Dear Friends,

After 20 years of working on conservation, fire, ranch projects, meeting all kinds of people that affect the landscape and this life that we live, the Malpai Borderlands Group (MBG) has come a long way in conservation, collaboration and education. Prior to our official formation in 1994, we became aware that by working with others, more could be achieved for the protection of this landscape than by acting separately.

One of our main goals has been to create sustainable livestock ranching for the families that live and work in our area. We are keeping this landscape open now and for future generations so it will continue to be productive for wildlife and agriculture.

When we started there were so many issues that divided ranchers, government, environmental groups and individuals, and all had different ideas for how to protect this area. Few of these groups spoke to each other about their ideas and plans. There was no comprehensive blueprint that set a vision we could follow. The lack of fires, brush encroachment, endangered species including jaguars and frogs, soil erosion, the need for water and fencing improvements, border issues, and the encroaching subdivisions that threatened this area seemed overwhelming.

Through the hard work of engaging diverse stakeholders in meaningful conversations, we built and strengthened relationships. Projects that ranchers alone could not afford became possible and solutions to complex challenges were found. People like Drum Hadley, Jim Corbett, John Cook, John Sawhill, Mike Dennis and others were instrumental in providing leadership and ideas to the cause! All these people brought others to the table, and with them, knowledge and resources we needed.

We never dreamed that:

* The fire plan would evolve into successful prescribed burns.
* We would have thousands of one rock dams in place.
* We could drill needed wells and install pipelines and storage for water for livestock and wildlife.
* We would have a diverse science panel to advise us, and an Annual Science Conference that draws hundreds of interested people.
* We could root plow and reseed large areas.
* We would buy conservation easements that preclude subdivision of these lands.
* We would have the help and support from government, foundations, environmental organizations and individuals that believe in what we do.

Most of our meetings were held at the Malpai Ranch because of the space and convenience. Consequently the ranch loaned its name to the group. The Malpai Borderlands Group office has been here in our home for almost 20 years.

In April, 2014, we will begin moving our office to another location in Douglas, Arizona. We will continue to have Malpai Group guests and meetings here at the Malpai Ranch when needed.

Our funding situation is precarious since the 2008 financial downturn. Some foundations have changed their focus to projects out of the USA, while others have reduced their funding. We continue to work as hard as we can to keep our projects going and to keep our operations as efficient as possible — but we cannot do this without your help!

We thank you for your past financial contributions. We need your immediate support to help identify new funding sources. We have an annual appeal only in the newsletter and we don’t send out multiple requests, make phone calls or ask for more than one donation per year. We don’t share your addresses with others. Please consider increasing your gift to us and thereby ensuring the continuation of our work in the Malpai Borderlands.

We sincerely thank you for believing in us.

Here’s to a West that works!!

Wendy Glenn
RESTORATION OF RIO SAN BERNARDINO — BRINGING BACK THE RIVER THAT GERONIMO KNEW

By Valer Austin, Fundacion Cuenca los Ojos

Most of the Arizona portion of the Malpai Borderlands area lies in the watershed of the Rio San Bernardino. Perennial flow in the stream begins at artesian springs just one mile north of the international border and flows south into Mexico. The springs were a cross-road of human activity for centuries before Europeans arrived. For well over 100 years the Rio San Bernardino had livestock grazing year-round along its banks. During much of that time the San Bernardino was the only reliable water in the valley, and fencing had not been built to distribute animals away from the valley bottom. The result was a barren, sandy channel with almost no perennial plants.

In 1989 Valer and Josiah Austin purchased the San Bernardino Ranch in Sonora. For the first time since Spanish settlement, the river bottom there was rested from grazing. In 2005 the Austin’s foundation, called Cuenca Los Ojos, started to build large rock-filled wire-basket gabions in the stream channel. Behind each gabion the sand collected, raising the river bed and allowing the sediment to remain permanently wet. Like a sponge the wet sand released water slowly. Vegetation began to take hold and farther downstream water began to flow again.

Prior to the Austin’s work, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service built similar structures north of the border on the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge. Then, during the last six years the erosion control work by the Malpai Group has helped to stabilize the upper watershed reinforcing the work of Cuenca Los Ojos and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The cumulative effect of all this work on the recovery of the river on the San Bernardino Ranch and beyond has been astounding. The channel went from a wide, sandy bed with water an inch deep and almost no perennial plants, to a dense thicket of willow, seep-willow, cattail, bulrush and cottonwood with pools several feet deep. Where there had been little useful habitat for any wildlife, there is now nesting habitat for migratory birds and pools for native fish. The rock baskets have raised the river bed by up to ten feet and the thick vegetative growth has additionally captured three to five feet of sediment in many places. Thus the deep gully that was downcut in the early 1900’s is slowly being rebuilt.

