How it All Began for YOUR Local Land Trust

By Becky Ruffner, President

Some thirty years ago, in the fall of 1989, a wave of shock and despair arose from the citizens of Prescott when a home site was carved out by a bulldozer at the base of Thumb Butte, our iconic landmark.

“How can this happen?!?!?!”

“Isn’t that US Forest Service land?”

“What can we do?”

A meeting was quickly called downtown at a local real estate office (the only place open on a Saturday) and those of us who showed up were introduced to the Trust for Public Land (TPL).

After coming to the sobering realization that the base of Thumb Butte was, in fact, owned by multiple small lot owners, it soon became clear that approaching each one of them about selling or donating their private property to protect the town’s views was the only option.

But wait! Before that could work, we also needed to incorporate as a non-profit land trust, and apply for tax exempt status from the IRS! THEN, maybe...we could raise some money to turn shock and despair into hope to restore the “scar,” as it was soon described.

Every step of the way, TPL guided us, strategizing on how to get the whole community involved, and stepping up to identify property owners, as we began to organize a campaign to “Save the Butte.”

The City of Prescott soon became our essential partner, offering to match every dollar we could raise from the community, towards approximately $400,000 that would be needed to protect the views of “butte.”

And one by one, landowners agreed to sell their lots at appraised value, and one by one, the dollars needed were generously donated by local citizens to “match the match.”

All together, six potential home sites were purchased from willing property owners. The City agreed to hold title to these properties, each with a conservation easement stipulating that the development value on the property was removed.

Volunteers organized to begin the back-breaking work of re-vegetating the “scar” with native trees, shrubs, and grasses, as well as to install drip lines to each plant to help get them established.

One of those hardy volunteers was Joe Baynes...

ULTIMATELY I AM VERY HAPPY TO DONATE THE PROPERTY SO THAT GENERATIONS TO COME CAN ENJOY AND SEE THE BEAUTY THAT MY GREAT AUNT SAW BACK IN 1909.”

Robert Knudsen, who recently donated his property on Thumb Butte to CALT

The Day Thumb Butte Got Me

By Joe Baynes, Recreation Services Director, City of Prescott

The first time I heard about “the scar” on Thumb Butte was at a construction site where I was working off Willow Creek Road, in the early 1990’s. We were just beginning to survey and layout several roads when, one day, I was approached by a young man (who was to become a lifelong friend). On that day, he would not take “no” for an answer!

Eric Glomski explained he was involved with a project on Thumb Butte to restore vegetation where a landowner had...
The Day Thumb Butte Got Me (Continued from Page 1)

done some extensive excavation in anticipation of building a home on his lot there. A local land trust was being formed to accept donations from the community to restore the “scar.”

Eric wanted to salvage some of the native plants in the path of the road we were surveying. After seeing his passion and his reassurance that he would not hold up our work, I agreed. After watching him for a few days, carefully extract native plants which would otherwise be destroyed, I got interested in learning more about the “scar,” so Eric suggested we take a little drive.

After seeing the back-breaking work being done by volunteers hauling large plants up the steep slope and installing drip lines to keep them alive, Eric and I ended up sitting on a large boulder outcropping at the base of Thumb Butte, looking over the beautiful City of Prescott and, well, I was sold!

At that point, I not only helped with the vegetation, but agreed to haul and place about 200 tons of topsoil. It was an eye-opening experience for me on how fragile our landscapes are and how coming together as a community, we can do a whole lot of good for everyone.

Recently, a few members of the CALT board and I toured most of the conservation easements the land trust holds on City properties and once again I was ASTOUNDED!!!! As we hiked up to what was once the “scar,” I just could not believe my eyes. With some help from Mother Nature, the area that was once the “scar,” that had been so visible to our community, is densely covered with piñon and juniper trees, a wide variety of native grasses, and many native shrubs.

If the community, the City of Prescott, and the Central Arizona Land Trust had not decided to “Save the Butte” and reach out to willing land owners offering a win-win solution, today our wonderful landmark, Thumb Butte would just not be what the early settlers of this area claimed as our landmark in the 1860s.

The original Thumb Butte Conservation Easement, dated January 1998, reads: “Since the early 1860’s, Thumb Butte has been an important landmark for people living in the region. General James Carleton mistakenly established the first Fort Whipple near a landmark fitting the description of the real Thumb Butte, which was some 25 miles distant. He later relocated Ft. Whipple along Granite Creek near Thumb Butte. Virgil Earp, brother of Wyatt Earp, operated a small sawmill at its base in the 1860’s. Wagon roads provided access from Prescott to logging operations and home sites to the north and west.

At the turn of the 20th century, Thumb Butte became a place for recreation. The early 1900’s saw the first climbers scale its precipitous cliffs. The Civilian Conservation Corps built the main United States Forest Service (USFS) hiking trail in the 1930’s. The trail provided hikers and climbers easy access to its base and inspired climbers to put up more climbing routes to its summit…”

Image by Matt Turner
Welcome to Our New Board Members!

We’re pleased to welcome two new board members to CALT: Catherine Benson and Dave Irvine.

