

PO Box 40043, Albuquerque, NM 87196

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Cecilia Rosacker, Polvadera

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

*President* - Sarah Wentzel-Fisher, Albuquerque

*Secretary* - Bill Hume, Albuquerque

*Treasurer* - John Leeper, Socorro

**Members**

Willy Carleton, Albuquerque

Cassandra D'Antonio, Albuquerque

Ron Thomas, Pueblito

John Utton, Santa Fe

**CONSULTANTS**

Tiffany Terry, Communications

Gina DellaRusso, Ecologist

Matthew McQueen, Attorney

Alan Hamilton, NM Wetlands Coordinator

[www.rgalt.org](http://www.rgalt.org) | 505-270-4421

Non-Profit Org.  
 US Postage  
**PAID**  
 Albuquerque NM  
 Permit No. 1893

**CELEBRATING WITH 2016 HARVEST DINNER**

Dear Friends,

Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust's is pleased to invite you join us in celebrating our recent successes and the NM harvest at our 2016 Harvest Dinner – Sunday, September 11th at the historic Guitierrez Hubbell House in the South Valley – 4pm to starlight. Enjoy a sumptuous feast of local foods and libations prepared by Albuquerque's finest chefs – Chef Chris Pope of Zinc, Chef Myles Lucero of Seasons, and Chef Frans Dinkelmann. A lively auction of local goods will spice up the evening.

We are thrilled to celebrate our 2016 accomplishments – Land Trust Alliance accreditation and 5 conservation easements protecting 500 acres of Rio Grande riparian habitat and farmland!

RGALT's annual Harvest Dinner is a landmark celebration that allows us to bring together our friends – conservation partners, landowners, and community supporters to embrace and honor New Mexico's local harvest. It is our intention to create an event in a beautiful, historic

setting that captures New Mexico's cultural history and showcases the products of local farmers, local chefs, and other artisanal food and alcohol producers in our community. The historic Guitierrez-Hubbell House, a Bernalillo County Open Space, is the perfect venue!

All proceeds from our fundraising dinner event (tickets, sponsorships and auction proceeds) will go toward capacity funds to further our mission to protect the place we all love - the Middle Rio Grande - it's land and water for future generations. Every dollar you contribute we are able to match 3:1, leveraging your contribution to access federal, state, and foundation funding.

We look forward to celebrating with our friends over dinner! It won't be fun without you!

Warmly,

Cecilia Rosacker

Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust's  
**ANNUAL FUNDRAISING**  
**HARVEST**  
**DINNER**

**Celebrate with us!**

Sunday,  
 September 11th

4pm to  
 starlight

Historic Gutierrez  
 Hubbell House in  
 South Valley NM

**Read more inside!**



**SPONSOR THE HARVEST DINNER**

**Farmall** \$500 | Two tickets 50%

**Massey Ferguson** \$1,000 | Two tickets free

**Minneapolis-Moline** \$2,500 | Four tickets free

**John Deere** \$5,000 | Six tickets free

Contact Cecilia to sponsor the dinner:  
 (505) 270-4421

**TICKETS**

Purchase at [www.rgalt.org](http://www.rgalt.org).

**Early Bird - Before Sept. 1st**

\$95 each or \$180 for two

**After Sept. 1st**

\$105 each or \$200 for two



Conservation easements, land trusts, restoration projects—these tools of land and natural resource protection can seem a bit abstract and complex. However, once you meet the people behind them, the value of these tools paired with the passion and amazing synergy among all these land advocates it becomes clear. So who are these people working behind the scenes to make land conservation happen?

At a recent intimate gathering, RGALT team members spent time with a number of RGALT’s partners and landowners—all fierce protectors of the Middle Rio Grande landscape.

“Land conservation work is work from the heart; it takes a community of passionate and committed people working together to protect land, water, and natural habitat,” Cecilia began. As a new team member with RGALT, the reality of how meaningful RGALT’s conservation work is, didn’t quite hit me until I listened to the partners presentations, heard the catch in their voices as they spoke about the work they so love – protecting the land, habitat, communities and creatures of the Middle Rio Grande.

At the core of RGALT’s work are the private landowners. The middle Rio Grande has a number of “pearls”, the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Sevilleta NWR, Valle del Oro NWR, NM’s La Joya State Game Refuge, the Ladd Gordon Waterbird Complex to name a few. But it is the landowners’ private farm and riparian lands that create the “string of pearls”, the private lands provide the connectivity between the state and federal refuges. Protecting these private lands is critical for a connective corridor.

Landowner Hank Taliaferro – farmer, birder, and hunter—with a hopeful gleam in his eyes—spoke about how he changed his and his family’s life completely to pursue a dream and purchase what is now the 350 acre La Joya Farms. He and his family have protected their farmland

through conservation easements (CEs) with RGALT, three CEs to date and currently working on their 4th CE with RGALT. They are working with RGALT and partners to enhance special areas on their farm for wildlife. “It was awesome meeting Cecilia, not only were we able to protect our land, but she has introduced us to so many people who are helping us improve our wildlife habitat on the farm!”

