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Open Space Acquisition Preserves Local Pumpkin Farm

The Arizona Open Land Trust garners a deal to permanently protect 505 acres of farmland and riparian habitat along the Brawley Wash

Tucson, AZ – The Arizona Open Land Trust announced today the purchase and permanent protection of 505 acres of farmland and riparian habitat along the Brawley wash in the Altar Valley. The \$5.1 million deal, negotiated by the Arizona Open Land Trust and in partnership with Pima County, is funded by Pima County’s Sonoran Desert Open Space and Habitat Protection Bond approved by the citizens of Pima County in 2004. The acquisition includes the transfer of 2,170 acres of state and federal leases to the County and secures 1,000 acre-feet of grandfathered irrigation water rights.

Pima County purchased Buckelew Farm to protect and enhance wildlife habitat along the Brawley Wash. The acquisition will protect habitat for the cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl, lesser long nosed bat, acuna cactus, and Pima pineapple cactus.

“The protection of the Buckelew Farm not only preserves an important riparian area along the Brawley Wash, it also secures grandfathered irrigation water rights, which will aid in protecting our groundwater supply,” says *Diana Freshwater, Executive Director of the Arizona Open Land Trust.*

“This acquisition,” Freshwater continues, “connects existing County preserves in the Altar Valley and furthers the goals of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan.”

Located west of Three Points along the Ajo Highway, the Buckelew lands include irrigated pasture land and important riparian habitat. This acquisition is located at the north end of the Altar Valley. The Trust hopes that protection of these key lands will slow the march of unregulated development south into the nearly undeveloped Altar Valley.

In addition, Pima County has entered into a Management Agreement with Nick and Laurie Buckelew who will continue the historic use of the farm. The Buckelew Family has owned and operated the Bucks-Kin Farm since 1954. The Farm is also the site of the much-loved Pumpkin Festival which will continue now that the threat of development is removed. Like many farming and ranching families throughout southern Arizona the Buckelews have worked the land for generations and are closely tied to it.

“Ideally we wanted to preserve the family farm forever. We were getting three offers a month from land speculators and hated the thought of the farm being developed. The Arizona Open Land Trust arranged the sale of the farm to Pima County with an agreement to continue the historic use of the lands. This has been a win-win solution for the entire family. All the family members received fair market value for their inheritance and we can continue farming, as was our dream.” Nick and Laurie Buckelew, Bucks-Kin Farm.

The transaction was reviewed and approved by an eleven-member citizen’s oversight committee, the Conservation Acquisition Commission. The Pima County Board of Supervisor’s approved the transaction at their September meeting.

The Arizona Open Land Trust is a non-profit land conservation organization dedicated to protecting southern Arizona’s vanishing western landscapes and wildlife habitat by acquiring and managing sensitive lands. In addition to its role as land steward, the Trust also engages in programs that support its mission, including appropriate legislation, public education, and outreach that encourages citizens to support protection of landscapes and ecosystems that are vital to the well being of all residents, present and future. Founded in 1978, the Trust has protected more than 53,000 acres of working landscapes, riparian corridors, wildlife habitat and the vast open spaces cherished by southern Arizonans. For more information contact the Trust at 520.577.8564 or visit us on the web at www.aolt.org.

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