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Ranchers Partner with Arizona Open Land Trust and County to Permanently Protect 36,000-acre Historic Arivaca Ranch

Arivaca, Arizona – Last month the Pima County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to permanently protect a historic ranch that includes 36,000 acres of important wildlife habitat and archaeological sites in southern Pima County, the result of an unprecedented partnership of ranchers, conservationists, and local government who share a vision for cultural and environmental preservation.

“Arizona Open Land Trust is pleased to be part of this partnership to protect Arivaca’s Rancho Seco and Santa Lucia Ranch, which have been in the same family for over 50 years,” said Diana Freshwater, executive director of the land trust that worked with the ranch family and the county since 2000, when the family began to explore options for preserving their legacy.

“Conservation of this ranch will protect a very large, unfragmented landscape containing high biological values, habitat for numerous Priority Vulnerable Species identified in Pima County’s Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, and many cultural and historic resources,” Freshwater said.

“A purchase such as this illustrates the 2004 Conservation Bond Program at work,” Freshwater continued, referring to bond funds approved by a landslide last May by Pima County voters. “There is a clear citizen mandate for the county to follow.”

When the transaction is completed later this month, Pima County will pay \$18.5 million for outright purchase of 9,500 acres of private land and 480 acres under conservation easement.

Under a 10-year contract with the county, the family will continue to operate Rancho Seco at its own expense as a working cattle ranch, which includes 26,800 acres of land leased from the Arizona State Land Department and Bureau of Land Management. The ranch is located between the town of Arivaca and the Cerro Colorado Mountains to the north, about 60 miles southwest of Tucson. It abuts the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge on the west, and bridges the Altar and Santa Cruz Valleys.

“This purchase is a fine example of Pima County's commitment to the preservation of working landscapes,” said county administrator Chuck Huckelberry. “Under a management agreement with the current ranching family, conservation ranching principles will be implemented to achieve the balance necessary to conserve the important habitat while continuing ranching. Having ranchers continue as stewards of the land is an asset to the County as we take on more and more of these large properties.”

“Ranching is a true American subculture, and the purchase of Rancho Seco under the continuing management of the ranch family means that the County intends to honor its commitment to one of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan's major goals: Ranch Conservation,” said Tom Sheridan, UA anthropologist and chair of the county's Ranch Conservation Technical Advisory Team.

The ranch includes numerous biological and cultural resources. Its desert grasslands, wooded uplands, and riparian habitats are rich in wildlife, harboring numerous Priority Vulnerable Species identified in the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. It is important habitat for endangered species such as the lesser long-nosed bat and Chiricahua leopard frog, according to county documents.

Over a dozen archaeological and historic sites are known on the ranch, including some that date to between A.D. 1200 and A.D. 1450. In addition, there are two small village sites occupied by the Hohokam Indians between A.D. 900 and A.D. 1200. During the 1800s the area was host to numerous mine and ranch operations; the ghost town of Cerro Colorado is often noted by historians as an important symbol of Pima County's 19th century frontier past.

“Rancho Seco offers the opportunity to demonstrate that sustainable ranching is compatible with the preservation of biodiversity. Rancho Seco will provide a critical bridge between Pima County's ranching past and a future that includes large unfragmented working landscapes,” Sheridan said.

The transaction was reviewed and approved in early February by an eleven-member citizen's oversight committee, the Conservation Acquisition Commission.

William Shaw, a professor in the U of A's School of Renewable Resources and chair of the county's Science and Technical Advisory Team, said: “Preserving an interconnected system of open landscapes that reach south from Tucson to the Mexico border is crucial for ensuring the long-term survival of Pima County's native plants and animals. This acquisition is a major step towards realizing this vision.”

