

## Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund Land & Water Conservation Fund

In March 2023, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham signed The Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund creating the state's first dedicated and long-term funding stream for land and water conservation. The fund prioritizes land and water conservation, forest and watershed health, outdoor recreation and infrastructure, agriculture and working lands, historic preservation, and wildlife species protection. Local entities - including land trusts, acequias, tribes, and Soil & Water Conservation Districts will be able to apply for projects they know work for them.

The appropriation will go toward two funds: an expandable fund, which will be allocated to existing state programs beginning in FY2024, and a permanent fund, which will gain interest over time and be distributed through the expandable fund each year for the next several years. Advocates have called for at least \$350 million in combined funding to ensure the program has the necessary resources to gain sufficient interest and reach all 33 counties and tribal communities. Funding for existing state programs will be dispersed through two finance mechanisms created by SB9, which established the Land of Enchantment Legacy Funds. The bill was sponsored by Senator Steven Neville (R) and Senator Peter Wirth (D) and Rep. Nathan Small (D). The Fund is a bipartisan product of five years of negotiations among a broad coalition of legislators, state agencies, community stakeholders



and non-governmental organizations.

With a reliable source of funds, New Mexico can establish meaningful and equitable conservation priorities that benefit people and wildlife throughout the state, now and in the future. Private land conservation funding will positively impact rural communities where wildlife/bird tourism, outdoor recreation and hunting opportunities provide a significant portion of the rural economy.

## La Joya Farm's Fifth Conservation Easement

RGALT is pleased to announce the completion of a fifth conservation easement on Hank and Kelly Talliaferro's La Joya Farm located in Socorro County, New Mexico. La Joya Farm represents the diverse array of natural habitats and working agricultural lands that are characteristic of the middle Rio Grande (MRG) valley, a mix of irrigated agriculture, Chihuahuan desert upland habitat, and riparian bosque floodplain habitat. This easement permanently protects an additional 96 acres, 57 acres of native riparian/wetland habitat and 39 acres of irrigated farmland. With the completion of this new easement, 333 acres of the almost 700-acre farm are now permanently protected from development.

Hank and Kelly have a long-term vision for the property which involves both main-



Aerial image showing part of the 57 acres of native bosque habitat and 39 acres of irrigated farmland permanently protected by the recent La Joya Farm conservation easement.

taining a profitable and sustainable agricultural operation as well as conserving and enhancing existing habitat for birds and other native wildlife. The farm provides high-quality habitat for thousands of migrating waterfowl

and Sandhill cranes every year, while the native Rio Grande cottonwood and willow forests along the river are home to dozens of other species - including the federally-listed Southwestern willow-flycatcher and Western yellow-billed cuckoo. La Joya Farms is adjacent to other important protected wildlife habitat, including the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge and the state-owned Ladd. S. Gordon Waterfowl Complex. Protecting La Joya Farms contributes to the viability of these refuges and the migratory corridor for over 450 bird species and other wildlife.

The farmland is irrigated by the historic La Joya Acequia, one of the few remaining irrigation systems in the middle Rio Grande that is still operated by the local community. Protecting this important

*continued on page two*

# NRCS Video featuring RGALT Landowners

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) uses short videos to feature agricultural producers explaining how conservation practices help their land and their operations. The NRCS videos shine the spotlight on farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners from across the United States who tell their stories from their viewpoints. NRCS hopes by sharing the conservation successes of their partners and landowners, it will inform the public about their programs and motivate more landowners and producers to consider the conservation opportunities.

NRCS reached out to RGALT about being featured in the video, showcasing our conservation easement landowners and our partnership with NRCS to implement conservation easements using the NRCS-Agricultural Land Easement (NRCS-ALE) program and the NRCS Farm and Ranch Protection Program (NRCS-FRPP).

Three of RGALT's Tomé-Adelino, Valencia County farmers and RGALT's Executive Director, Cecilia Rosacker will be featured in the video. The landowners include brothers Mark and Ray Garcia, both have NRCS-FRPP easements that were established in the mid-2000s, protecting over 50 irrigated acres. RGALT is currently working with Mark Garcia and Ron Moya, also featured in the video, on NRCS-ALE projects protecting 80 irrigated acres. Moya has also worked with NRCS to implement season extension by installing a mobile hoop-house that allows him to produce vegetables for local markets year round.



