



NEWS



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Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge adds 41 acres Refuge is closer to completion

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – The next 41 acres of a planned acquisition of the 570-acre Price’s Dairy was conveyed to the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), said The Trust for Public Land, Bernalillo County, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) on Monday. Yesterday’s transfer represents the second phase of the Refuge’s three-phase acquisition plan.

The Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge was established in 2012 and is the first urban national wildlife refuge in the Southwest. In Albuquerque’s South Valley, it will provide close-to-home outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities not only for Albuquerque and Bernalillo County residents, but for residents throughout all New Mexico and far beyond.

The Service is seeking additional money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for the federal fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. The additional LWCF funds are needed to complete the acquisition of the property and protect the land as part of the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge.

“This is a continuation of a community-based conservation partnership that defines the Refuge, and is truly a win-win for stewardship,” said Benjamin Tuggle, the Service’s Southwest Regional Director. “City, county, state, federal, tribal and private conservation organizations have worked together to create the Southwest’s first urban national wildlife refuge. The Refuge name – Valle de Oro – was chosen by the public and is so fitting; this area truly is a treasure.”

The Trust for Public Land has been working with the local community for years to protect the Price’s Dairy property. Located just five miles from downtown, the tract is one of the largest undeveloped agricultural properties in the metropolitan Albuquerque region. The project is also supported by New Mexico Audubon, New Mexico Wildlife Federation, and American Rivers among many other organizations.

Will Rogers, president of The Trust for Public Land, said, “We are thrilled to help residents of Albuquerque’s South Valley gain access to close-to-home green space. With the purchase of an additional 41 acres of Price’s Dairy, the vision of a new urban national wildlife refuge is becoming a reality. We thank the Service and the New Mexico congressional delegation for helping move this project closer to the finish line.”

In addition to the 390 acres already protected as the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge along the Rio Grande, the 41 acres added to the Refuge on Monday provides significant water rights to address Middle Rio Grande restoration plans.

The 41 acres purchased during this second phase of the Refuge's acquisition plan were acquired using \$1.5 million from the LWCF. The total acquisition cost of the three-phase project is \$18.56 million, which includes substantial senior water rights.

LWCF gets its money from offshore oil and gas receipts, not taxpayer dollars. U.S. Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich and U.S. Representative Michelle Lujan Grisham support both the LWCF and the efforts to protect this property as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

"The Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge will bring numerous recreational, educational and job opportunities, benefiting both Albuquerque's economy and wildlife," said Sen. Udall. "With the acquisition of this land, the South Valley community is one step closer to seeing its completion, and as a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I will do everything I can to see funding for this project in the next fiscal year."

"We are one step closer to opening the gates of the first urban national wildlife refuge in the Southwest to the public," said Sen. Heinrich. "This is exciting news, and the result of years of hard work and collaboration to bring this project to fruition. Too many kids spend more time in front of the television than they do outdoors. This new wildlife refuge is our opportunity to change that. The Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge will help New Mexico kids discover the incredible natural heritage of our state, right in their backyard, while supporting river and habitat conservation and enhancing our thriving outdoor recreation economy."

Rep. Grisham added, "The Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge will benefit nearly all areas of the Albuquerque community: the businesses that will see increased tourism and economic development, the schools that will have a new educational resource, and the residents who will enjoy this outdoor oasis. I have been a strong supporter of this project since I served on the Bernalillo County Commission, and I am thrilled that the Refuge is now one step closer to completion."

In addition to LWCF funds, Bernalillo County has contributed \$5 million towards this project.

"Expanding this wildlife refuge is a legacy for the South Valley and Albuquerque's future," Bernalillo County Commissioner Art De La Cruz said. "More open space means more opportunities for children to get outside and learn in a healthy environment. This is also an incentive to take advantage of tourism and other economic development that will occur as a result of this new refuge. I want to thank New Mexico's Congressional delegation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Trust for Public Land, our local elected officials and so many community partners who've worked hard on this project. We look forward to working with Secretary Jewell to continue the momentum for Valle de Oro."

The local Mountain View Neighborhood Association and the new Friends of the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge have joined with partners across the state to support the Refuge recognizing the great benefits it will bring to river and habitat conservation, outdoor education

and recreation, and to supporting local jobs, tourism and revitalization of the area. This strong local support led State Senator Michael Padilla to propose legislation in the 2013 New Mexico State legislative session that ultimately passed, providing an additional \$1.1 million in state money to help fund the project.

“The community solidarity and diversity of support for this extraordinary public asset is so impressive. We all continue to link arms and move forward with great purpose,” said Angela West, president of the Mountain View Neighborhood Association, which surrounds the new Refuge.

West sees the community’s support as a form of local empowerment that creates momentum for residents to create a healthier community, including greater social and economic options.

Teri Jillson, president of the Friends of the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, added, “The Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge has overwhelming public support and is a perfect example of what can be accomplished through collaboration between community, local, state, tribal and federal entities. This Refuge will not only provide education, recreation and conservation opportunities for children and adults in the Albuquerque area, but will also benefit the local economy.”

The Refuge will be open to the public once acquisition of the entire 570-acre Price’s Dairy property has been completed, but is open for special events and by appointment. Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge will host its first public event on Saturday, September 28, in honor of National Public Lands Day. The community is invited to attend that event and to be involved in shaping the Refuge’s future. For more information, contact Refuge Manager Jennifer Owen-White for more info (505) 248-6667, jennifer_owenwhite@fws.gov.

For additional information, please visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge website at http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/newmex/valle_de_oro/index.html or follow the Refuge on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ValleDeOroNationalWildlifeRefuge>.

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The Trust for Public Land is a national conservation organization which protects land for people to enjoy as parks and open spaces and is the nation’s only organization committed to building parks in urban areas across the nation. Since it was founded in 1972, TPL has protected more than 3 million acres in 47 states. TPL depends on the support of individuals, foundations, and corporations. For more, visit www.tpl.org