Executive director, Cecilia Rosacker said this at the event, “Landowners pursue conservation easements because they love their land. Their land and land stewardship is their legacy. It is what they want to leave behind for their heirs and the community at large.”

As each CE landowner was recognized for their key role in conservation, they beamed with pride – their love and commitment to their land and community shown through.

According to Cecilia, “Their charitable donation through conservation easement creates a ripple effect that gives RGALT and other partners the resources to leverage federal funds to accomplish otherwise insurmountable goals like the purchase of Valle del Oro. Without the landowners, none of these efforts could succeed.” Clearly, though each stakeholder is linked in this strand of pearls, but without the landowners, the strand wouldn’t even exist.

During the course of presentations, RGALT team member -Gina Dello Russo, a Socorro native, shared her story of growing up along the river and how, even in retirement from Bosque Del Apache NWR, she is devoted to protecting the Rio Grande corridor. This is evident through her ecology consulting work with RGALT, Socorro County, the Tamarisk Coalition, Audubon and serving as a board member of the Save Our Bosque Task Force and chairing a committee of the Rio Grande Trail Commission. It’s clear why Cecilia refers to her as the



“Queen of the River.” Gina is key in bringing together the groups she serves, making her an excellent example of how critical each and every link can be in connecting all the necessary stakeholders.

RGALT partner and advisor, Alan Hamilton conveyed how important people like Gina are, as well as the landowners’ incredible contributions and the way the partners rally to leverage resources that earn federal grant awards for beneficial river, land and wildlife projects. Alan, himself, is the former conservation director for the New Mexico Wildlife Federation; he founded the non-profit Rio Grande Return (RGR) and is working on river restoration. His is also the NM Wetlands Coordinator leading the partnership with RGALT and others for ongoing landscape conservation efforts, pulling together partners to pool resources, as well as bring their projects together to gain federal funding for conservation, largely through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act Standard \$1M grant program.

John Barney the Bernalillo County Parks & Recreation Planning Section Manager, presented on the counties 2014 conservation initiatives, a mill levy for conservation funding. Barney spoke of RGALT’s role in the initiative and role in working with the county to create a conservation easement program. The overriding goal of the initiative is to ensure a healthy community. Barney’s presentation connected the dots on how land preservation is connected to the health of our communities – protecting farmland provides access to fresh, healthy local food; protecting open space and natural habitat provides an the opportunity for the community to connect with nature. Valle del Oro Urban Refuge is a perfect example of a win-win providing open space, agriculture, and natural wildlife habitat for locals to experience.

Of course, there is the RGALT board members dedicating their time towards ensuring RGALT is a sustainable organization and the work is of the highest standards. RGALT’s recent Land Trust Alliance

accreditation is a testimony to their commitment.

RGALT executive director, Cecilia Rosacker, is the face of RGALT. She works closely with the landowners, partners and community leaders to develop, strategize and implement on the ground conservation in the Middle Rio Grande. Working with expert consultants that cover areas such as riparian ecology, conservation law, wetland restoration, together they implement not only land protection, but also enhancement and restoration.

Over the years much of the work has occurred at Cecilia’s kitchen table. It so happened Ducks Unlimited partners were in town and joined us at the recent event. They were in the region touring RGALT projects and working with partners to design restoration projects on those conserved lands. They reminisced about their previous visit to NM – a long day touring projects and potential projects, ending the day at Cecilia’s kitchen table. Over appetizers prepared fresh from Cecilia’s farm garden, along with Gina and Alan – they spread out maps, discussed and prioritized projects to be included in the most recent North Americans Wetland Conservation Act grant proposal submitted this July.

It was evident this conservation work is not a 9-5 job; it takes passionate and committed people whose conservation accomplishments are the legacy they will leave behind – benefiting all NM’s citizens. They are the links connecting the “pearls”.

Please join RGALT and fellow land protection advocates to sustain and conserve the Middle Rio Grande for future generations. Connect with us to find out how.

Visit [www.rgalt.org](http://www.rgalt.org) or contact Cecilia Rosacker at:

[ceciliam@rgalt.org](mailto:ceciliam@rgalt.org) or 505-270-4421.







When the Jones sisters inherited their family farm, they knew one thing for certain: they wanted it to remain farmland.

Their parents raised the sisters on their small three acre farm, irrigated off the historic Cristo Rey acequia in Albuquerque's South Valley. Growing up, they enjoyed their rural lifestyle on the fringe of Albuquerque, and the sisters wanted to ensure another young family could experience that same connection to the land and community. They were aware that the farmland and agricultural water rights contributed to the viability of the culture and tradition of the historic Pajarito Land Grant community and that the patchwork of small irrigated lands contributed to viability of the Valle de Oro Refuge. They had grown up watching the rural south valley farm land be subdivided and developed into housing, threatening the cultural and rural integrity of the community they so loved and they didn't want to be part of it.