RGALT and NRCS would like to extend a big "THANK YOU" to the landowners who each generously committed a half day to participate in the NRCS video. It is the goal of NRCS and RGALT to share these videos in order to expand NRCS easement programs both here in our community and afar.

***We look forward to sharing the NRCS video production featuring RGALT conservation easement landowners with you - NEW VIDEO COMING SOON!***

Meanwhile below are links to other NRCS videos that are similar to the upcoming video featuring RGALT landowners. The first two are about easements and the third link will take you to an entire series of videos that cover various conservation practices.

**Grassland Easement – South Carolina**  
<https://youtu.be/WZetr9qxPYY>

**Wetland Reserve Easement – Indiana**  
<https://youtu.be/Oh8I2xTRHWU>

**Conservation at Work Video Series**  
<https://www.farmers.gov/conservation/conservation-at-work>

*continued from page one*

farmland is critical for maintaining the historic agricultural traditions and cultural heritage of New Mexico. Additionally, the property provides open space and scenic vistas - this emerald jewel in the desert can be seen from I-25 and provides the community with unobstructed views of the Ladrones Mountain Range and scenic vistas of the Rio Grande valley.

Funding for conservation easements on La Joya Farm was obtained from grant funding through the USFWS North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) Standard grant program with the majority of the conservation easement value donated by the Taliaferros that helped leverage the federal funding for their project and numerous other restoration projects in the MRG. RGALT and over 50 partners have successfully obtained 3 - \$1M NAWCA grants to protect and restore over 10,000 acres of Rio Grande riparian/wetland habitat and farmland for future generations.

*See our 25th Anniversary video on the [rgalt.org](http://rgalt.org) website to learn more about the Taliaferros' long-term vision.*





# RGALT Awarded American Farmland Trust “Soil Health Stewards” Grant

WRITTEN BY AMY ERICKSON

In March 2023 RGALT was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the American Farmland Trust for their “Soil Health Stewards: Promoting Soil Health on Protected Agricultural Lands” program. RGALT was invited to apply for this grant because we hold several farmland conservation easements protected through the federal NRCS Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, the precursor to the NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

Under this grant award, two RGALT staff members attended a virtual multi-day training in late April that went over the basics of soil health and the benefits of adopting healthy soil practices such as no-till and cover cropping to enhance soil health and increase soil organic matter. The training included tips on communicating the benefits of healthy soils to interested farmers. Farmers from across the west presented about their personal experiences implementing soil health practices. We also learned about the resources available for producers in order to provide technical assistance for cost-share programs and other resources to help them adopt soil health practices successfully.

Conservation Coordinator Elena Taylor and Conservation Specialist Amy Erickson completed the training workshop, which included the completion of a Soil Health Action Plan. RGALT’s Action Plan will help us deliver information to landowners who are interested in adopting and expanding soil health practices on their protected land and documenting what practices are currently being implemented. Elena and Amy found the training to be extremely useful and informative, and RGALT is excited to be able to offer landowners another tool to ensure their working lands remain viable and productive now and into the future.

If you want to learn more about opportunities for protecting farmland and working land, you can visit the Farmland Information Center website which provides resources and information on farmland protection.



Austrian peas winter cover crop on Cecilia’s farm in Polvadera, NM





# Pajarito Acequia Walk & Talk

## Center for Social Sustainable System

WRITTEN BY ELENA TAYLOR, RGALT CONSERVATION COORDINATOR



“New Mexicans have a unique heart connection with the land, the *Río*, and the acequia system. That connection is in the words themselves – *acequia madre*, or mother ditch, and when we refer to the offshoots of the acequia, they’re called *venas*, or veins. You can feel the importance of water and how it gives life to the land and its people in those words.”

In late May, I joined Santiago Maestas and Jorge Garcia of the Center for Social Sustainable Systems (CESOSS) for their Acequia Walk and Talk along the Pajarito Acequia in the South Valley of Albuquerque. A handful of community members gathered at the Durand Open Space and we slowly made our way to the Gutierrez-Hubbell House property by way of the Pajarito Acequia system, dug out in the 17th century by enslaved members of the Isleta Pueblo. The acequia is lined with old cottonwoods and houses – some old and some new. Development is rampant and those new houses are being built where agricultural land once existed.