But perhaps the most remarkable recovery has been the expansion of perennial flow along the river. When the Austins bought the ranch, the river did not flow very far beyond Highway 2, the major highway across northern Sonora, and had less than a mile of surface flow. Now the river flows downstream onto land of cooperatively owned ranches known as Ejidos. Initially, the Ejidos downstream feared that their new neighbors might cut off all of their water. Now they realize that their water has increased and that the river is flowing year-round despite the longest regional drought in recorded history.

The members of the Ejidos are now building similar structures on their land with the help of the Mexican government agency CONAFOR. Additionally they are lending labor to Cuenca Los Ojos in exchange for use of the foundation’s equipment and expertise.

The story is an example of how cross border cooperation is restoring habitat and bringing back water to a stream that for decades was dry much of the year. The Malpai Group, Cuenca Los Ojos, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, and Ejido 18 de Agosto are together bringing life to the Rio Yaqui watershed.

CLARENCE BURCH AWARD

This year the Malpai Group was awarded the Clarence Burch Award by the Quivira Coalition. This award is presented to an outstanding land management steward, either individual or organization, within the conservation or ranching communities. This is a prestigious award in the world of collaborative conservation, and we thank the Quivira Coalition for their recognition of our hard work, and for the $20,000 which accompanies the award.
This year an initiative has gotten under way that we hope will make it easier to use fire for grassland management. For years, people from all over Arizona have recognized the importance, and the difficulty, of using prescribed burning. To address this, a group of people representing the many faces of fire management, from fire suppression and resource management to wildlife habitat and academic research, got together in July to organize an Arizona Prescribed Fire Council. The Malpai Group was represented at the meeting by Don Decker.

Fire councils such as this exist in 25 states. The councils are coordinated by a national coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils. The overarching goal of the coalition is to create one voice to assist fire practitioners, policymakers, regulators, and citizens with issues surrounding prescribed fire use, and to provide a forum to voice and address issues of national concern.

The goal was first of all to determine if there is sufficient need for a council and willingness to participate. After several hours of discussion, all 14 participants unanimously agreed to develop the council and establish a steering committee. The committee is now developing the by-laws and organizational structure to incorporate the Arizona Prescribed Fire Council as a new non-profit organization.

One outcome of the meeting was agreement on the purposes of the new Council, based on a shared understanding that prescribed fire is an effective tool to restore, maintain, and enhance our varied fire adapted ecosystems, which are:

- **Information Exchange** — Provide a forum where all interested parties can share information about the benefits and challenges of prescribed fire use, including best practices, regulations, and policies, to ensure the continued use of prescribed fire in Arizona.

- **Education** — Promote public understanding of the benefits of prescribed fire use and the role of fire in our diverse fire-dependent ecosystems.

- **Prescribed burn implementation** — Promote safety, training, and research in the art and science of prescribed fire to facilitate an increase in the safe and appropriate use of prescribed fire as a management tool in Arizona.

The group agreed to learn more about prescribed fire work that is already under way in local communities in Arizona, and some of the road-blocks that local efforts are facing. Two members of the Fire Council steering committee, Bruce Greco from Northern Arizona University and Byron Kimball from the Arizona State Forestry Department, came to the Malpai Ranching Today workshop in September, and participated in a discussion about how much the Malpai Group has done, but also the challenges still remaining. It seems clear that a state-wide support network provided by the Fire Council will make prescribed burning easier in the future.

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**CREATION OF AN ARIZONA PRESCRIBED FIRE COUNCIL**

*By Peter Warren, TNC*

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**BRINGING SCIENCE TO THE RANGE**

*By Kris Havstad, Lead Scientist, USDA Jornada Experimental Range*

“Data we have, it is information we lack.”

— Many frustrated people

Through the collaboration between the Jornada Experimental Range and the Malpai Group, one thing we are trying to do is put together as much of the available data that exist for the Malpai area into a place where it can be easily accessed and used to create information. We now have 122 different sets of Malpai data that are accessible through a web page that anyone can access and use. There are literally hundreds more that we could place on this web site. We are putting public data on this site, but we can also put private data that are password protected and only accessible to individuals or groups with permission. We want data available to anyone so that whoever is interested in developing information can easily access these data.