Catherine Benson is currently an Assistant Professor of Biology at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU). She holds a B.S. in Environmental Science and Policy, M.S. in Environmental Science and Engineering, and a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Biology and Biotechnology. Katie brings to CALT over 10 years experience in ecological monitoring, wildlife habitat restoration, and private lands conservation. An avid birder, she holds a permit to guide tours to see rare species, such as the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. Don’t miss her article in this issue about her pioneering research using cDNA to detect wildlife in water sources.

Most likely, Dave Irvine’s name rings a bell for most of you, as he serves as the Executive Director of the Highlands Center for Natural History. Dave brings over 30 years of experience working with nonprofit science education organizations as a naturalist, director of education, and executive director. Locally, Dave has served on number of committees involved with stewardship of public lands including: the Prescott Stewardship Forum, Central Arizona Sustainable Recreation Coordinating Team, and the Yavapi County Resource Allocation Committee (RAC). Dave’s help was instrumental in reaching the fundraising goal for the Coldwater Farm campaign.

It’s Time to Celebrate

We did it – together! Nearly 20 acres of Coldwater Farm are now permanently protected by a conservation easement. Located on the Agua Fria River in Dewey-Humboldt, this property is visited by threatened and endangered species like the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and over 140 other bird species. Thanks to our partners and generous donations from our community, we were able to make this happen. THANK YOU!
Orme Ranch Forever
By Jeanne Trupiano and Åsa Björklund

Orme Ranch, one of Arizona’s historic ranches, has been awarded a major matching grant to conserve the property in perpetuity with a conservation easement. The funding has been awarded by the National Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. A campaign, spearheaded by Orme Ranch alumni, is underway to raise the 25% matching funds required by the NRCS.

NRCS works to support America’s farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners by promoting the conservation of the nation’s soil, water, air, and other natural resources. The program involves willing landowners who are interested in furthering wise stewardship of their farms and ranches that benefits both the landowner and the environment.

For over 100 years, the Orme Family has ranched and farmed the lands along Ash Creek, north of Mayer, Arizona. Containing significant water resources, the ranchlands have supported a livestock operation and farming based on wise land management. The uplands are considered significant grasslands that provide quality habitat for Arizona’s Pronghorn, among other native species.

The Orme Ranch agricultural conservation easement would guarantee that the property will never be subdivided and will keep the water resources attached to the land forever.

Keeping the ranchlands from division and development ensures compatible and predictable land use into the future. These protections would benefit neighbors, such as the Orme School, known nationally and internationally for its academic excellence. Students now and forever would be able to enjoy open space and natural vistas surrounding them, along with enhanced education and research opportunities related to agriculture, science, and their natural environment.

As the holder of the conservation easement, CALT would conduct oversight for the conservation easement. Annual monitoring, provided by CALT, guarantees that the land would not be subdivided or developed beyond what is agreed upon in the conservation easement deed.

In Arizona, where the population is estimated to cumulatively grow 27 percent by 2040, the conservation of open lands, such as the Orme Ranch, is critical. CALT will be proud to preserve a significant piece of Arizona’s rich ranching tradition.

We cannot make these projects happen without the support of donors like you. If you believe in preserving open space—whether for wildlife habitat, recreation, ranching, or farming—please consider making a gift today. Every dollar you give will help us to permanently protect more of the places you love.

Use the enclosed envelope or go to our website (www.centralazlandtrust.org) to make your gift today.

Thank you so much for taking an active role in your central and northern Arizona community – today and for generations to come!
Embry-Riddle researchers exploring new methods for monitoring biodiversity in Central Arizona

By Catherine Benson

When biologists think about designing a monitoring program, usually time-intensive surveys come to mind. For example, bird surveys require early mornings, arriving at sites before the sunrise, while surveys for breeding amphibians are conducted from sunset into the middle of the night. Put those together and you are looking at a lot of sleepless nights! But, what if there was another way? All organisms, from bacteria to humans, leave a genetic fingerprint in their environment and modern molecular techniques are allowing researchers to detect these signals in air, water, and soil. These techniques, collectively called environmental DNA analyses (or eDNA for short), are revolutionizing the way that biologists are monitoring biodiversity on the landscape.

Over the past year, my colleagues and I have developed a technique that can detect fish and wildlife eDNA from water samples. We have conducted pilot studies in the Verde River watershed, at Watson and Willow Lakes, and at springs and stock tanks in the Prescott National Forest. Thus far, we have detected a whopping 93 species, including species of fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. As predicted, this technique does a great job picking up eDNA from fish and aquatic wildlife, such as waterfowl, frogs, toads, turtles, river otter, and beaver. However, we were surprised to also pick up eDNA from species that are transient users of aquatic ecosystems, including songbirds, black bear, mountain lion, mule deer, and elk. Based on these results, we believe that eDNA analysis represents a promising new tool for species monitoring. Our initial efforts have been focused on public lands with existing monitoring programs conducted by state and federal natural resource agencies. We believe that the real power of this technique lies in its ability to be used as an exploratory tool, and as such, we look forward to collaborating with CALT to extend our research to include conservation easements in the region.