The Pajarito Acequia is part of the Valle de Atrisco, commonly referred to as the South Valley, and is one of the oldest and most historic areas of Albuquerque. The Atrisco Land Grant was established in 1692 and there are still families in the South Valley who can trace their lineage back to original settlers, claiming rights to land and water in the area. The Pajarito Acequia system was integral in providing water to land cultivating corn, wheat, alfalfa, and others. The space around the acequias from the colonial period of the 17th century through World War II consisted of rural farmland subdivided between those original settler families. Today, because of growing urbanization throughout Albuquerque, the acequias of the South Valley function as unique sources of public space and cultural tradition.

New Mexicans have a unique heart connection with the land, the *Río*, and the acequia system. That connection is in the words themselves – *acequia madre*, or mother ditch, and when we refer to the offshoots of the acequia, they’re called *venas*, or veins. You can feel the importance of water and how it gives life to the land and its people in those words. You don’t even have to be from New Mexico to feel it – it’s something that pulls at that primordial piece inside each of us, that piece that knows we are kept alive and nourished by the flow of the *Río*, just like the ancestors that came before us.

Walking along the Pajarito acequia madre with Santiago and Jorge filled me with a sense of pride and strengthened my heart connection with our land and water. A lot of times the work I do with RGALT is behind a computer screen and getting out onto the acequia and chatting with the community gave me back my sense of purpose for why we do this work, why we care about protecting the land, water, and open space. RGALT aims to strengthen our partnership with CESOSS and applauds the outstanding work they’ve done since 2003 to strengthen a sustainable connection between our community and the land. Please visit their website at <https://www.cesoss.org> to learn more about their work.







# PROTECTING RIO GRANDE RIPARIAN WETLAND HABITAT

RGALT protects agricultural lands but what many people don't know is that many of our conservation easements (CEs) protect privately owned Rio Grande riparian habitat. The Middle Rio Grande (MRG) landscape, RGALT's main focus area, encompasses the highest concentration of private lands on NM's Rio Grande floodplain, including 60,000 irrigated acres of farmland and over 20,000 acres of undeveloped riparian habitat stewarded by private landowners.

The riparian habitat, the river, and the farmland all provide critical wildlife corridors. These privately owned riparian lands provide habitat for several endangered and threatened species such as the Rio Grande silvery minnow, the southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, and the NM meadow jumping mouse. The MRG is vital for migratory birds, providing a bottle-neck corridor essential for bird migration in the Central Flyway of North America. The wetlands within this valley, both natural and working wetlands (flood-irrigated agriculture), provide critical stopover habitat and wintering grounds for over 400 species of migratory birds.

This year with Rio Grande spring flows amping up to 5000 cubic feet per second, many of RGALT's conservation easements experienced over bank flows putting our annual monitoring on hold but providing the opportunity to observe and photograph our riparian wetland easements actively flooded. RGALT holds 16 conservation easements

protecting riparian/wetland habitat in Socorro County where there is no county zoning. The CE projects were funded through the USFWS- North American Wetlands Standard grant. The CEs protect the riparian habitat and prevent the floodplain from being developed thereby allowing the Rio Grande to over flow into the natural habitat on the Rio Grande's

water rights to municipal and industrial uses and years of extreme drought. The remaining natural habitat is fragmented and degraded (over 90% decline) because of development, habitat conversion, invasive species, wildfire, and hydrologic alterations. In addition, predictions for climate change make efforts to preserve and restore the agricultural land



La Joya Farms NAWCA conservation easement protecting riparian wetlands.  
Drone photo by Amy Erickson.

eastern floodplain. The over bank flows help maintain the natural riparian habitat and also distribute the river sediment to a broader area here in Socorro County where the channeling of the Rio Grande has caused sediment to build to the point that the Rio Grande sits over 10 feet higher than the City of Socorro.

The MRG landscape is threatened due to increasing urbanization, loss of agricultural

for the local foodshed and the remaining natural habitat critical for sustaining people and wildlife. Private land protection and restoration are of utmost importance for critical habitat and linkages between the five wildlife refuges scattered through the MRG corridor, for a resilient local foodshed, and for preserving the cultural heritage of the communities throughout the MRG.

# Executive Director's Visit to Capitol Hill

In mid-March, RGALT's Executive Director Cecilia Rosacker joined the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) to conduct their annual Hill Visit Fly-In to Washington, DC along with other key partners. All were excited to participate in these important meetings once again in-person and a jam-packed week of dynamic conversations ensued producing one of IWJV's most-engaging visits to date! "RGALT is thrilled to have a voice at the table and to speak about the conservation needs of New Mexicans!" said Cecilia Rosacker.