For example, earlier last year the questions were posed: Has increased border enforcement activities led to more roads in the area and, if so, what are the impacts of those roads? You will now find a data layer on the current roads we were able to create along the north side of the border across the Malpai region. We then compare this data layer to road data layers from the late 1990s before the recent increase in border patrol activities. We found there were a few more roads created in recent years, but the bulk of the roads, including infrequently used trails, were already there. What increased is not the total length of roads, but vehicle traffic. This result is not what we expected. The impact of recent border patrol activities in the Malpai is not the physical effect of more total length of roads, but the impacts of increased vehicle traffic on those roads. This is an example of putting data together to develop data-based information. Now others can use these publically available data to create new information.

“Science needs to under promise and over deliver.”

— A sage advisor

We want to create a means for people working on the ground to be able to learn in a repeatable, quantifiable manner what conservation practices have worked in the past, and where and why they have worked. We also want people to learn what hasn’t worked, and why and where.

For example, where has prescribed burning actually worked for its intended purposes? One key to good science is to identify and control for variation that may influence the responses you observe. You want to know that your response variable (e.g., grass growth) is actually responding to the treatment (e.g., prescribed burning) and not some other uncontrolled factor (e.g., differences in soil fertility between a burned area and an unburned control area). It is much easier to control for variation in the environment if you work at very small scales, like 100 ft² plots.

A big challenge for conducting good experiments at large pasture or ranch scales is that we still have to try and control for variation. The way we choose to do this is to create, literally, a map of
a landscape that describes the ecological potential of land and its current vegetation state so that we can then compare responses of similar kinds of land to understand the effects, if any, of management practices. In the Malpai, for example, this means comparing burned clay loam upland sites in a 16" to 20" precipitation zone and shrub infested states to other clay loam upland sites in a similar precipitation zone and vegetation states that haven’t been burned. We have to create these coded maps so that we can compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges, so to speak. For decades we have tried to draw conclusions about the effects of land management without having these “coded maps”. That won’t work when trying to conduct experiments at ranch scales. So, over the past 18 months we have been “coding” ranches within the MBG to create the base maps for these comparisons.

“So, how is this going to turn out? I don’t know; it’s a mystery.” — An honest scientist

What we are trying to do here is conduct experiments at landscape scales with a repeatable, publishable experimental design. We haven’t done this before. However, we are now doing this on other landscapes in addition to the Malpai.

In the end, we think we can analyze data collected at these large spatial scales and draw conclusions about the effects of management practices. What we really want to do, though, is create the tools for analyses that could be used by a land owner or a technical service provider, such as an NRCS field person. We would like to see the methods and tools of science be more generally applied by the people that live and work on those lands (Note: the Australians are ahead of us in this regard; it is possible). One of the things we have learned in science over the decades is that general principles have to be adapted to the ecology and management of specific places. Getting this process to that point is the mysterious part of all of this for us.

The truth is, we should have started to work on these objectives with the MBG many years ago. However, as a research unit we weren’t ready or capable until recently. Now, though, whatever we can accomplish will be available to any entity for their use. We still have much work to do and much to learn.

PROTECTING THE WORKING WILDERNESS – ANOTHER STEP TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

This year we took another step toward our goal to protect the Borderlands from subdivision and development. Long-term success of our work requires that land protection goes hand-in-hand with habitat restoration and management to reduce grassland deterioration. With the addition of another conservation easement completed this year, we have now secured protection for more than 78,000 acres of private land on fifteen ranches.

We have protected an additional 609 acres on the Glenn family’s Malpai Ranch, most of which is already protected by an earlier conservation easement. The Glenns recently acquired the 609 acres from a neighboring ranch and wanted to protect that land as well. This property is a high priority for protection because the Malpai Ranch is the closest to the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge and so is critical as watershed buffer protection for the refuge. Also, the property lies along Geronimo Trail Road near the western edge of our planning area towards Douglas, which is a key area where development could encroach on the Borderlands. We could not have completed this important step without the help of our many supporters.

LISTEN TO THE MALPAI STORY ON NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO!

The National Public Radio program State of the Re:Union recently produced a new episode about the rural Southwest which highlights the Malpai Group. The episode has now been released, and being aired on NPR affiliates around the country. You can listen to the episode online here:

http://stateofthereunion.com/the-southwestern-range/

The story about the Malpai Borderlands Group is in the first three segments of the episode.