Arizona Open Land Trust is a 27-year-old non-profit organization that protects southern Arizona's vanishing Western landscapes and wildlife habitat by acquiring and managing sensitive lands. In addition to its role as land steward, Arizona Open Land Trust also engages in programs that support its mission, including appropriate legislation, public education, and outreach that encourages citizens to support protection of landscapes and ecosystems that are vital to the well being of all residents, present and future. —end-



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Rancho Seco – Santa Lucia Ranch Fact Sheet

- Located 60 miles southwest of Tucson, Arizona, near the town of Arivaca.
- Bordered on the west by Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, the south and east by Arivaca Road, and the north by the Cerro Colorado Mountains.
- Pima County will acquire: 9,500 acres fee title, 480 acres protected under conservation easement.
- Under a 10-year contract with the county, the Carrow Cattle Company will continue to operate Rancho Seco at its own expense as a working cattle ranch, which includes 26,800 acres of land leased from the Arizona State Land Department and Bureau of Land Management. The contract is renewable.
- Over a dozen archaeological and historic sites are known on the ranch, including some that date to between A.D. 900 and A.D. 1450.
- The ranch's ghost town of Cerro Colorado is an important symbol of Pima County's 19th century frontier past.
- At least 140 species of wildlife may occur on the ranch, including 41 mammals, 77 birds, 5 amphibians and 20 reptiles.
- There are nine Priority Vulnerable Species (identified in the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan) that have a moderate to very high potential of being present at Rancho Seco.
- Habitat for at least two endangered species, including the lesser long-nosed bat and Chiricahua leopard frog.
- Important habitats include Mesquite Riparian, Mixed Grass-scrub, and Interior Southwestern Riparian Deciduous Forest.

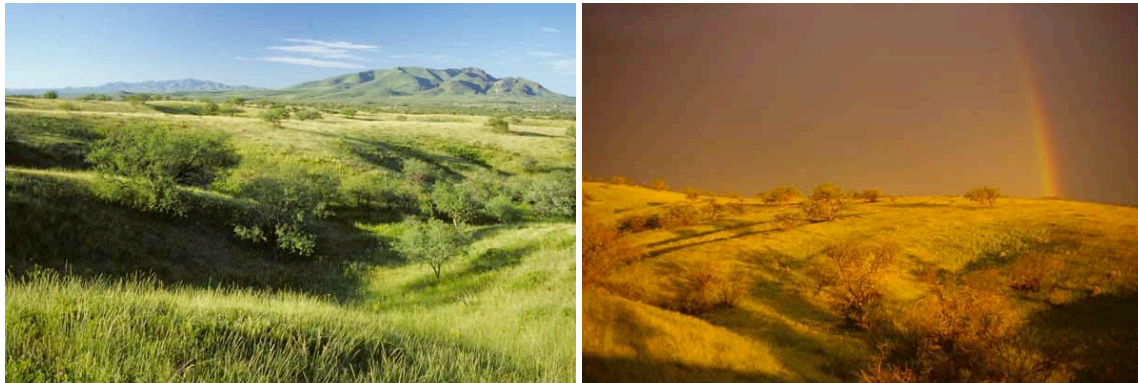


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Rancho Seco – Santa Lucia Ranch Photos

Please credit and caption as below. Both full-sized and scaled images as JPGs are on enclosed CD, if print version, or by email if PDF version (call AOLT office).



Healthy desert grasslands are among the important native habitats that will be preserved on the ranch. Photos courtesy Dale Faulkner Land Company, by Randy Prentice.



Cowboys from Rancho Seco and Santa Lucia Ranch will continue to work the land as they have for over 50 years, in a new partnership arrangement with Pima County. Photo courtesy the Carrow Cattle Company.



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Rancho Seco – Santa Lucia Ranch Photos, continued

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Left: The ranch is one of the largest intact natural landscapes left in southern Pima County. Right: To the north the property abuts the rugged Cerro Colorado Mountains. Photos courtesy Dale Faulkner Land Company, by Randy Prentice.



Western heritage is one of the many cultural resources that will be preserved on the ranch. Photos courtesy the Carrow Cattle Company.