



Altar Valley Conservation Alliance 2013 Year in Review

Dear Friends,

At this time of year we pause to celebrate contributions to Altar Valley watershed work and reflect upon our collective accomplishments. Your monetary and partnership contributions have added richness to our mission to: "Work effectively with our partners to conserve healthy and productive working landscapes, promote a thriving agricultural economy, and sustain a resilient rural community enriched by the culture and history of the Altar Valley."

On-the-ground stewardship projects are well under way at five sites scattered throughout the valley, fueled by a generous five-year grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation matched 3:1 by numerous partners, including Pima County. Accomplishments include: completion of environmental analysis for the Keystone Peak prescribed fire in the Sierrita Mountains; negotiation and funding of a pre and post-fire monitoring research project of the endangered Pima Pineapple Cactus at the West Mill prescribed fire site on the King's Anvil Ranch; preparation of detailed erosion control & watershed enhancement plans for the West Mill, Las Delicias and Elkhorn prescribed fire sites to be installed early in 2014 prior to burning; and the establishment of a biannual fire meeting program to plan prescribed fires and response to wildfire.

Monitoring continues at the Alliance's largest restoration project to date, the Elkhorn/Las Delicias Demonstration Project, installed in January 2012. The project showcased the planning, installation and monitoring of watershed restoration practices in arroyos and associated uplands over an approximately 1,500 acre project site. Volunteer Forrest Sherman and expert range conservationist Dan Robinett gathered students from the University of Arizona (UA) Tierra Seca Club, landowners and the US Natural Resources Conservation Service to conduct vegetation monitoring. Preliminary photo point comparison and data on drainage channels with erosion control structures show increases in soil deposition and vegetation growth, two positive signs of restoration success. Look for news early in 2014 when the project team reconvenes to evaluate monitoring data and project results in detail.



Dan Robinett and Katie Cline teaching the crew about how to record vegetation species and channel substrate.
(Photo credit: Mary Miller)



Onsite planning for the installation of erosion control measures under the NFWF grant.
(Photo credit: Sarah King)

Last spring, the Alliance's Scientific Advisory Board launched a discussion nicknamed the "Altar Valley Watershed Charter," designed to craft a shared vision of the future of the Altar Valley. Over 30 Altar Valley partners attended the workshop, which was facilitated by Southwest Decision Resources. We are developing a web-based tool that will synthesize the discussions held by the Charter group, serve as a guide for partners at work in the valley and facilitate communication between watershed project teams. The Scientific Advisory Board also developed a "research protocol" to help scientists work effectively with landowners, and a research agenda to guide efforts in the watershed. Finally, the 2014 Altar Valley Watershed Research Fellowship was awarded to UA graduate Morgan Pfander to prepare an annotated Altar Valley bibliography housed within the Global Rangelands database co-founded by the University of Arizona.



A view of the undeveloped valley taken from a helicopter. This is the landscape through which the pipeline would travel. (Photo credit: Sarah King)

Last, but not least, the Alliance and its partners participated in ongoing environmental analysis of the proposed Sierrita Lateral Pipeline Project (formerly Sasabe Lateral). Corporate giant Kinder Morgan seeks to construct a 36- inch pipeline through the Altar Valley to deliver natural gas from the United States to Mexico. The least environmentally friendly “west route”, that cuts through undisturbed land at the foot of the Baboquivari Mountains, has emerged as the preferred route. Draft environmental impact statement comments are due December 16, 2013. The release of the final environmental impact statement is projected for April 2014 and Kinder Morgan aims to deliver gas by fall 2014. The Alliance opposes location of the pipeline in the Altar Valley. We have also invested energy in critiquing the restoration strategy and mitigation planning, should the project come to pass. We continue to maintain a

website, www.altarvalleyaction.com, where you can learn more about the proposed project and how to voice your opinions and concerns.

This time of year marks the first anniversary of the Alliance’s transition into a more mature organization with paid employees. We thank Program Administrator Sherie Steele and Program Director Sarah King for their steady work and dedication. Sherie’s attention to financial and board management detail is critical to our success as a professional non-profit organization. Sarah’s dedication to work with partners and communication is the heart of collaborative conservation.

Between November 1, 2012 and October 31, 2013, the Alliance received \$15,003 in contributions. The Alliance received \$95,250 in grants that went to work in the field matched by in-kind contributions and donated goods and services totaling \$239,992.



A glimpse into a day spent ranching in the Altar Valley. (Photo credit: Sarah King)

Your partnership and financial support are essential to us. Sierrita Pipeline work has stretched our resources. Sadly, Farm Bill politics and federal belt-tightening have ended a highly successful cost and work-sharing program with our critical partner, the US Natural Resources Conservation Service, that supported landowner contacts, monitoring and communications activities. Your financial generosity is thus more important than ever as we transition to new sources to help sustain our programs.

Thank you for your steady support of collaborative conservation in the Altar Valley! There is no question that we get more good work done collectively than any entity can accomplish individually. We look forward to seeing you out here on the land in 2014! Happy Holidays to you and your families and colleagues!

The Altar Valley Conservation Alliance Board

*Patricia King (President)
Mary Miller (Vice-President/Programs)
Heather Fox (Vice-President/Operations)
Walter Lane (Treasurer)
Sue Chilton*

*Mary Kasulaitis
Tom Kay
Dee Lusby
Peggy Rowley
Tom Sheridan*

P.S. Keep up with the Alliance all year by visiting our website, www.altarvalleyconservation.org and signing up for our e-news – plus find us on Facebook and Twitter!