

Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust

Volume 20, Issue 1

Fall 2021

America the Beautiful Initiative

The America the Beautiful Conservation Plan, released by the Biden-Harris administration and the Department of Interior, is a plan to conserve, protect and restore 30% of the United States' lands and waters by 2030 for the sake of our economy, health and well-being. The plan, often referred to as the "30 by 30" plan, is a 10-year initiative developed from recommendations from tribal leaders, farmers, ranchers, land trusts, governors, conservationists, outdoor recreation organizations, veterans and more. America the Beautiful calls for a locally-led conservation effort intended to benefit directly the communities, economies and wildlife that depend on these lands and waters.

RGALT's work directly aligns with the America the Beautiful Initiative. Diverse partnerships and collaborations are the backbone of RGALT's land conservation work and this is precisely the call for action from the America the Beautiful initiative. "The initiative outlines eight principles that should guide the nationwide effort, including a pursuit of collaborative approaches; a commitment to supporting the voluntary conservation efforts of farmers, ranchers, and fishers; and honoring of Tribal sovereignty and private property rights." The plan also directly calls out the importance of conservation easements that protect our private agricultural lands and wildlife habitat.

RGALT has always worked to ensure protecting lands is an option for all land owners. This means conservation funding is essential in order for RGALT to help underserved communities where landowners cannot afford to donate a CE, the CE transaction costs, nor to implement conservation practices. The America the Beautiful Plan promises



conservation funding to help private landowners, many of whom have been stewarding America's land for generations, meet their conservation goals.

"Where this path leads over the next decade will be determined not by our agencies, but by the ideas and leadership of local communities. It is our job to listen, learn, and provide support along the way to help strengthen economies and pass on healthy lands, waters, and wildlife to the generations to come."

Local conservation organizations, such as RGALT, who have established community trust and a proven track record of successful partnerships and collaborations and longevity are essential in accomplishing the goals of the America the Beautiful initiative.

FALL FUNDRAISER CHANGES: Online Auction!

We are devastated to announce our decision to cancel our in-person annual fall fundraising farm tour, dinner and live-auction event, again. Given the surges in Covid cases and the predictions of increased surges throughout the fall, keeping our community safe and healthy is our first priority.

We have decided to try something different this year! We are launching an **Online Auction!** We have secured wonderful outdoor experiences, gift certificates, art pieces and goods such as the Acacia Riding Adventures, guided river canoe trips, birding tours, overnight vacation stays, Explora membership, New Mexico Harvest CSA shares, cords of wood and many more!



Bidding will start October 15th at 8am and close November 1st at 7pm. Further information and a direct link to the auction is available on our website!

While the auction will be fun and help with RGALT's annual fundraising, the biggest portion of our annual fundraising event is

through sponsorships or individual donations.

Please consider becoming an event sponsor, making a one-time gift or becoming a sustaining member with a monthly gift that feels right to you. Please email us or go online at www.rgalt.org/become-a-member.

We were so looking forward to resuming our annual in-person fundraising event that brings the community together, both urban and rural, to celebrate our work to protect all that we cherish - the abundant harvest of our farms, the wildlife, the protection of water and our vast open spaces and scenic natural beauty. Over the years, your support has made you an important partner in our conservation work.

GIRL POWER!

In August 2020, I visited our conservation easement landowner, Ray Garcia. Ray's conservation easement was RGALT's second easement. The easement protects 30 acres of irrigated farmland in the historic farming community of Tome. Ray and I were meeting to discuss protecting more of his farmland. The meeting took place at their kitchen table like most of our landowner meetings. The table was surrounded on three sides by big windows showcasing the farm fields. Ray's granddaughter, on a break from virtual kindergarten, joined us. As we talked, she made us a make-believe lunch, graciously dishing out our delicious, invisible food from pans she had pulled out of the cupboards.

"Cecilia, meet my granddaughter. She's gonna have land, I'm gonna make sure she has land. That's why I'm doing this, putting conservation easements on my land. Look at it!", he gestured his hand across the fields. "It's beautiful! We love our land. The birds love it. We love wildlife. This land is for them. Where else are they going to go if I don't protect it? This is all they have left, our farms."

