



Easement conserves 315,000 acres at southern NM ranch

BY **THERESA DAVIS / JOURNAL STAFF WRITER**

PUBLISHED: FRIDAY, MARCH 18TH, 2022 AT 10:05PM

UPDATED: SATURDAY, MARCH 19TH, 2022 AT 12:05AM



A desert bighorn sheep roams Ted Turner's Armendaris Ranch in southern New Mexico. Following a deal nearly five years in the making, 315,000 acres of the ranch is now under a permanent conservation easement with the New Mexico Land Conservancy and the U.S. Department of Defense. (Courtesy of Turner Enterprises)

Copyright © 2022 Albuquerque Journal

Desert bighorn sheep, bison and thousands of bats call the Armendaris Ranch in southern New Mexico home.

Owned by media mogul and conservationist Ted Turner, the ranch spans along the Rio Grande from Bosque del Apache to just south of Elephant Butte Lake.

advertisement

Now 315,000 acres is permanently protected from subdivision and harmful development under a conservation easement with the New Mexico Land Conservancy and U.S. Department of Defense.

The deal was nearly five years in the making and is the biggest yet for the land conservancy, said southern program director Ron Troy.

"It's pretty neat when you look at the connectivity of this unfragmented habitat along a really important corridor of the Rio Grande," Troy said.

Turner, the 83-year-old who launched CNN, owns about 1 million acres in New Mexico.

advertisement

The ranch in Socorro and Sierra counties is known for the Jornada Bat Caves and research on bighorn sheep, tortoises and falcons.



Bison roam Armendaris Ranch in Socorro and Sierra counties. The ranch, which spans the Rio Grande from Bosque del Apache to just south of Elephant Butte Lake, is known for its research on bighorn sheep, tortoises and falcons. (Courtesy of Turner Enterprises)

“Looking at it from a large landscape scale, the Fra Cristobal mountain range is entirely located on the ranch,” Troy said.

“Agencies now use that as a source population to reintroduce sheep into areas like the Sacramento area near Alamogordo.”

The easement was funded in part by a federal program that protects a buffer zone around White Sands Missile Range and other military sites. The parties aren't disclosing how much the ranch was paid for the easement.

advertisement

Turner donated a little more than half of the value of the easement.

Brian Knight, environmental division chief at White Sands, said the project preserves open space and restricts development such as transmission lines and wind turbines that could impact nearby military operations.

Some weapons system testing can only be done at White Sands because of its sheer 2.3 million acre size.

North of the range is about 870,000 acres of restricted airspace that is normally open and managed by the Federal Aviation Administration.

advertisement

“But if we have a special need to do a certain kind of mission, we can call up that airspace and it becomes restricted for things like low-level test flights,” Knight said. “We also have the same thing in the west called the western call-up area, and within that is a portion of the Armendaris Ranch.”

The Civil War battle of Valverde took place in 1862 on an area that is now the ranch.

Historic towns on the land were part of the transportation route for atomic bombs to the Trinity Site during the Manhattan Project.

The Army has also funded about 40,000 acres of conservation easements on ranches north of White Sands.

advertisement



Bats take flight from the Jornada Caves at Armendaris Ranch. At least eight bat species stop at the caves during migration season. (Courtesy of Turner Enterprises)

The Armendaris conservation easement is the largest ever completed under the military buffer project program.

Only half of the Turner ranch is actually within the range's buffer boundaries.

But Knight said the larger easement worked for everyone involved.

advertisement

“As we develop more long-range weapons systems and things like hypersonic testing, we could need to expand that restricted airspace to allow for future missions,” he said.

Knight emphasized that ensuring options for future military work is important for the site that is a major economic driver in southern New Mexico.

About 25,000 ranch acres were excluded from the easement to allow for renewable energy projects and ecotourism.

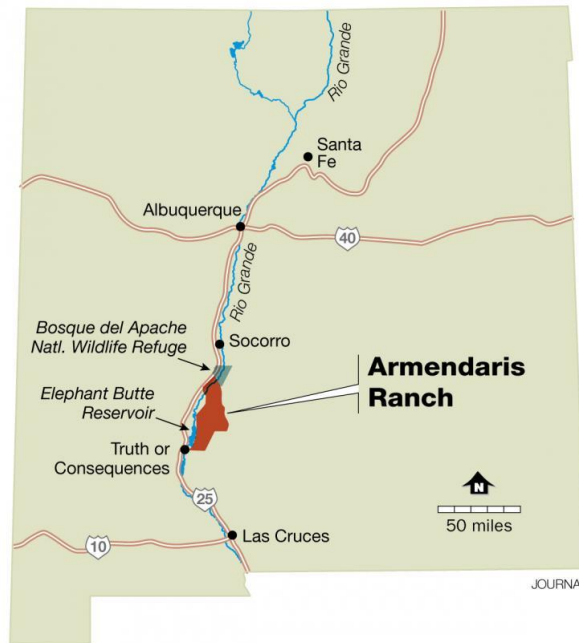
The project balances conservation and economics, said Scott Wilber, executive director of the New Mexico Land Conservancy.

advertisement

“So often when we go to a national park or a monument or refuge, we don't always think about the surrounding land, the

backdrop, which often is private land,” Wilber said. “To continue protecting those viewsheds and connectivity, private land conservation is really important.”

Phillip Evans, a spokesman for Turner Enterprises, said the easement is “vital to (the ranch’s) preservation and protection for generations to come.”



“As stewards of biodiversity-rich lands, our company’s commitment to the environment is consistent with the management philosophy of our ranches and properties – innovatively managing our lands to be ecologically sustainable while promoting the

conservation of native species,” Evans said in a statement.

The land conservancy now oversees about 650,000 acres of conservation easements in the state.

Department of Defense funding enabled the land trust to hire biologists, surveyors and title companies for the easement work.

The land trust will monitor the easements and issue annual reports to the Army.

“It’s not only about conserving land – there are financial benefits from conservation, including employment,” Wilber said.

Theresa Davis is a Report for America corps member covering water and the environment for the Albuquerque Journal.

[Home](#) » [ABQnews Seeker](#) » **Easement conserves 315,000 acres at southern NM ranch**

SPONSORED CONTENT



Which Travel Cards Have The Most Valuable Miles? [↗](#)

By [Wise Bread](#)

These no-hassle travel cards have no annual fee and offer the most valuable miles on the market.

Albuquerque Journal and its reporters are committed to telling the stories of our community.

• Do you have a question you want someone to try to answer for you? Do you have a bright spot you want to share?

We want to hear from you. **Please email**
yourstory@abqjournal.com
