



Altar Valley Conservation Alliance 2015 Year in Review

Dear Friends,

It's that time of year again – the time to express our thanks to all of you and share the collective accomplishments achieved in the Altar Valley watershed! 2015 marked the Alliance's twentieth year at work in the valley, as we strive to conserve the Altar Valley for future generations.

We spent 2015 plugging away on our eight conservation action sites created under our National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant (NFWF). While our efforts weren't nearly as glamorous as 2014 with the prescribed burn conducted at the Las Delicias site, they were important nonetheless. We are deeply grateful for the hard work of Dan Robinett, Larry Humphrey, and Steve Carson, who are the contractors responsible for fire planning and erosion control installation at our conservation action sites. We launched planning at two new conservation action sites: the Northern Altar Wash Area and the Noon Ranch. Prescribed fire projects at two older sites, the West Mill and Pig Mountain, were delayed by challenges related to fire liability coverage and drought. We can't control the weather, but liability solutions should be possible. We are working with the Arizona Prescribed Fire Council to encourage the State Legislature to pass "Right to Burn" laws that will create an environment in which insurance companies would be able to sell burn liability insurance. Without these provisions, prescribed burning is essentially halted, as conducting prescribed burning without insurance is an immense risk that most individuals and corporations are unwilling to take.



Bill Zeedyk and Steve Carson teaching in the field at the Elk/LD site. (Photo credit: Sarah King)

The Elkhorn/Las Delicias Demonstration Project continues to draw visitors from around the world to the Altar Valley to see our on-the-ground conservation activities! It is a hands-on classroom that allows Altar Valley visitors to see low-tech conservation measures at work in the valley. In November, University of Arizona's Tierra Seca Club joined AVCA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and other partners at the site for the annual monitoring field day. AVCA has hired Kelsey Hawkes as a Monitoring Technician and Naomi Orchard as our first Conservation Education Intern, responsible for creating signs to guide visitors through the Elkhorn/Las Delicias site. We are delighted to have them on board!



A Desert Museum Earth Ambassador at work in the Altar Valley. (Photo credit: Mary Miller)

A new partnership with the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in which their youth leadership corps group, Earth Ambassadors, visits the Altar Valley seasonally to do volunteer work adds youth to our mix of Altar Valley stewards – a long time AVCA goal. During monsoon season, they installed a pollinator garden at Elkhorn Ranch and this winter they will do maintenance work and a "Bio-Blitz" monitoring day at the Elkhorn/Las Delicias Demonstration site.

In December, the AVCA Science Advisory Board convened a planning retreat focused on the Altar Wash that flows through the heart of the valley. The severe erosion of the wash began in the early 20th century, and is now 20 miles long, 20 feet deep and as much as 1,500 feet wide. The retreat, co-sponsored with the Pima Natural Resource Conservation District, gathered restoration practitioners, scientists, resource managers, and local landowners to develop strategies. Healing the Altar Wash is one of the key issues



A horseback view over the valley. (Photo credit: Ziembra Photographic)

around which the Alliance was founded and we are hopeful that this retreat will lay the foundation to turn ideas into action!

Alliance operations are increasingly complex, and our staff keeps all of the irons in the fire. 2015 saw staff changes, and 2016 promises to bring more as we continue to build our capacity. Sherie Steele remains our Program Administrator. Sarah King refocused back into the role of Community Outreach and Education Coordinator, following her maternity leave. Mary Miller became the Alliance's first Executive Director – though that didn't change much in the functioning of the organization, as the title merely reflects the tireless work that Mary has put into the Alliance

over the past 20 years! We are recruiting for a new, full-time position: the Conservation and Science Coordinator. We hope this employee will continue to establish the Alliance as a science-based organization that serves the needs of our agriculture producers, and helps them continue to care for the working landscape of the Altar Valley.

Between November 1, 2014 and October 31, 2015, the Alliance received \$21,050 in contributions. The Alliance received \$40,000 in new grant funds from Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold Foundation and applied our multi-year National Fish & Wildlife grant to work in the field, matched by in-kind contributions and donated goods and services totaling nearly \$265,585.

We look forward to the new possibilities promised by 2016! We will continue to focus on the restoration and prescribed fire implementation work funded by our NFWF grant, along with working toward the restoration of the Altar Wash. We remain indebted to all of you for your continued support of the important conservation work taking place out here on the ground. It is a joy to see that the Altar Valley is as important to all of you as it is to those of us who call it home. 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!