



2025 SANTA FE CONSERVATION TRUST PROGRAMS

LAND

Land conservation is the core of SFCT's work. As a land trust, we provide the legal documents and support for landowners to take the development rights off their land, with or without building envelopes. By donating their development rights to SFCT, which will then protect and defend them in perpetuity, the landowner is giving up value in their land, which qualifies them for State and Federal tax deductions. Not only are they voluntarily giving up some value, they are also providing a public benefit by meeting one or more of the IRS-determined conservation values: Those values are: agricultural, scenic, historic, ecological (wildlife habitat), or recreational.

SFCT works with landowners to determine which conservation values they will be protecting. We help the landowner work with the appraisers, title companies, surveyors, geologists, archaeologists and other specialists to create the documentation needed for the conservation easement. We provide the landowner with a legal template that they can use with their attorneys to write up the easement. We file it at the County Clerk's office to make it official. We create the baseline documentation report that shows the status of the property when it was put into the conservation easement. This baseline is what we use annually when we inspect the property to be sure the conservation values are being upheld. And, we will file the paperwork to apply for the transferrable State tax credit, if the landowner wants to apply for it.

Usually, the landowner who originally put their land into a conservation easement is easy to work with. They are motivated to protect the property. SFCT is now working with second and third generation landowners who have purchased or inherited properties with our conservation easements on them. The farther away from the original grantee, the higher likelihood of the current landowners violating the terms of the easement. As such, SFCT has a robust **stewardship program** which annually monitors the conservation easements we hold either remotely or with an on the ground visit to be sure that the conservation values on each property are being upheld. Stewardship also includes working with landowners to help them understand their easements, solve problems on the land, etc. Sometimes there are violations of the easement, and SFCT has to send out violation letters. If the situation is not corrected, SFCT can initiate legal proceedings to correct the violation. We carry insurance (TerraFirma) to cover the cost of litigation if it occurs. Fortunately, SFCT has never had to litigate a violation.

SFCT's **Strategic Conservation Plan**, completed in 2018, guides our land work (with intermittent updates) through 2028. While we will always work with landowners who come in the door, the Trust wants to be more proactive about working in areas with a high risk of development and high conservation values. We are interested in working to preserve larger tracts of land that include many landowners so that we can have a larger impact on watersheds, wildlife corridors, the protection of scenic views and open space, recreational opportunities and the preservation of our cultural resources. To do so, we will be working with some landowners who probably cannot afford the cost of doing easements, so we'll be using the Strategic Conservation Plan not only to guide our conservation work but also to talk with donors and foundations to bring in more funding to underwrite the costs of easements, the bargain sale of development rights, or in some cases,

outright purchases of development rights. Up until this time, the Trust has been fortunate to work with landowners who could afford to donate their development rights and pay the upfront costs.

Our board wants to work with a wider variety of people to make our work more impactful. To do so, SFCT developed two financial programs aimed at opening the door of conservation to a wider spectrum of landowners in northern New Mexico. Conservation easements are expensive and require landowners to have the money upfront to implement them. To overcome these economic barriers, SFCT's board approved using endowment earnings and donations to fund two programs that target lower income landowners with high value conservation land, especially in areas where there is high valued conservation land or where we want to create larger, connected conservation corridors to help plants and wildlife move to areas more suitable for their survival. The **Quickstart Fund** helps to cover the upfront expenses associated with conservation easements, and the landowner repays us after the sale of their tax credit is complete. The **Total Transaction Fund** completely covers the costs of one conservation easement transaction without repayment. These funds help people across the economic spectrum participate in conservation. We recently identified and entered into agreement on our first Total Transaction Project. We will be working with the Roybal family to conserve and protect their land, a former local dairy, Rancho Los Lagunas. Our second Quickstart project is now underway to help landowners afford the cost of amending an easement to protect more land along the Pecos River.

In 2020, the Thaw Charitable Trust donated a 300-acre parcel called the Thornton Homestead to SFCT. This donation fills a "donut hole" in the Galisteo Basin Preserve area that could have been developed. This property is a wonderful opportunity for us to show how landscape scale conservation can work to help wildlife move from lower to higher terrain, to preserve cultural resources in an archaeologically rich area, and to show our other landowners, potentially, how to manage and restore their lands. The property is now owned by SFCT, and we donated the conservation easement to the Taos Land Trust, as due to the Doctrine of Merger, SFCT cannot enforce a conservation easement on land that it also owns. There are now 6,000 contiguous acres preserved, including this 300-acre parcel. Since buying the land, SFCT has installed 4 miles of single-track trails, and has done extensive land restoration work. Hundreds of volunteers have helped install erosion control structures, removed invasives from the ephemeral wetland area, helped to install the passive wildlife drinker, built the 4 miles of trails, and thus, have developed a more intimate relationship with this land. SFCT's restoration work will continue based on a 10-year management plan for the property. In 2025, a grassland restoration effort will also be initiated.

TRAILS

The Santa Fe Conservation Trust with the financial support of the City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe County engage volunteers — individuals, clubs, schools, businesses, and non-profits — as advocates and stewards of the trails that make our community an outstanding place to live and to visit. Our founding director, Dale Ball, created the Dale Ball Trail System and under the guidance of our late founder, Stewart Udall, we began the Santa Fe Rail Trail creation process.