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"This land is for my kids, my grandkids. My parents left us this land. It's been in our family for a very long time, for generations. It's part of our culture, we've been farming it a long time. Going back to the Spanish Tome Land Grant and the Native Americans, this land has been farmed. My grandmother was native American. I want all my kids to have land. And I'm going to make sure my granddaughter has land. I believe in girl power! The girls, they take care of us, they keep the traditions going, they keep the family together. My sister didn't get as much land as us boys, but she is the one that keeps us together. I want to make sure my granddaughter has land. Because I believe in girl power. And this girl here, my granddaughter, she's powerful! I want my granddaughter to have land. **That's what it's about Cecilia – Girl Power! And the land!**"

"The development is coming! It's all around us. Did you see it? Yeah, eleven houses

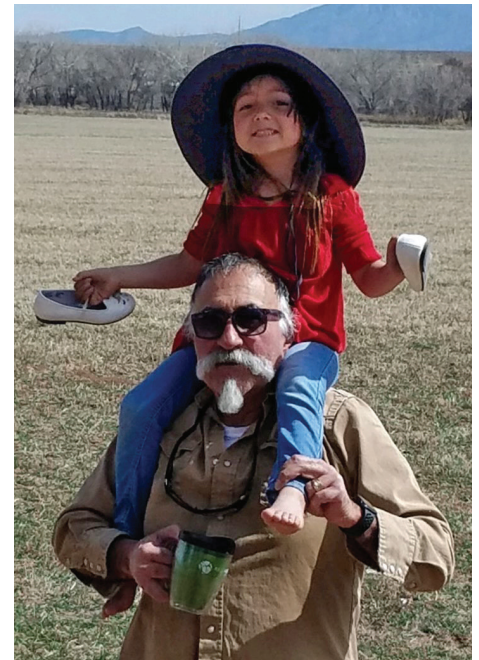
in the middle of the alfalfa field. They're going to buy this piece next to mine and my brother's conservation easements." After Ray's easement, RGALT also worked with his brother to convey a conservation easement on his farm next door. "The developer will sell the water rights and build houses there too."

I had seen the houses in the alfalfa field down the road. Driving there, I wasn't even sure I was in the right place, it all looked so different with all the new houses. In 2020, while we were on pandemic lockdown, eleven houses were built on what was once an alfalfa field. The alfalfa still grows strong in defiance, deep green and blooming purple right up to the front porches. The alfalfa was still there after a long, hot, drought-stricken summer without water. It persisted through the construction trucks driving over it, workers stomping it down, cement, stucco, and construction debris washed over it. The alfalfa persisted just like us farmers holding on to our land and our way of life while development and drought threaten our existence.

Just a couple of weeks ago, I received an email from Ray, titled "Cancer or Predator". I opened it wondering...over the last months he'd sent me his drone photos of the many species of birds that seek refuge and sustenance in his farm fields.

I opened the email along with the numerous photo attachments. My heart sank. The photos were of roads and a cul-de-sac bladed in the field adjacent to the Garcia brother's conservation easements. Since last year five more houses have gone up next to the Garcia brother's CE lands. He said, "I hope the developers save the little cottonwood forest next to it. There are two great horned owls who live there. When can you come to meet with me and my wife? I want to protect more of my land."

As a farmer myself and having raised my family on my farm, I understand the immense grief of watching our farmland disappear.



Ray Garcia and his granddaughter

As stewards of the land, out on the land every day, we understand when farmland disappears we all lose.

- Less farmland means fewer migratory birds.
- Loss of farmland means wildlife corridors will become fragmented.
- Losing our farmland means losing our rural way of life and our cultural heritage tied to the land.
- Farmland loss means our children, future generations, may not have access to land and the open space we all enjoy.
- Farmland loss means our local food system will disappear.
- Losing farmland impacts the entire community.

RGALT works with landowners who want to protect their land for future generations. It is the legacy they want to leave behind for their heirs and for the community.

RGALT's mission to protect land and water for people and wildlife forever benefits all of the community.

