

How land trusts conserve natural areas

■ Lately there's been lots of talk about conserving land in El Paso. Several groups and many individuals wish to conserve land. But how can that be done? And who can help us do it?



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FRONTERA LAND ALLIANCE

Land trust organizations, such as El Paso's Frontera Land Alliance, protect land directly by purchasing land, as it did the 91-acre Resler Canyon in 2005. Land trusts can also accept donations of land, or deploy conservation easements.

Land trusts can help landowners tailor conservation easement plans to their individual situations and financial circumstances, and determine the property's conservation values.

Land trusts can cooperate with governments in conserving properties such as the 27-acre Thunder Canyon, which the city owns and whose easement Frontera holds.

One way a landowner can help conserve natural areas, ranches and farms, is by donating an easement to Frontera, ensuring that the land will be protected and preserved in its natural state.

A conservation easement is a

voluntary, legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land to protect its conservation values, while allowing the owner to continue owning and using the land and selling it or passing it on to heirs.

Frontera and the landowners work together to write a conservation easement that reflects both the landowner's desires and the need to protect conservation values. A conservation easement restricts development to the degree necessary to protect the significant conservation values of the property. Every conservation easement is uniquely tailored to a particular landowner's goals and land.

Conservation easements are perpetual, and offer great flexibility and benefits to both the landowners and the public. If the donation meets federal tax code requirements, it can qualify as a tax-deductible charitable donation.

Conservation easements are attached to the land, binding the original owner and all subsequent owners to the easement's

restrictions. The easement is recorded at the county records office so all future owners and lenders will know about the restrictions.

The land trust is responsible for enforcing the restrictions that the easement document stipulates. The land trust monitors the property at least once a year to determine that it remains in the condition prescribed by the easement document. The land trust also maintains written records of these monitoring visits.

How does a conservation easement affect property rights? Owners of properties protected by conservation easements must abide by the agreement reached between the owner who signed it and the land trust.

All rights to the property not specifically relinquished in the easement are retained and may be exercised. The landowner owns the land, lives on it and/or uses it or can sell it, but all uses both pre-sale and post-sale must be consistent with the terms of the easement.

The landowner is obligated to pay taxes on the property and ensure that the easement's terms

are not violated.

What are the advantages of working with a land trust?

One advantage of the Frontera Land Alliance is that we are closely tied to the communities where we work. Frontera can draw on community resources, including volunteer time and skills. We are familiar with our area's land and have the trust and confidence of local landowners who may not want to work with outsiders.

In addition, since Frontera is a private organization, it can be more flexible, creative and

responsive than public or government agencies. Frontera can hold and manage land and is able to negotiate with landowners directly.

Frontera is hosting an all-day conservation easement workshop on Nov. 2 at the DoubleTree Hotel. All are welcome. To learn more, visit www.FronteraLandAlliance.org, call (915) 915-351-8352 or email janae@fronteralandalliance.org.

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Reverse Mortgages

A reverse mortgage enables homeowners (62 and older) to use a portion of the home's equity as collateral. This program can give senior citizens greater financial security. Many seniors use it to supplement social security, meet unexpected medical expenses, make home improvements and more!

For more information and to discover the benefits of this loan program, please contact:



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