SFCT had a contract with the City of Santa Fe for Tim Rogers, our Trails Manager, to manage the volunteers who maintain all of the City's soft surface trails. The City canceled the contract in 2020 due to their deficit from the pandemic, so now SFCT provides this work based on annual purchase orders from the City. In 2024, we also received a work order from the County to provide trail maintenance services on the County portion of the Dale Ball Trails. Tim also does promotional bike and walking cruises/expeditions, works with all trail advocates in Santa Fe to coordinate efforts, and offers his planning background to the City on issues affecting both biking and hiking.

The following trails are our primary focus:

- The Dale Ball and Santa Fe Foothills Trails
- Arroyo Hondo Open Space
- Galisteo Basin Preserve with partners Commonweal Conservancy
- SFCT's Galisteo Property Trails
- La Tierra Trails
- La Piedra Trail
- Atalaya Trail
- The Santa Fe Rail Trail
- Arroyo de los Chamisos Trail

The Santa Fe Conservation Trust was instrumental in the preservation of the Arroyo Hondo Open Space. Located just outside Santa Fe and only a 12-minute drive from the Plaza, 86 acres of natural lands known as the Arroyo Hondo Open Space are forever protected by Santa Fe County in partnership with the Santa Fe Conservation Trust. A mile-long, fairly level loop trail affords spectacular views of Santa Fe, the northern stretch of the Galisteo Basin, Sandia Mountain, and, on a clear day, Mount Taylor—99 miles away.

The Galisteo Basin Preserve open space features 35 miles of hiking, biking, and equestrian trails. SFCT was involved in the creation of these trails. These publicly accessible paths invite exploration and celebration of this landscape by Preserve residents and visitors alike.

The Trust is actively working with City, County and other community organizations and individuals to plan and implement a unified, sustainable network of natural-surface trails in and around Santa Fe. The goal of the **“Grand Unified Santa Fe Trail Organization (GUSTO)”** is to develop an interconnected trail system for local residents as well as visitors on foot, bicycle, or horse, so that trail users will be able to travel between trail systems and connect out to these systems from the places where people live, work, and play. In 2019, we plan on soliciting public feedback on the GUSTO proposed trails. From there, we will develop a phased plan for first developing the low hanging fruit trails, working up to those that will require more resources, etc.

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

In 2014, SFCT started its Passport to Trails program designed to take 4th and 5th graders to the local trail system for field trips. The program focuses primarily on south side schools, as the City's south side offers fewer recreational opportunities and many do not know about the City's free trail system. The goal of this program is to introduce kids and their families to our trail system, build community on the trails and inspire the next generation of conservationists. Since 2014, SFCT has taken over 5,000 participants on field trips. Tim can only do so many field trips per year, so while this program is very successful, it cannot grow unless we get more capacity in the Trails office.

In 2018, SFCT convened many community partners to start the Vámonos: Santa Fe Walks program, which is an in-town walking program on our City's ADA accessible trails around our parks. The goal of this program is to reach out to people who cannot get into nature as easily: elders, the infirmed, the transportation limited, people who are afraid to walk by themselves, etc. We have partnered with La Familia, Christus St. Vincent, SW Care Center, the City of Santa Fe, AARP, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the NM Department of Health and many others to partner in the creation of the program and leverage promotions. The program runs from May through October annually.

SFCT will be building an accessible trail at the Galisteo Property at the end of the summer of 2025. This has been a multi-year project. We applied for design and planning funding from the State's Outdoor Recreation Division and completed the 2022 \$92,723 planning grant in early 2024. Not only did we conduct several meetings with representatives of the disabled community to get the design completed for the half-mile loop

trail, we also had funding to complete the County-required Road widening and to build the parking area. We identified the contractors we want to work with and got bids from them. Then, we applied for a \$292,319.46 construction grant from the Trails + program at the State's Outdoor Recreation Division, and signed the contract for that grant on December 13, 2024. Construction will begin at the end of the summer of 2025. The accessible trail will provide a safe, rural, outdoor experience to the almost 19,000 people in Santa Fe County living with disabilities.

SKIES

The night sky has informed and inspired humankind for thousands of years. Around the globe, regardless of national borders, political ties or spiritual beliefs, all of us live with the night. The night sky is one of the great unifiers of the human experience across time and across cultures. But the invention of the incandescent light bulb changed everything. It's been estimated that artificial lighting has eaten away at so much of the night sky that two-thirds of the US population can no longer see the Milky Way!

When the train to Lamy was operating out of the Railyard, SFCT had some successful star gazing gatherings in the Galisteo Basin. These successful gatherings died out when the train stopped going to Lamy. Once we purchased the 300-acre Galisteo Property, we started the star parties again to introduce people to the majesty of the night sky and open their eyes to the importance of protecting it. SFCT also protects the night sky in its conservation easement templates that require that all of our partner landowners to use low impact lighting to preserve our night skies.

In 2024, SFCT embarked on the EONS project (for Eyes on the Night Sky) in collaboration with Dark Sky Partners of Flagstaff to better understand and create data on light pollution in Santa Fe County. Currently there is one device located in Arroyo Hondo where light data is recorded. That data is downloaded and shared with our partners in Flagstaff who will create periodic reports to share with the public.