

Inside this Issue

- 1**
- Another Arroyo Saved: Thunder Canyon Conservation Easement
 - Frontera Land Holdings as of May 2007

- 2**
- Frontera Receives World Wildlife Fund Grant
 - Land Trusts 101—Coming Soon

- 3**
- From the Board
 - Renew Now!
 - Advisory Board Members
 - Board of Directors Members

- 4** MEMBERSHIP FORM

Special Places
Wide Open Spaces

The Frontera Land Alliance
3800 N. Mesa, Suite A2-258
El Paso, TX 79902 USA



Another Arroyo Saved: The Thunder Canyon Conservation Easement

May 8, 2007, marked a key step in the progress of El Paso's local land trust: completion of our first conservation easement transaction! To make the story even more interesting, this easement covers a parcel of land owned by the City of El Paso that was purchased through a Public Improvement District—a very unusual and creative multi-party approach to natural resource preservation.

Thunder Canyon is a 26-acre natural arroyo in the western slopes of the Franklin Mountains that was formerly owned by a private development company. Over the past two years, neighbors of the canyon have worked with the City to create a PID and purchase the property. Essentially, the 88 households surrounding Thunder Canyon are taxing themselves to pay off the purchase price; the land will belong to the citizens of El Paso for all of us to enjoy forever. A conservation easement was established to preserve the canyon's scenic vistas and native wildlife habitat in perpetuity.

By accepting this easement, The Frontera Land Alliance takes on the responsibility to monitor and defend the conservation values of Thunder Canyon. It's not something to be undertaken lightly, but we were able to do so at no expense to the taxpayers or the members of the PID

thanks to very generous donations from El Paso Electric Company and Texas Gas Service. We'd like to express our deep appreciation to both companies for underwriting this project and giving us the means to move forward with it.



Above: Members of Frontera's Board of Directors survey Thunder Canyon in September 2005

We also wish to offer special thanks to City Representative Ann Morgan Lilly for facilitating the process and giving our board another opportunity to fulfill Frontera's public benefit mission.

The real heroes of this story are the 88 households of the Thunder Canyon PID whose outstanding generosity and public-spiritedness is truly inspiring. We are very optimistic that their example will lead to more creative efforts in our community to preserve El Paso's special places. Congratulations to all who worked so hard to bring this effort to such a delightful conclusion! ■

Frontera Land Holding As of May 2007:

Acquired 2005:

- Wakeem/Teschner Nature Preserve at Resler Canyon (approx. 91 acres)
- Colonia Vista parcel (approx. 5 acres)

Acquired 2007:

- Thunder Canyon Conservation Easement (approx. 25 acres)



Above: Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, with water. Summer 2003

Frontera Receives World Wildlife Fund Grant

In March 2007 The Frontera Land Alliance was awarded \$8,000 from the World Wildlife Fund's Chihuahuan Desert Program. The grant will support Frontera's efforts to establish a water rights transfer program to benefit Rio Bosque Wetlands Park in El Paso's Mission Valley. The Coca-Cola Company was the primary donor of the funding.

Historically, the wetlands and riverside woodlands of the Rio Grande valley were the biologically richest habitats in the El Paso-Juárez region. Today, they are virtually gone. Past land- and water-management practices did not accommodate the needs of native ecosystems, and a vital part of our natural heritage gradually disappeared.

Over time, many people began to realize the importance of these river-valley habitats and became committed to reversing their loss. Rio Bosque Wetlands Park is a living example of that commitment.

At 372 acres in size, it is El Paso's largest city-owned park and natural area. It is also the site of a federal wetlands mitigation project: in 1997 the U. S. Section, International Boundary and Water Commission

(USIBWC) reconstructed the historic channel of the Rio Grande where it once meandered through the park-land. Working from a design crafted by Ducks Unlimited, the USIBWC created a system whereby water flowing through this channel can be diverted to a series of large, shallow wetland cells.

The infrastructure for a significant wetland is in place, but Rio Bosque has not been able to achieve its full biological, educational, and economic potential due to the lack of a guaranteed water supply during the growing season. Any wetland restoration effort in an arid region faces the challenge of how to integrate ecosystem health with the many competing demands for water from urban, agricultural and industrial users. The way a community allocates a vital but scarce resource reflects the values and relative interests of its members.

The Frontera Land Alliance recognized an opportunity for private citizens to address Rio Bosque's water needs. With financial support from WWF grant, the land trust has embarked on a project to establish a "user-friendly" mechanism whereby landowners with unused water rights can transfer or assign their water rights to Frontera, which Frontera will then exercise at Rio Bosque. The idea is to make Rio Bosque a regular customer of El Paso County Water Improvement District No. 1, and fully

We are very grateful to WWF's Chihuahuan Desert Program for supporting Frontera's work and giving such a boost to our fledgling organization. WWF maintains a very informative website about many aspects of the Chihuahuan Desert at:

<http://worldwildlife.org/wildplaces/cd/index.cfm>.

To learn more about Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, please visit www.riobosque.org.

integrate the park into the existing irrigation network.