Alone you may never be able to improve a wetland, protect a family farm, or protect a wildlife corridor. **Together, with your support, we can protect land and water for people and wildlife forever!**

RGALT Helps Landowners Protect Their Farmland Using NRCS – ALE Program

For 24 years, RGALT has been working to protect land and water for people and wildlife in the MRG, New Mexico (Sandoval, Bernalillo, Valencia, Socorro, and Sierra counties). RGALT provides private landowners the services needed to protect their lands in perpetuity with voluntary conservation easements (CEs). Accomplishing CEs has been especially challenging in the MRG. The majority of the landowners are in predominantly underserved communities where most landowners are land rich and cash poor, making conservation easement funding necessary. RGALT has a record of success in leveraging and securing grant funding for conservation easement work (90 percent of our CEs are the result of public/private partnerships through state or federal agency programs), however access to CE funding has been limited.

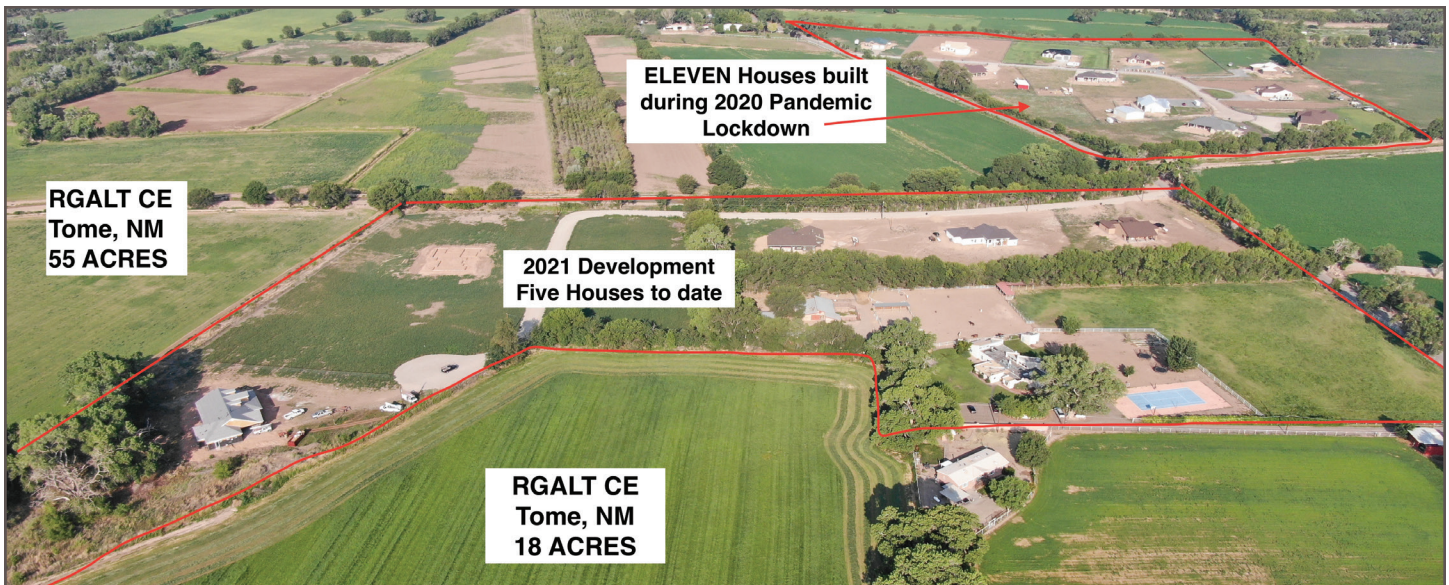
The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)-Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) Program is one funding source RGALT uses to help landowners protect their land. In the past, this program has been largely inaccessible in New Mexico, where we lack a state-funded conservation program to help leverage federal programs. However, recent changes to the ALE program allow landowners to provide the required 50 percent non-federal match by using the residual values of

conservation easements. This opens a huge opportunity for private land protection in the MRG.

RGALT has received all of the ALE funding allocated to NM in 2019, 2020, and again in 2021. Through this funding program we have obtained almost \$1.1 million for bargain sale conservation easements that will protect five farms ranging in size from 20-40 acres.

Currently, New Mexico receives \$200- \$750K per year for this program, while neighboring states receive \$14-\$19 million. NRCS-New Mexico can request more funding for this program by increasing the number of applications submitted, demonstrating the need for more funding. Providing technical assistance to landowners to make more applications will require an increase in RGALT's organizational capacity funding to hire additional staff. This would allow RGALT to help more interested landowners access this program and bring more conservation money to NM.

The result will be more land and water protected. This benefits landowners, wildlife, communities, the ecosystem, and future generations.



WHY THE RIO GRANDE AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST MATTERS

“We have all seen great changes in the landscapes we have lived in. Some of those changes may have been benign, or maybe even positive. Other changes have occurred so slowly that we have not noticed them as they were occurring. Some changes, like the construction of a new freeway, or of a new shopping mall, can create dramatic impacts almost overnight. In way too many cases we do not appreciate what is lost until it is too late. In the Rio Grande corridor, we still have time to preserve the essential characteristics of these disappearing landscapes. But the longer-term trends are sobering, and irrigated lands have a hard time competing with other types of land and water uses. As a Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (RGALT) board member, I am delighted to be part of a dynamic team that is making a difference in protecting these disappearing landscapes that contribute to the health, environmental wellbeing, and welfare of the entire community.”

~John Leeper, RGALT Board Treasurer

RGALT Board Members and Staff News and Highlights



Welcome Lindsey Diaz, RGALT's New Executive Assistant

Lindsey joins us after five years as the Conservation Program Manager with Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District where she worked with farmers, ranchers, first-time growers and youth in conserving important natural resources and supported management of Whitfield Conservation Area Complex. Prior to that position, Lindsey worked on the Navajo Nation for a healthy food access program, for the Colville Confederated Tribes as the Watershed Restoration Specialist and as an organic farmer. Lindsey has a passion for growing healthy foods and working with people to create the communities they envision – supporting wildlife habitat, natural resources and culture.

Welcome New Board Members!

PAUL TASHJIAN is the Director of Freshwater Conservation for Audubon Southwest. Paul joined Audubon in March of 2018 to establish a comprehensive water and restoration strategy for the Rio Grande in New Mexico. Prior to joining Audubon, Paul spent 26 years working as a regional hydrologist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in the Southwestern United States. His expertise includes water management and water protection for wildlife, river restoration, water law, and coordination. Paul was the founder and coordinator of the Bosque Hydrology Group, an inter-agency, inter-university think tank that focused on the physical restoration of the Middle Rio Grande in New Mexico.



Paul enjoys fishing, photography and family. He holds degrees from Colorado College (BA Anthropology) and Temple University (MS Geology).

BETH WELLS is a community activist who taught English, theater and history for over 20 years in public schools and community college in numerous states including New Mexico. She has helped found four nonprofits including the Terry Lee Wells Nevada Discovery Museum and served as executive director for the Nevada STEM Coalition. Beth has served as a fundraiser for multiple nonprofits.



Beth currently lives in Socorro, NM where her husband is president of New Mexico Tech. In Socorro she helped to revive the Socorro Beautification Committee, growing it into the nonprofit Diamond in the Desert, Inc. She and her husband Steve enjoy hiking, camping, and birdwatching, sharing a strong interest in global conservation of our natural environment and water.

Congratulations Tanya Trujillo!



RGALT is pleased to announce Tanya Trujillo's appointment to the Biden Administration's Interior Department where she will serve as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for water and science. As such, Tanya Trujillo has stepped down from the RGALT Board. Tanya will take her wealth of experience

in southwest water conservation management to her new position. Tanya, a water lawyer for over 20 years, has served on the US Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee the NM Interstate Stream Commission and has most recently worked as the Project Director of the Colorado Sustainability Campaign and Executive Director of the Colorado River Board of California. Tanya's expertise will be missed, but we are thrilled that she will take her experience and knowledge to the national level and will ensure southwest land and water issues are considered.

Congratulations Sandra Postel, Stockholm Water Laureate 2021!