Director Rosacker led meetings with Senator Lujan and Senator Heinrich offices and also joined in meetings with staff from the House and Senate Agriculture, House Natural Resources, and Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committees, and the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee.

Rosacker's message focused on the challenges faced by underserved landowners in accessing the NRCS Agricultural Land Easement program in particular and other NRCS programs. There are some simple administrative changes to the ALE program, such as supporting conservation easement transaction costs, that could make a huge difference for land and water conservation in New Mexico. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) will provide an additional \$19.5 billion over five years for climate smart agriculture through several of the conservation programs that USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) implements, including the ACEP/ALE. Our hope is that our recommended administrative changes to the NRCS ALE will help make that funding available to New Mexicans and ensure equitable conservation nationwide.

This focus connected well with those discussing how funding from

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) represents an unprecedented opportunity to support community-led, landscape-scale, on-the-ground conservation delivery. The groundwork laid by all the previous IWJV Hill Visits was apparent in how we were able to get into the details of the role IWJV can play in supporting agencies' application of BIL and IRA funds.

The Hill Visit Team also conducted valuable meetings with leadership of the Department of Interior (Associate Deputy Secretary Sarah Greenberger and Water & Science Assistant Secretary Tanya Trujillo), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Director Martha Williams), Bureau of Land Management (Director Tracy Stone-Manning), Department of Agriculture (Farm Production & Conservation Under Secretary Robert Bonnie), Natural Resources Conservation Service (Chief Terry Cosby), and U.S. Forest Service (Biological & Physical Resources Director Rob Harper), as well as staff from their offices along with those from the White House Council on

Environmental Quality. This visit also aligned with the Association of Joint Venture Management Boards (AJVMB) Annual Meeting. AJVMB's effort was supported by a Core Team of Joint Venture Management Board members and several Joint Venture Coordinators.

"The success of the 2023 Hill Visits was a function of an incredible effort by every single member of the IWJV and AJVMB teams that contributed time, energy, relationships, and connections to the endeavor."

RGALT is thankful for the opportunity to work with our long-standing partner, the IWJV, and the opportunity to be part of such a successful week!



## Welcome Amy Erickson, RGALT's Conservation Coordinator II

I am excited to join the RGALT team because I enjoy working with landowners and the local community! To me, a job is not just a job – I need to do something meaningful that I feel passionate about. I have been working with private landowners and the agricultural community for over 10 years

in various capacities and I enjoy the unique challenges and opportunities that come with this type of work. My educational background is in Avian Biology and I have always felt that I am able to help bridge the gap between conservationists and the agricultural community. Sometimes it feels like those two groups share little common ground and have conflicting goals, but the reality is that we all want the same thing – healthy ecosystems, abundant wildlife, water in the river, productive agricultural lands, and strong communities.

Although I have been partnering with RGALT through my previous positions since 2018, I did not truly understand the complexity and incredible amount of work that is needed to permanently protect land until I became a full-time staff member. It is truly impressive how effective this small organization is and how much meaningful work is accomplished with a small staff and a volunteer board of directors.

I am excited to bring my unique skills and perspectives to the RGALT team and I love the fact that I have been working with many of RGALT's conservation landowners since I first moved to Socorro. I hope to continue to build those relationships and establish many new ones. See the RGALT website to learn more about Amy's vast experience in conservation and building collaborations between private landowners and agency partners.