Once the details of the transfer mechanism have been worked out, Frontera will set about recruiting water rights holders to donate their precious resource to this community project. It will take the contributions of many people of good will to build up a sufficient supply to meet the park's needs. If you have an interest in helping cottonwoods and willows flourish at Rio Bosque, please let us know! ■

Land Trusts 101 -- Coming Soon

The Frontera Land Alliance is partnering with the Texas Land Trust Council to organize the Trans Pecos/West Texas Regional Land and Water Trust Workshop--another first for us! Saturday, November 3, 2007, a panel of field professionals will present a full day of seminars on the nuts and bolts of land preservation, covering topics of interest to landowners, government officials, and citizen conservationists. If you're interested in attending, please drop a line to info@tfla.net and we'll keep you posted as we get the location, schedule, etc., finalized. Everyone is invited to attend! ■

From the Board:

Castner Range is a former US Army firing range located in northeast El Paso. Each spring the lower slopes of Castner Range explode with color when wild Gold Poppies carpet the rugged desert terrain, a display found nowhere else in Texas.

The City of El Paso's 2007 Open Space Master Plan states, "Permanent long term preservation of the 7,000 acre Castner Range property should be a high priority of the City of El Paso. This property forms the foothills of the Franklin Mountains, and includes many alluvial fans that are not found elsewhere along the base of the mountain range."

Due to the presence of unexploded ordnance (UXO), the range remains closed to public entry as Fort Bliss gradually clears the land of hazards. Under the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act, the Army is responsible for the clean-up of all UXO on Castner Range. It cannot transfer this responsibility, or liability associated with UXO, to any other party. In 1981 the Texas Legislature provided for adjusting the boundary of adjacent Franklin Mountains State Park (FMSP) for the future addition of

Castner Range. However, presence of UXO has hindered the direct transfer of the land to the State for reasons of public safety and liability.

Recently, Congress created a new means for continuing natural resource stewardship on military lands. The Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act of FY2003 authorized conveyance of surplus military real property to nonprofit organizations that exist for the primary purpose of conservation of natural resources on real property (Section 2694a of Title 10 of the US Code). The deed of conveyance shall require the property to be used and maintained for the conservation of natural resources in perpetuity. This mechanism is known as a conservation conveyance.

As a RAND Corporation Research Brief explains, "Congress authorized this mechanism to conserve ecologically valuable lands more expeditiously, recognizing that a large-scale cleanup might not be necessary on lands where human access and activities would be restricted." A conservation conveyance would establish immediate perpetual protection for all of Castner Range while the work of clearing the land of UXO continues. Under these terms, the Army would continue

clearance of UXO as time and funds permit. Section 2694a provides that the recipient of real property may convey it to another eligible entity, including a state or a political subdivision of a state, subject to the same deed restrictions. Thus, when UXO clearance is complete, the non-profit intermediary would convey all of Castner Range to the State of Texas for addition to FMSP.

The first application of a Conservation Conveyance took place in September 2003 when the Army transferred the 57,632-acre Honey Lake Primary Parcel near Herlong, CA, to an affiliate of the not-for-profit Center for Urban Watershed Renewal. Once this former Sierra Army Depot land is cleaned up, it will be transferred to the California State Lands Commission who will add it to the State Wildlife Refuge System. ■

RENEW NOW!

With the arrival of summer Frontera begins its third year of memberships. If you would like to keep receiving this newsletter, please take a minute to renew your membership using the form on the last page of this newsletter and mail it in. Thanks! ■

As of May 2007:

**THE FRONTERA LAND ALLIANCE
BOARD OF ADVISORS**
Wynn Anderson, Chihuahuan Desert Gardens, UTEP
Lois Balin, Texas Parks & Wildlife Division
Don Baumgardt, Pinata Publishing
Marshall Carter-Tripp, Centennial Museum, UTEP
Helen Cooke, Coronado Neighborhood Assn.
Miki Cutler, Ex-Treasurer, TFLA
John Moses, Texas Parks & Wildlife
John Sproul, Rio Bosque Wetlands Park
Marcia Turner, Upper Mesa Hills Neighborhood Assn.
John Walton, Dept. of Civil Engineering, UTEP

**THE FRONTERA LAND ALLIANCE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**
Maria Trunk, President
Kevin von Finger, Vice-President
Scott Cutler, Secretary
Charlie Wakeem, Treasurer
Nancy Hanks, Newsletter Editor
Jamie Ackerman
Michael Bray
Doug Echlin
Michael Gaglio
Chuck Kooshian
Amy Schoemaker

**YES! I want to help The Frontera Land Alliance preserve the special places
and wide open spaces of West Texas and Southern New Mexico.**

Enclosed is my contribution for:

\$25 \$40 \$75 \$100 \$250 other

Please designate my contribution to the Wakeem/Teschner Nature Preserve (Resler Canyon) endowment fund.

Please use my contribution for general support of Frontera projects and programs.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State, ZIP: _____

Email: _____

Does your employer have a matching gift program? If so, please note the contact information:

Please make checks payable to **The Frontera Land Alliance** and send to:
3800 N. Mesa, Suite A2-258, El Paso, TX 79902

Contributions are deductible for federal income tax purposes.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

The Frontera Land Alliance
3800 N. Mesa, Suite A2-258
El Paso, TX 79902 USA

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED