



Altar Valley Conservation Alliance 2014 Year in Review

Dear Friends,

Another year has flown by here in the Altar Valley! 2014 was a monumental one for us, and we'd like to pause to reflect on it and share the year's accomplishments with you.

Our second National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant continued to be the focus of most of our work. In early November 2013, we completed surveys for the endangered Pima pineapple cactus at our West Mill NFWF site. This work was led by AVCA contractor Bob Schmalzel and a team from the Southwest Conservation Corps. In February of 2014, Steve Carson of Rangeland Hands and Forrest Sherman conducted restoration work at the West Mill and Las Delicias NFWF sites. Plans were made for post-fire seeding at the Pig Mountain site. During the summer, planning began at two new NFWF sites: the Northern Altar Wash Area, and the Arivaca Creek - North Branch Area.

While all of those things by themselves represent excellent progress in work on the ground, the most exciting part of our NFWF grant this past year was seeing a prescribed fire take place on June 12, 2014 at the Las Delicias site! Why is this burn so exciting? Fire reintroduction has been one of our major goals to enhance the natural landscape within the Altar Valley since our organization's inception. Prescribed fire is a valuable tool to maintain and improve rangelands for livestock and wildlife. However, factors such as funding, fuel, permits, burn plans, and the need for a liability carrier can all easily limit our ability to use prescribed fire.

In early March 2014, the Las Delicias site became the top contender for burning, but one of the complicating factors of completing a burn is finding a liability carrier. When our planned liability carrier fell through, the neighboring Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (BANWR) fire crew expressed their willingness to conduct the fire. Since the area is known to be habitat for the endangered Pima Pineapple Cactus, surveys for the plant had to be completed prior to burning. Alterations in survey guidelines were resolved and granted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in late March 2014. Surveys were completed by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), BANWR Fire Crews, the Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) and the Las Delicias Ranch on both the Las Delicias Ranch and the BANWR sides of the planned burn in mid-April. Meanwhile, the ranch applied for a Land Treatment permit from ASLD, and received the approved permit in early May. Then, on June 12, 2014, under the guidance of the BANWR fire crews, the match was lit for the Las Delicias prescribed burn! This collaborative effort showcased the best of the Altar Valley's teamwork and every player was essential to the burn's success.

When we wrote to you last year, the Alliance and partners were in the midst of the review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Sierrita Lateral Pipeline Project (formerly Sasabe Lateral). We submitted extensive comments by the December 16, 2013 deadline. While we waited for the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on March 28, 2014, we continued conversations with both our partners and Sierrita Gas Pipeline LLC with regard to the restoration strategy and monitoring. On June 2, 2014, as it became clear that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission would allow the pipeline to proceed through the Altar Valley, the Alliance signed a settlement agreement with the pipeline company. The Alliance agreed to withdraw opposition to the Project, and the company agreed to provide the Alliance with \$1 million to aid in valley-wide projects, including direct support of watershed-wide restoration of the Altar Wash floodplain and its tributary systems. The AVCA

Board has used these funds to establish the *KM/Sierrita Pipeline Endowment* that will provide sustained funding for Altar Valley watershed work for years to come.

The settlement agreement did not waive any of the Alliance's rights to continue to be involved in conversations surrounding the pipeline, nor our right to subsequently publicly challenge Sierrita with respect to any failure by Sierrita to abide by any of the applicable conditions and requirements set forth in permits and approvals for the Project. The pipeline installation occurred over the summer, and went into service on November 1, 2014. We helped to facilitate the first conversation amongst the stakeholders regarding the monitoring of the right-of-way in October 2014, and hope this sets the stage for a thorough community-driven monitoring and restoration process.

Between November 1, 2013 and October 31, 2014, the Alliance received \$22,618 in contributions, including a bequest of \$8,500. The Alliance received \$77,070 in grant funds that went to work in the field, matched by in-kind contributions and donated goods and services totaling nearly \$220,000. As mentioned above, we have established a permanent endowment for future projects with the funds received from Sierrita Gas Pipeline LLC.

2015 will be upon us shortly, and we are excited to celebrate 15 years as a 501(c)3 not-for-profit and 20 years as an Alliance! We will continue to focus on our NFWF work of restoration and prescribed fire implementation. Also on the horizon is the 2015 Pima County Bond Election, which is projected to include the \$1.5 million Altar Valley Watershed Restoration Project, as well as completion of the Marley Ranch open space acquisition. We hope you'll join us in celebrating this coming year by continuing your steady support of collaborative conservation in the Altar Valley! As this year's projects demonstrate, we get more done on the ground as a collective than we ever could individually. Happy Holidays to you and your families and colleagues!

The Altar Valley Conservation Alliance Board

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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!