RGALT's Advisory Board member, Sandra Postel was recently named the Stockholm Water Prize Laureate for 2021! This prize is an incredible recognition – the Stockholm Water Prize is often referred to as the Nobel Peace Prize for water. She was awarded this prestigious prize for her groundbreaking work to raise awareness of the global water crisis we are facing. Her 1992 book *Last Oasis: Facing Water Scarcity*, considered revolutionary, was one of the earliest calls to recognize the threat of water scarcity throughout the world. In describing Sandra Postel, the Stockholm Water Prize Nominating Committee wrote: "No one has exhibited more commitment, capacity, courage, and perseverance to address far-ranging and critical water issues that affect both human and natural ecosystems." RGALT is honored to have Sandra Postel as a member of our RGALT team.



Thank You RGALT 2020 Supporters!

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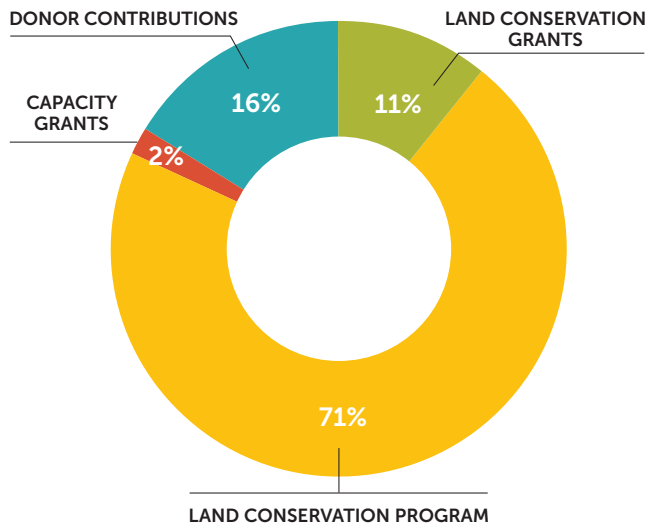
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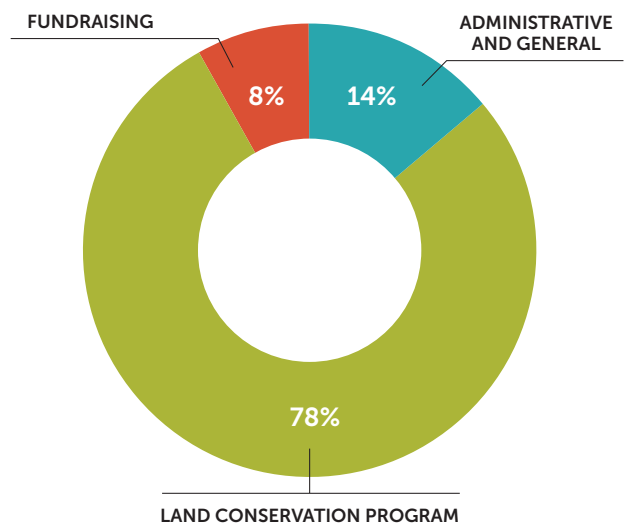
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FISCAL REPORT

SOURCE OF FUNDS



USE OF FUNDS



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We protect land and water for people and wildlife in New Mexico, forever.



RGALT 2021 FALL FUNDRAISER

NEW ONLINE AUCTION!

Lots of wonderful outdoor experiences – horseback riding, river trips, birding tours, weekend getaways and more!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Bidding starts October 15th at 8am and closes on November 1st at 7pm.

For details and online auction link visit our website, www.rgalt.org.

PLEASE CONSIDER SPONSORING OUR AUCTION FUNDRAISER!

The auction will be fun, but sponsorships and donations are the biggest portion of our annual fundraising.

Our suggested support levels for this year's online auction fundraising event are below:

Farmall - \$500

Massey Ferguson - \$1,000

Minneapolis-Moline - \$2,500

John Deere - \$5,000 or more



Your support is more critical than ever to sustain RGALT through these challenging times!
For sponsorship contributions contact us at Cecilia@rgalt.org or call 505-270-4421