Thank you for a Great Year

The Altar Valley Conservation Alliance (AVCA) has enjoyed a successful year thanks to our donors, members, cooperative governmental agencies and their personnel, as well as other private and community organizations. Together we continue to find ways to help protect and preserve the more than 600,000 productive acres that lie in the Altar Valley Watershed. Here are a few highlights of this year’s successes.

- AVCA has a created a stronger working relationship with Arizona Game and Fish Department and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in a joint effort to help design a Safe Harbor agreement for the reintroduction and protection of the Chiricahua Leopard Frog.

- Cooperative work with USFWS is ongoing regarding a fire management plan that will include the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Reserve (BANWR), and other lands in the Altar Valley.

- The new manager of the BANWR, Mitch Elles, has met with the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance. He is interested in working with the AVCA on many areas of shared concern including fire plans, habitat, property destruction by illegal aliens and the sharing of scientific information garnered from on-the-land projects.

- Kathleen Ryan of the Arizona Department of Agriculture met with the AVCA to explain the newly created Livestock & Crop Conservation Fund. This grant program was created by the State Legislature through the "Growing Smarter" initiative. The grants will be available to assist ranchers and farmers with the implementation of conservation projects that provide for the preservation of open space.

- The Alliance completed its first annual assessment for USFWS regarding the Pima Pineapple Cactus mitigation bank on the Palo Alto Ranch.

- New collaborative efforts are under way between the Alliance and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson. Thanks to a grant from the Alliance, Robles Elementary in the Altar Valley School District was able to bring the Desert Museum’s Desert Ark to the school to teach the children about our Sonoran Desert animals.

- Thanks to the Helen Clay Frick Foundation, riparian restoration expert, Bill Zeedyk spent two days visiting several Altar Valley ranches. He returned January 10, 2005, to present a public workshop.

- The Alliance, in partnership with the Southeast Arizona Land Trust hosted a community meeting on rangeland conservation in June.

- Pima County Administrator, Chuck Huckelberry and Diana Freshwater of the Arizona Open Land Trust met with the AVCA executive committee to describe the county’s efforts to preserve open space either through the purchase of the land or to purchase conservation easements on large parcels of land. Pima County voters recently approved a $173 million bond package that will allow the county to buy land for its Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan.

Thank You to everyone and may you have a bright, healthy and happy new year!

Make Rain Runoff Work for You


Bill Zeedyk, riparian restoration specialist, presented the featured program, “Assessing the uplands and their relation to the Arroyo.” He talked about low-cost, low-impact techniques to promote natural recovery of degraded riparian areas as well as uplands altered by erosion. Zeedyk spent two days in the Altar Valley in November, hosted by Pat and John King of the Anvil Ranch. Zeedyk visited several Altar Valley ranches and commented on erosion caused by road grading practices and pointed out how upland water runoff problems affect valleys and streams below. His big message to all landowners is to disperse the water — disperse — disperse — disperse. One inch of rain falling on one acre of compacted road surface can yield up to 27,000 gallons of water. This water runoff accelerates as it rushes downhill, damaging roadsways, eroding soil, generates gullies and robs the landscape of life-giving moisture. Zeedyk emphasized that all land owners should look for sites where your efforts will have the most effect. Start small and resist the desire to pile up a lot of rocks. One-rock-high dams and curved rock dams called medallunas will slow water runoff without causing additional erosion. The idea is to filter the water through the rocks so that sediment will build up and form a bed for new plant growth. He also made suggestions on road grading practices to mitigate erosion and how to induce meanders in gullies to slow runoff.

Zeedyk holds a B.S. degree in Forestry (Wildlife Management) from the University of New Hampshire. He retired from the U.S. Forest Service in 1990 after 34 years of service. His last assignment before retirement was as the Staff Director for Wildlife and Fisheries Management, Southwestern Region, Albuquerque, N.M. He owns and operates a small consulting business specializing in the restoration of wetland and riparian habitats using low tech, hands on methods and native materials. He has many successful projects throughout the Southwest and Mexico and various state, federal, tribal and non-profit agencies have sponsored his workshops.

Nathan Sayre, associate professor of Geography at the University of California at Berkeley, presented his history of the Altar Valley Wash. Sayre has spent several years in the area, researching the impact of ranching, the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge and weather on the ecology of the valley. Ray Turner has researched the changes over time in the ecology of Southern Arizona and is the author of The Changing Mile Revisited. Van Clothier works on various watershed restoration projects in New Mexico and the Southwest.
AYCA Welcomes New Refuge Manager

Mitch Ellis, the newly-appointed manager of the Buena Vista National Wildlife Refuge, located in the heart of the Altar Valley, was welcomed at the agency’s annual meeting on May 29, 2004. The meeting was hosted by Rob and Mary Kasnati.