ZANE WEBSTER - KRENTZ SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Zane Webster received the 2013-2014 Krentz Memorial/Malpai Borderlands Group Scholarship. Zane is our third recipient and currently resides in San Simon, AZ, where he graduated with a 3.04 GPA. While in high school, Zane was involved in FFA and 4-H, playing sports and participating in high school and junior rodeos, where he attended the National Junior High School Rodeo Finals. Zane loves to show livestock and in high school he was asked to judge at the National FFA Livestock competition, and also at the National Western in Denver and the North American International Livestock Exposition.

With his background, it is natural that Zane would be accepted at Connors State College in Warner, OK., where he has already been accepted as a member of their collegiate livestock judging team, which is ranked one of the best in the United States. While in college, Zane will pursue a degree in agriculture education and communication.

Zane also has been active in volunteering. He cleans the local cemetery on a regular basis and has taught in Vacation Bible School at his church.
An effort is under way in the lower San Pedro River Valley to create a locally-led conservation initiative. Several of us from the Cascabel community who are involved in this effort, Pat Corbett, Sue Newman, and myself, attended the Malpai Group’s Ranching Today workshop in September. The workshop introduces people to the Group’s work and to exchange ideas on starting and maintaining collaborative conservation groups, which is exactly what we were looking for. For the two nights of the workshop Warner and Wendy Glenn graciously hosted the three of us at the Malpai Ranch.

One of the highlights of the workshop was the chance to interact with people from several community conservation efforts who brought many different points of view to our discussions. Participants included several local ranchers; representatives from the Blackfoot Challenge watershed group in Montana; Partners for Conservation in northern California and Texas; the new director for Cuenca de los Ojos, the Mexican counterpart to the Malpai Borderlands Group just south of the border; and two who are trying to build a new collaborative in the Burro Mountains in New Mexico.

The two representatives from the Blackfoot Challenge attended as part of a program on building cooperative conservation groups and plan to distribute a report on the workshop to everyone. Numerous other organizations which participate in these collaboratives were also represented including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Nature Conservancy, Arizona State Forestry Division, the Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University, the Arizona Community Foundation, and the Jornada Experimental Range in New Mexico.

After a get-acquainted dinner on Thursday, we spent the next day and a half on a tour of the Borderlands. We visited several ranches, including the Diamond A (or Gray) Ranch in the Animas Valley. We got an overview of the border fence where it passes through the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge. A principal objective of these tours was to see the results of cooperative land management projects in which the Malpai Group supports neighboring ranchers, especially for grassland restoration (mostly with fire) and erosion control.

Participants discussed how to build and maintain an effective collaborative conservation group. Bill McDonald emphasized the importance of getting prospective participants to develop a clear statement of what they want to see occur. From this, a group needs to develop strong mission and vision statements that reflect these shared goals. These statements help guide future actions, and prevent a group from being side-tracked in the future by others who may have contradictory interests or goals.

Building participation is the challenge. Creating social capital takes time and is part of what makes an organization effective. It is important to reach out to and include all stakeholders, even those who may oppose the organization or feel that it is irrelevant to them. It is equally important to maintain transparency and not hide actions or intentions. Any group should expect some opposition at first. Some individuals initially opposed the Malpai Borderlands Group, but most criticism has since dissipated through the demonstration of well-intentioned, concrete actions.

To involve others, a group needs to offer something that will help them. Many people will not come to meetings but will still be interested. Passion is important to the vitality of any such organization, involving people with a long-term vested interest in the area and its well-being. It is as hard or harder to keep an organization going as it is to start one, and splitting responsibilities is important. Groups need to involve leaders in the ranching community because ranches are so important to the conservation of the whole. A strong organization with a good reputation is much more effective than a single landowner in dealing with agencies whose actions may be causing concerns.

Overall, we found that the Malpai Group shares many of the concerns and goals that we have for the San Pedro. Their experiences have given us lots of ideas about how we can move ahead with conservation of our valley.

REPORT FROM THE NRCS-MBG
PROJECT COORDINATOR
By Don Decker, Resources Conservation Service

Mapping & Monitoring

I have been involved with Eldon Ayres and the Cooperative Assessment, Monitoring and Interpretation Network (CAMINO) project for the Malpai Group. This work, which is being carried out in cooperation with the NMSU Jornada Experimental Range and voluntary participation with ranchers, is creating an interactive database of resource information for the Malpai which will be available to access for research, planning and evaluation purposes. In the fall, I was able to help ranchers with the reading and analyzing of transects on their ranches. At these transect locations, photos are taken and plant species and cover information is recorded that is compared against previous readings in order to try to detect changes over time. Rainfall and cattle grazing records are evaluated in order to help interpret the results and the trend is documented.
Implementing Conservation Practices

