Executive Director Corner - A Decade of Conservation

By Janie Rennefeld

The Frontera Land Alliance (Frontera) was created a decade ago. Frontera, the El Paso area’s only 501(c)3 land trust organization, works on land-conservation projects in El Paso, Hudspeth and Culberson counties as well as in southern New Mexico. Frontera was founded by citizens concerned about the changes taking place around the Franklin Mountains. A highly-important motivator was the ever-ongoing threat to sell and develop Fort Bliss’s Castner Range, located between the U.S. 54 Patriot Freeway and the eastern boundary of the Franklin Mountains State Park.

As El Paso’s landscape changed, the concern for the future of our quality of life became more urgent. Many of you may remember when the drive to Hueco Tanks State Park was wide-open desert landscapes. If you drive that route today, you’ll find nearly all developed. El Paso’s landscape has been changing—formerly open scenic views of the desert and hills and from wildlife corridors and arroyos that once went all the way from the Franklin Mountains to the Rio Grande, to developed areas.

To help address this change, Frontera purchased its first property, on December 23, 2005, the Wakenen-Teschner Nature Preserve at Resler Canyon, which we’ve owned and managed ever since. This property was conserved thanks to the devoted efforts of the Coronado Neighborhood Association, willingness of the landowner to sell and the generosity of a donor. All took action because they saw the long-term value in keeping a 14-acre arroyo open and in its natural state.

Today Resler is home to deer, coyotes and birds that have all adopted to living in the city and use this arroyo as a trail to the Rio Grande. Then in 2008 another individual donated a 5-acre tract of natural Chihuahuan desert to Frontera. This landowner also saw that the growth was moving up the side of the mountain and wanted to ensure that an area was protected and left for wildlife and people to enjoy.

Frontera has worked and continues to work with private as well as public partners. Frontera partnered with the City of El Paso to hold a conservation easement on Thunder Canyon, a 24-acre arroyo in 2007. While this was occurring Frontera was working with the office of then-Congressman Silvestre Reyes to acquire funding from the Office of Economic Adjustment. In early 2019 Frontera was awarded $500,000 to conduct research on methods to conserve Castner Range, create a land use plan, and develop education materials such as a DVD (in Spanish as well as in English) with the ultimate goal of conserving Castner Range. (Since 2010 Frontera has been working to that end with members of the Board of Directors of the Franklin Mountains Coalition, the group that led the 1978 campaign to establish the now 40-square-mile Franklin Mountains State Park.)

Over the past decade and mostly as a volunteer board, Frontera has been the beneficiary of over 1,000 volunteer hours, raised over $2,500,000.00 (includes grants, sponsorships and the donation to purchase Resler Canyol), hosted over 100 hikes, held over 50 clean-ups at Resler and Thunder canyons and conserved more than 120 acres of open natural areas in El Paso County.

Frontera has become the go-to organization for options on how to conserve land, water, ranches or farms, as well as the group that can direct you to other groups if Frontera is not the right fit. Frontera leverages its resources, has dedicated sponsors, supporters and volunteers, and is not deterred by setbacks to reach our many goals. Frontera seeks out opportunities and partnerships, and Frontera is a success.
A Visitors Center/New Headquarters for the Franklin Mountains State Park

By Richard Tscherner

The present Franklin Mountains State Park (FMSP) Headquarters is a 500 square-foot building completed in 1937 by the federal Works Projects Administration. The Headquarters are located near the end of Mescalino Canyon, more than two miles up a doping two-lane road from Alameda Street. Only four employees are able to work in the Headquarters at a time. (The FMSP has ten full-time equivalent positions.) Headquarters is located 18.5 miles from the FMSP’s Tom Lowe Unit, which of the Park’s five units is the most popular as it is home to 43 sheltered picnic sites, four restrooms, several camping areas, etc. and from the Park’s Maintenance Area, also at Tom Lowes, Texas Parks and Wildlife has always intended to site a Visitors Center Headquarters near the City of El Paso’s Museum of Archaeology on the 17-acre “Widerness Park” owned by the City, surrounded by Castner Range, and located on East Transmountain Road just a mile to the west of its intersection with the US 54 Patrol Freeway, land where the Border Patrol Museum is also built.