The sisters initially listed the land as available for farming on a website where farmers could search for agricultural property to lease or purchase. That is how young farmers, Eric Chrisp and Michelle Natale, first connected with the sisters. The couple fell in love with the land and saw the farming potential, especially with the pre-1907 water rights still intact. The Jones Sisters and the young farmers, and the couple soon moved to the property. Though Eric and Michelle were interested in purchasing the land, as young farmers, the market value was beyond their reach. Fortunately, the Jones sisters found a way to make the young couple's farm dream come true.

Despite the substantial financial gain possible if the Jones family were to sell the land for development, they chose to protect it and help ensure it could be kept in agricultural use. The Jones sisters knew a conservation easement (CE) would help reduce the value of the land making the land more affordable for the young couple; they also hoped to gain some tax benefits for their charitable donation of a CE. They saw a conservation easement as a win-win for everyone. They contacted RGALT and through this new partnership, they were able to place a conservation easement on their irrigated property protecting the land and agricultural water rights for future generations.

Just days after closing on the CE, the Jones sisters sold the land to the young farmers who, as a family, have transformed the fallowed fields into Abundia Farms, a small sustainable farm operation.

Since 2013, Abundia Farms has added small farm animals like chickens and goats, beehives, as well as llamas! Fresh produce has grown in cultivated rows under the careful watch of Eric and Michelle. They even developed a small CSA (community supported agriculture business) membership!

This year, the fields of Abundia Farm are resting, but probably not for long. As Eric writes on the Abundia Farms website:

We love [farming]. Simple as that. We love the feeling we get when we walk out our door and see our happy chickens wandering unchecked in our field. We love the sensation of sticking our hands in dark earth to bring new life forth, and knowing that we are part of a cycle of consumption and production and renewal. We are of this earth now. We are these plants and these animals. We are connected to all of it, the acequia water, the cottonwood forest, the warm dry air and the bright shining sun that powers our lives here on planet earth. We farm because at the end of the day, there is nothing we would rather do.

With the majority of New Mexico's farmers over age 65, RGALT looks forward to working with even more landowners to help make New Mexico farmland accessible to the next generation of farmers. To connect with RGALT or refer a friend, please contact us at [ceciliam@rgalt.org](mailto:ceciliam@rgalt.org) or 505-270-4421. To learn more about RGALT, please visit our website at [www.rgalt.org](http://www.rgalt.org).



From her Socorro County farm, RGALT's director, Cecilia Rosacker, saw the black cloud billowing in the distance. The culprit was a fire in the Escondida area of the Rio Grande Bosque—a place near 4 of RGALT's conservation easements. The following morning, with smoke still hanging in the air, Cecilia received a call from conservation easement landowner Sue Conklin exclaiming, "You've got to see this! Your conservation easements saved us! You've got to get out here and see this."

"The fire raged on their neighbor's property fueled by the salt cedar, but their conservation easement property where restoration had occurred had no fire damage," stated Cecilia Rosacker, RGALT ED.

The recent wildfire along the Rio Grande bosque in the Escondida area burned more than 500 acres of private and public land, as well as multiple homes and other buildings. Some properties, like the 25 acres owned by Sue and Al Conklin, bordering the fire line were spared thanks in part to restoration efforts by property owners and non-profit organizations dedicated to preserving the riparian areas.

When Cecilia arrived at Sue and Al Conklin's 25 acre property, it was clear just how important conservation easements paired with restoration work are for wildfire prone regions. The contrast was amazing with a clear fire line stopping near the Conklin's conservation easement where hazardous fuels like salt cedar previously had been reduced as part of a Save Our Bosque Task Force restoration project.

Staff writer, John Larson, of Socorro's El Defensor Chieftain, visited Sue and Al Conklin to learn how land like their 25 acre conservation easement was spared—due to restoration efforts—during the recent wildfire.

From Larson's article:

"In the long run, the CE helps all of us to limit development in the bosque... the benefits from the restoration are what assisted with this wildfire," [RGALT consultant and Save Our Bosque Task Force {SOBTF} board member, Gina Dello Russo] said. "We [SOBTF] partner with RGALT to protect the lands that we have worked on if the landowner is interested in a conservation easement. Many local landowners have seen the benefits to protecting their lands in this way. All of this is voluntary, we like the combination because it not only restores the bosque but protects it from further development."

Read more about the recent Bosque wildfire in the article by staff writer, John Larson, of Socorro's El Defensor Chieftain, "Easements help protect homes from wildfires" at <http://bit.ly/2aa7jjE>.



Don't forget to buy your **tickets** for the **2016 Harvest Dinner!**

Early bird **discounts** are available.

Visit [www.rgalt.org](http://www.rgalt.org) to buy your tickets now.

See you in September, **RGALT friends!**