With the cost share program, eight projects were completed in the past year and they included: installation of wildlife friendly fencing, livestock pipelines, a storage, troughs and removal of sediment in stock ponds. Projects are carried out to comply with the agreed to components of the Malpai Habitat Conservation Plan. Projects are also tracked in a way that meets the reporting requirements of the HCP. All of the conservation practices are designed and built according to NRCS specifications. Through the Arizona/ New Mexico Borderlands Cooperative Conservation Initiative, one Malpai area ranch was funded for various conservation practices which include water developments, fencing and brush treatments. These improvements will help with the implementation of a rest/rotation grazing system and improved rangeland condition. The initiative directs NRCS EQIP and BLM Healthy Land Initiative monies to rangeland conservation needs in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico, with an emphasis on brush control. I have been working with the Group to direct and oversee the building of erosion control structures in the Malpai Borderlands area. This program is available throughout any of the watersheds in the area where small, low cost structures built on site have the ability to improve hydrology, decrease erosion and increase grass growth as a means of soil protection. On the Arizona side of the Malpai Borderlands, the labor source to accomplish this work has been the Douglas State Prison wildfire crew. A small team has been assembled to focus in on Hay Hollow Wash and its watershed. It is hoped that this study will result in on the ground applications which will improve the condition of the eroded portions of this wash.

Fire Planning & Implementation

The new Malpai Borderlands Group Fire Management Plan is complete. The new fire plan updates and incorporates existing plans and creates a new wildfire management plan for the Arizona portion of the MBG. The wishes of each rancher have been incorporated into the plan. A small prescribed burn on the private land of one MBG area ranch was planned and approved. Half of this burn was carried out in late June and the other half is planned for implementation this fall or spring. I am currently working with Frank Hayes, a retired Forest Service fire expert on two large prescribed burns. These prescribed fires would occur over multiple ranches and ownerships on the Arizona side of the MBG. We are trying for plan approvals by early 2014 and if funding becomes available, actual implementation of one or both burns by spring of next year. I have been invited to participate in a newly formed group in Arizona which will be called the Arizona Prescribed Fire Council. Among its many goals, this group will work to improve the method and decrease the hold-ups to implementing planned burning in the State.

Working with the dedicated ranchers of the Malpai Borderlands Group is a privilege which I do not take lightly. It is extremely uplifting to be able to contribute to such a noble and worthwhile effort.

BISON IN THE BORDERLANDS

By Laura Paulson, Mexico Arid Lands Program Manager, TNC

We don’t usually think of bison as part of the native wildlife of the Borderlands. However, historical accounts of early explorers in northern Mexico often reported bison and research and records indicate that the Plains Bison ranged as far south as the Mexican states of Sonora, Chihuahua, Durango and Coahuila. These historic records extend into the mid-1800’s. Bison seem to have disappeared from the Janos Valley after 1820, but were reintroduced there from the House Rock herd in Arizona in the 1920’s, and were well established by the 1950’s. Some of these animals occasionally roamed as far west as the Animas Valley.

The Janos-Hidalgo bison herd is the only free-ranging herd in Mexico, and is considered to be of national importance. With construction of the border fence, it has become increasingly difficult for the bison to cross the border in the last few years, causing many to remain north of the border. This has raised concern about the future of bison in the Janos grasslands.

One solution was the reintroduction of genetically pure bison to its historic range in Mexico. In 2009, 23 genetically pure bison were transferred from Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota to the Nature Conservancy’s 46,000-acre El Uno Ranch in Janos, Mexico as part of a bi-national partnership between the National Park Service and it’s Mexican counterpart, the National Commission for Natural Protected Areas. The bison are managed by the Conservancy under a cooperative agreement with CONANP and a national working group for the recovery of bison in Mexico. The young herd has grown to 45 individuals in three years and they seem to be adapting well to the warmer climate of the Borderlands.

A second addition of 20-25 animals from a different herd is planned for 2014. The addition of the second group will create a solid foundation for future growth of the herd. We expect that within five years the herd will be large enough that it can be used to re-populate other parts of the bison’s historic range in Mexico. After almost disappearing from the Janos grasslands for a second time, it looks like bison will finally have a secure place among the wildlife of the Borderlands.
M ALPAI B ORDERLANDS GROUP
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MALPAI GROUP GOAL STATEMENT

“Our goal is to restore and maintain the natural processes that create and protect a healthy, unfragmented landscape to support a diverse, flourishing community of human, plant, and animal life in our borderlands region. Together, we will accomplish this by working to encourage profitable ranching and other traditional livelihoods which will sustain the open space nature of our land for generations to come.”