## Welcome New RGALT Board Member Ann Simon

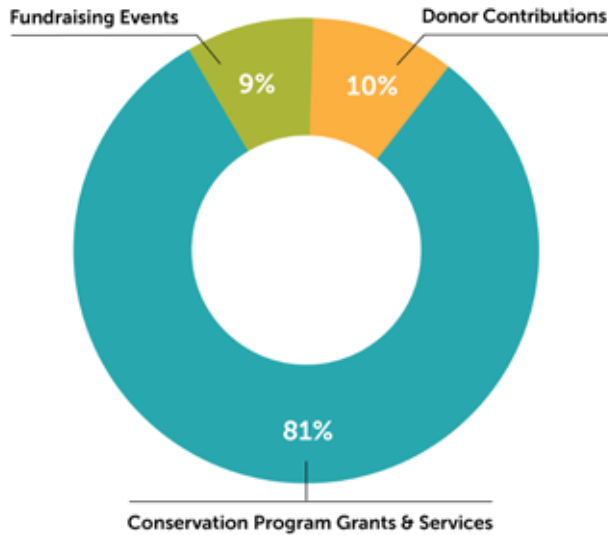


We are so pleased to have Ann Simon join the RGALT team! Ann brings her passion and years of experience in working to promote and preserve NM's agriculture. She spent 16 years as the Economic Development Program Manager for the Mid-Region Council of Governments where she worked on projects affecting the local and regional economy, including the Agriculture Collaborative, a farm to market networking and lecture series. Her nearly 30 years of public policy and program development, and ability to partner with key stakeholders, has helped her create successful programs in her community. Currently, she is the Administrator of Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque. Ann and other Los Ranchos community members are working on initiatives to protect agriculture in their community.

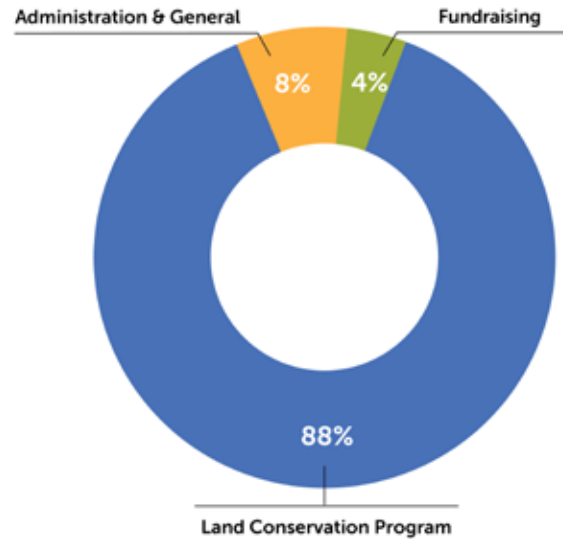


# 2022 FISCAL REPORT

## INCOME



## EXPENSES



## Thank You RGALT 2022 Supporters!

RGALT relies on donations from the community to continue to protect land and waters in the MRG. We can't do this work without you, and we are truly grateful for your contributions each year.

### PARTNERSHIPS and GRANTS

LEF Foundation  
 Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge  
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# RIO GRANDE AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST

P.O. Box 40043 ABQ NM 87196

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LEF Foundation

NRCS - Racial Equity and Justice Grant



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



## A Farm to Table Harvest Dinner Event

### Join Us in Celebrating 26 Years of Conservation!

The Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust invites you to join us for an unforgettable evening at our Annual Fundraiser Event- A Farm to Table Harvest Dinner!

The event will be held at the Historic Gutierrez-Hubbell House in Albuquerque's South Valley on **Saturday, October 14, 2023 from 3:00pm to dusk**. We will gather the community together to celebrate RGALT's work to protect the places we cherish. We can't think of a better way to celebrate than sharing the bounty of our local farms by providing you with a farm to table dinner. Local chefs Daniel Garcia and Sean Staggs will bring their inspiring culinary artistry to the table, showcasing fresh harvested, seasonal ingredients sourced from nearby farms. We promise a dinner experience you won't soon forget!

Not only will you enjoy a delectable meal, but the event will also include music, libations, and a silent and lively auction! Don't miss out on this unique opportunity to savor the flavors of the local harvest with your community while supporting RGALT's mission to protect land and water for people and wildlife, forever! We can't wait to see you there!

### TICKETS ON SALE NOW!

**Early Bird Tickets: \$130 each or 2 for \$225**

**Tickets After September 15th: \$140 each or 2 for \$250**



### Interested in Sponsoring Our Event?

Sponsorships from generous supporters, like you, make up a major portion of our fundraising effort. Would you like to support our fundraising effort by sponsoring our event?

Please see our suggested sponsorship levels and benefits below:

#### FARMALL - \$500

Your name on our event promotions.

#### MASSEY FERGUSON - \$1000

2 tickets plus your name on our event promotions.

#### MINNEAPOLIS-MOLINE - \$2500

4 tickets plus your name or logo on our website and social media event promotion.

#### JOHN DEERE - \$5000 or more!

8 tickets plus your name or logo on our event poster, event mailer, website, and social media event promotion!

If you would like to sponsor our event please contact [elena@rgalt.org](mailto:elena@rgalt.org). Sponsorships at any amount that feels right for you are appreciated!

*RGALT is a 501c3 non-profit organization, all donations and sponsorships are tax deductible.*