Mitt said that he had been job hunting for a few weeks when he enthusiastically accepted our invitation to meet his neighbors in the Altar Valley.

Mitt is a smart and conscientious man who grew up in Ajo, Arizona. His father, who worked for Phelps Dodge Copper, taught him a lot about nature. The love of the desert came naturally to Mitt and he was inspired to pursue a career in conservation, by his best friend’s father, who is a refuge manager.

Mitt pursued a wildlife ecology degree at the University of Arizona and went on to work at a variety of refuges in Arizona, Alabama, and West Virginia. Before landing his first management position at the Imperial National Wildlife Refuge based in Yuma, Arizona. His most recent position, Law Enforcement Chief for the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) National Wildlife Refuge System, took him to Washington, D.C.

Mitt stressed to the Alliance his willingness to be a good neighbor. He promised an open door policy and said that he would work with the Alliance as much as possible. He is bound by Federal law to apprise any refuge in a certain manner. He made it clear that he had to work within the confines of his federally mandated duties, but felt by being "open and honest" as a refuge manager.

—Senta Strand, Field Coordinator, Save the Altar Valley Meeting, June 2004

Land Protection—HOW TO KEEP RANCHERS RANCHING

The Alliance, in partnership with Southeast Arizona Land Trust and the Arizona Community College, is again hosting their community meeting to reach land protection. California ranchers, Darrel and Karen Swett, speak from the story of the California Rangeland Trust (CRT).

The CRT is a land trust developed about seven years ago by California’s equivalent of the Arizona Cattlemen’s Associations. It was born out of the need of ranching and farming families who wanted to preserve their lands and protect them from development.

The organizations like The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Lands, the Arizona Land and Water Trust, and the UA are beginning to explore collaborative ways to keep land in active use.

Land and Conservation easement transactions involving ranches, but ranchers often are not comfortable with these organizations.

Every conservation easement has an effect on the steward of the estate. These organizations are developing creative options and management agreements.

The organization finds that landowners will not consider the stewardship of the estate. These organizations are developing creative options and management agreements.

Senta Strand says: "We always learn more about CRT, a land trust, and the Alliance Grease California. Let’s talk about what we are doing in the Altar Valley. Let’s share ideas about successful ranch protection projects that have been developed with the Arizona Range Land Trust.

Many California ranchers now greet the news of endangered species on their land with, "How much are they worth?" rather than regarding the regulations and lawsuits as threats to their land uses. They see the need for preserving these species as the only way to ensure their survival.

The Swetts emphasized the importance of getting partners on board to protect the endangered species projects on our land. They have found that working together with ranchers and farmers who share a common goal can make it easier for them to work together and reach common goals.

The Alliance has been working this summer to build relationships with other organizations and individuals with technical expertise on land protection. If you have questions about land ownership or conservation easement purchase, you might consider contacting Senta Strand, Executive Director of Southeast Arizona Land Trust and the Alliance Grease California.

The Alliance has a long-standing relationship with the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, and has bundles of real estate for sale in the Altar Valley. They are always looking for new partners to help with their conservation efforts.

Executive Director of Southeast Arizona Land Trust (SALT) (520) 455-592, Peter Warren at The Nature Conservancy in Tucson, or Diana Freshwater at the Arizona Open Land Trust (520) 395-5925.

The following is an excerpt from the Arizona Land and Water Trust’s newsletter, written by Pima County’s Water Conservation Program.

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The Desert Museum came to my school

by Clara Miller, age 7

The Desert Museum came to my school. They showed us a slide show. We sang a song. Then we saw animals. My favorite was the ring-tail. It eats bugs and sleeps at day and comes out at night.

Thank you Desert Museum, Robles Elementary and the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance.

Alicia and Clara Miller, Elizabeth McGibbon, and Matthew and John King—representatives of the next generation of Altar Valley ranchers—thank you for your generous support and enthusiasm about our work and wish you a Happy New Year! Your gifts help the Alliance spread the word about the beauty and importance of the Altar Valley watershed. A special thanks to all the Elkhorn Ranch guests who have heard about the Alliance through Mary and Charley Miller and The Rainmaker.

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Gene and Charity Tucker
Deanne and Tom Urmy
Peter and Gail Wilson
Alice and Hellmut Wohl
Christopher Zeoli and Charlotte Tate

Please share your ideas and questions with us!

The Altar Valley Conservation Alliance needs your ideas and support! Please contact any of the Executive Committee by phone or by mail at:

Altar Valley Conservation Alliance
c/o King Anvil Ranch
HC 1 Box 97E
Tucson, AZ 85736

Your financial support is greatly appreciated!

$ 35 $ 50 $ 100
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