For several decades the Franklin Mountains Wilder- ness Coalition (FMWC) has been working towards a much larger, more accessible Visitors Center and Headquarters; since 1994, Texas Parks and Wildlife has described that project as a future intention, one entirely beyond the nation’s largest 250,000 acres = 40 square miles urban-area state park, which extends from north of Sisco Drive to the New Mexico line.

Early in April this year, a knowledgeable member of El Paso city delegation told me this: “If you really want a Visitors Center then you’ve got to hire a lobbyist.” This came as quite a shock, but after I, Jody Ackerman and others talked individually with the members of El Paso’s delegation, we concluded they were right: in the capital of the nation’s second most populous state, an Austin-based lobbyist is essential. So hired on, a fellow who’s been lobbying in Austin for over twenty years, he’s been working for a new Visitors Center Headquarters since September 2nd of this year and will do so through June 2015. His efforts, already bear fruit. In September the Parks and Wildlife Department’s Exceptional Item Request Schedule for the 2015 legislative session included the following as a Legislative Appropriations Request: “Visitors Center at Franklin Mountains State Park: A total of $3.5 million to develop and construct a WC at FMSP – the proposed 7,770 square foot center would include a viewing gallery, interpretive exhibit area, restrooms, gift shop, classrooms, storage and space for Tpwd administrative offices.” What a contrast with our present tiny Headquarters! Other good news is that in regular meeting on Tuesday, October 7th the El Paso City Council unanimously voted to include as a Priority Item the FMSP Visitors Center in its 2015 City of El Paso State of Texas Legislative Agenda. This victory was achieved by the efforts of members of the FMWC and the Castner Conservation Conveyance Committee (4CW) who visited, individually, each City Representa- tive plus the Mayor and the City Manager.

The 2015 Legislative Session convenes on Tuesday, January 13th. Before the "Lage" starts up, committees meet and hearings are held. The Session itself ditches our Senator and our five Rep- resentatives describe as “a hurricane” will require back and constant monitoring. Our lobbyist plus the City of El Paso’s lobby are already giving us that. I am confident that after more than two decades we will finally get our richly-deserved Franklin Mountains State Park Visitors Center Headquarters, a boon to El Paso’s economy and culture and to all who love and use our beautiful, large and unique state park.

Frontera 2015 Board of Directors and Meeting Dates:

- Scott Cutler, President
- Scott Winton, Vice President
- John Moses, Treasurer
- Doug Echele, Secretary
- Brenda Swanson, At Large Board Member
- Mike Gaglio, Board Member
- Charlie Valsheem, Board Member

Frontera Committee Members Include:
- Frontera Board of Directors, Jessica Chris- tiannon, Danielle Nguyen, Ruby Ann Gaglio, Mitsu Overstreet, and John D’Ascenzi

Stay Connected!

Please sign up for the monthly updates and the electronic mail, to help save costs and to stay up to date with all our current work and projects.

The Frontera Land Alliance Rock Solid Award

By Mike Gaglio

Richard Tscherner being awarded the Rock Solid Award, November 1, 2013 by Mike Gaglio and Charlie Walker

Each year we give the Rock Solid Award to an individual who embodies the spirit of land conserva- tion and has demonstrated proven, with consistency and perseverance, their commitment to making our region a better place through open space preservation. We are pleased to announce that this year’s Rock Solid Award went to Dr. Richard Tschchner. Dr. Tschchner has repeatedly given financial backing, valuable time and considerable expertise in support of the conservation of water and land in our region. Dr. Tschchner is a person who donates generously to the conservation effort and loves our mountains, the scenic beauty they provide, and the wildlife habitat they support. Dr. Tschchner’s contributions to our activities are irreplaceable.

The Frontera Land Alliance would like to thank our 2014 sponsors:

Richard Tscherner

Richard Tscherner

We appreciate the support of Washington University, the University of Chicago, and the National Academy of Sciences.

Yes, I eagerly support the preservation of our region’s land and water!

Name: __________________________
City/State/Zip: ____________________
Phone: __________________________
E-mail: __________________________

________ $1,000 Double Platinum
________ $500 Platinum
________ $250 Gold
________ $100 Silver
________ $50 Bronze
________ $25 Copper
________ Other: __________

Make checks payable and send to: Frontera Land Alliance 3800 N. Mesa Street, Suite A2-259 El Paso, TX 79902

Thank you for your support!

rc.png