A Partnership Worth Its Name

By Åsa Björklund

The more the merrier? When it comes to partners in landscape conservation, that’s a good guiding principle. CALT teamed up with Camp Navajo-Arizona National Guard, the Army National Guard, and Coconino County to permanently preserve an important wildlife corridor and wetland southwest of Flagstaff, Arizona.

As this quaint mountain town rapidly grew, it became increasingly clear that Camp Navajo needed a buffer zone to ensure compatible land uses around the base. Camp Navajo is Arizona’s largest military installation – and it’s one of the most important training facilities in the Army Reserve and National Guard network.

At the same time, Coconino County and CALT wanted to preserve lands that support the open space and community plans and policies. Eventually, funding from the Army Compatible Use Buffer Program allowed CALT to acquire a conservation easement on 240 acres of Coconino County lands, known as the Frontiere property, adjacent to the Rogers Lake County Natural Area.

“This successful conservation effort will serve a two-fold purpose: it will guarantee permanent conservation of an important wildlife corridor for elk, pronghorn, and other large mammals, and ensure the long-term, compatible land uses to sustain state and national security objectives at Camp Navajo,” said CALT Board President Becky Ruffner.

This strategic conservation project, adjacent to resource-rich Rogers Lake County Natural Area, supports a wetland that attracts thousands of waterfowl and mammals. Wetlands such as this one, especially in the arid Southwest, are among the most bio-diverse ecosystem types that exist, supporting a diverse range of animal and plant species. Protecting this property from development benefits people by assuring opportunities for recreation and other outdoor experiences.

“We have a strong partnership with the Central Arizona Land Trust. The conservation easement on the Frontiere property continues our work in the ephemeral wetlands of Rogers Lake County Natural Area to further protect this community asset for generations to come for activities such as hiking, environmental education, biking, and other outdoor opportunities,” said Coconino County Supervisor Matt Ryan.

What started as a security priority for the Army culminated in a conservation success benefiting the region’s ecology, wildlife, and community. That’s what we call a landscape conservation partnership worth its name.
Qualified Charitable Distributions

By Stephanie Sterling

With the introduction of the Tax Cuts & Jobs Act (TCJA) signed in December 2017, more people are using Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD’s) for their philanthropic giving. This is a tax-free way (not included in income on your personal tax return) to move funds directly from an IRA to charity. QCD’s are distributions from a Traditional IRA (or inherited IRA) account that have some unique characteristics. There are some “rules” that need to be followed but when taken correctly, not only does the charity benefit, the distributions are also excluded from taxable income on your tax return.

To be eligible:
• The distribution must come from your Traditional IRA or inherited IRA account
• The distribution must be made payable directly to the charity, not to you personally
• You must be over 70 ½ at the time you take the distribution
• The amount you withdraw counts toward your Required Minimum Distribution in the year taken
• The maximum amount you can exclude from taxable income for all QCD’s in any year is $100,000 (or $100,000 per taxpayer if filing a joint return)
• The charity must be a 501(c)(3) organization, eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions
• As with all contributions, you need a receipt from the charity for your donation
• You cannot take a charitable deduction on Schedule A for any amount you are taking as a QCD

Stephanie Sterling AIF®, AWMA®, FPQPTM, EA, is a Wealth Manager with Stratos Wealth Partners Ltd. She holds FINRA series 6, 7, 63 with LPL Financial, and series 66 with LPL and Stratos Wealth Partners, is an Accredited Investment Fiduciary®, Accredited Wealth Management Advisor℠, and Financial Paraplanner Qualified Professional™. Stephanie is also an Enrolled Agent.

Stratos Wealth Partners Ltd is located at 100 E. Sheldon Street, Ste 105, Prescott AZ 86301.
Ph: (928) 460-5526 E-Mail: ssterling@stratoswp.com
website: www.prescottwealthmanagement.com
Source: IRS Publication 590-B (2018), Distributions from Individual Retirement Arrangements (IRAs)
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No strategy assures success or protects against loss. This information is not intended to be a substitute for specific individualized tax or legal advice. We suggest that you discuss your specific situation with a qualified tax or legal advisor.

Since the introduction of TCJA, more taxpayers are taking the standard deduction on their personal tax returns. The QCD strategy has become an excellent way to benefit from charitable giving, without the need to itemize. As you can see, taking a Qualified Charitable Distributions can be complex. It is recommended you the seek advice of your financial advisor or tax professional to determine if Qualified Charitable Distributions make sense in your situation.
Donors Make It Happen

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Become A Partner in Protection

The Central Arizona Land Trust is an Arizona nonprofit corporation and is tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) and a qualifying organization under Section 170(b)(1)(A)(vi) of the Internal Revenue Code for the acceptance of conservation easements. Please visit our website for information on charitable gifts and estate planning. We depend on the continued generosity of our donors to accomplish our mission of preserving and protecting open space throughout Central Arizona.

Preserving the Land You Love, in the Heart of Arizona, since 1989