not getting anywhere," they recall. In spite of feeling like they were hardly making progress, the family persisted and gradually fell into a collaborative, efficient rhythm. One person would chop down a Tamarisk tree, another person would spray the herbicide that prevents the trees from re-sprouting, and the young nieces and nephews would scurry through the brush, playing hide and seek as their parents methodically moved west towards the river.

During this time, Christina and Salomon learned about how the landowners of the adjacent property, Matthew and Stephanie Mitchell, had been able to conserve their portion of the Rio Grande bosque with support from the Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (RGALT) and the Save Our Bosque Task Force (SOBTF). The Gonzales' knew of the Save Our Bosque Task Force, an organization that could help them with wildlife habitat restoration, through Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, a partner agency in the area. The Mitchell's introduced the Gonzales' to the Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (RGALT), an organization that could work with them to protect their property from future development. The family met with the two organizations and shortly thereafter, RGALT acquired grant funding through the North America Wetland Conservations Act (NAWCA) to help protect the Gonzales' 46-acre piece of property. Additional funding for habitat enhancement was received through the State of New Mexico's Land and Water Conservation Fund. In 2008, RGALT helped the Gonzales' establish a conservation easement on the land, which protects the property in perpetuity from the risk of development and/or the loss of water rights. Afterwards, restoration work continued with funding from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. This collaboration between RGALT, SOBTF, and the Gonzales family preserved habitat for migratory bird species, fostered the regrowth of grassland habitat and native trees, mitigated the fire risk associated with dense patches of salt cedar, and added one more section of critically important habitat connectivity to the Rio Grande corridor.

While Salomon and Christina, their brothers, sisters, and in-laws do not visit the property as often as their father once did, they are proud of the progress they have made since their father's death in 1998. The



Site of salt cedar removal on the Gonzales' property

Gonzales' continue to monitor the property and take proactive actions to ensure that prior restoration efforts remain resilient to threats like drought, wildfire, and the reestablishment of invasive vegetation. Salomon regularly travels from his home in El Paso to San Antonio, New Mexico in order to monitor vegetation on the land. The family occasionally gathers for picnics under the bosque canopy and from time to time, family members can also be found pitching a tent for an overnight stay alongside the river, reveling in the same quietude that Ernest cherished while he was still alive.

Today, their upland habitat adjacent to Bosquecito Road

is beginning to be covered with native saltbrush and alkali sacaton, wonderful quail habitat. Mature cottonwoods tower throughout the bosque, and plantings of coyote willow, Goodding's willow, New Mexico olive and other shrubs are thriving with new room to breathe after the removal of salt cedar and Russian olive. Meanwhile, spring overbank flows of the Rio Grande are evident this year in the muddy walkways under the cottonwood canopy, a promising sign that the Gonzales' efforts to restore the bosque will have the long-term positive benefits like the reestablishment of native vegetation, the health of wildlife, and floral and faunal biodiversity. The Gonzales' experiences tell us that conservation in the Middle Rio Grande wears many hats. It is not just about protecting the land, it is also about maintaining a spiritual connection with a loved one.



Vista of the Magdalena Mountains as you approach the Gonzales'

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS IN THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE

RGALT AND PARTNERS RECOMMENDED FOR \$1 MILLION GRANT

RGALT is thrilled to announce that the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission has recommended \$1 million in funding to the Rio Grande Corridor New Mexico-North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) partners, pending federal obligation of 2017 USFWS-NAWCA funding. Over the last 5 years, RGALT has collaborated with more than 50 partners in the Middle Rio Grande Valley to secure three \$1 million grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-NAWCA Standard Grant Program. These funds, which were leveraged by an additional \$7.6 million in non-federal match contributions, have been used to protect, enhance, and restore 5,500 acres of critically important riparian and wetland habitat and farm land for wildlife and people in New Mexico. The 2017 funding will be used to implement land protection, natural habitat restoration, and enhancement in the Middle Rio Grande. This project illustrates how conservation partnerships can be used to protect agriculture, natural habitat, and outdoor recreational opportunities that cross cultural, jurisdictional, and geographic boundaries.



Morning along the Middle Rio Grande

PARTNERS TAKE A TOUR OF RGALT'S CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Cecilia Rosacker, RGALT's Director, led managers of the NM USFWS-Partners Program and five other USFWS employees on a tour of La Joya Farms conservation easements. On the tour, Rosacker discussed RGALT's team approach to conservation. RGALT lays the ground work to protect the land then works with the landowners and partners to develop a conservation plan for the property. Then, RGALT's partners such as the USFWS implement natural habitat restoration/enhancement on the properties. Land protection is a critical component of the conservation effort because these privately owned lands provide wildlife corridors between the wildlife refuges along the Rio Grande. Three of RGALT's conservation easement properties are currently under consideration for wildlife enhancement projects through the USFWS-Partners Program.



Partners for Wildlife Program managers and staff visit La Joya Farms conservation easement in Socorro County.

RGALT PARTICIPATES IN SYNERGY BUILDING WORKSHOP WITH SAVE OUR BOSQUE TASK FORCE

In June, RGALT participated in a synergy-building workshop with other conservation non-profits working in Socorro County, New Mexico. At the half-day retreat each non-profit briefed the group on their current work in the area and engaged in dialogues about how conservation programs in the Middle Rio Grande Valley could be made more effective through better inter-organizational communication and collaboration. We look forward to watching this conservation alliance grow and to finding innovative ways that we can leverage our areas of expertise in order to positively impact our Middle Rio Grande community and ecosystem.



Cecilia Rosacker and Matt Mitchell represent RGALT at the workshop