



The Sonoran Institute promotes community decisions that respect the land & people of the West

Wyoming reins in ranchettes

Counties given say on large-lot subdivisions



A Google search finds plenty of “35-acre ranches in Wyoming” for sale. More accurately called ranchettes, they proliferated in part because counties had no authority to regulate subdivision lots of 35 acres or more. With no county regulation, these large-tract subdivisions offered a path to quick profits for some, mainly out-of-state real estate developers.

Touting an opportunity to own a piece of paradise, developers frequently neglected to inform buyers if land lacked basic amenities, like reasonable access or potable water. They also left the costs of roads, water and other public services to the uninformed buyers and county taxpayers.

Jim Whalen leads the Partnership for Wyoming’s Future and other Sonoran Institute activities in the state, and he worked to build a broad coalition to support reform and to educate legislators and county commissioners about the need for it.

In March, the Wyoming Legislature granted counties the authority to require developers to submit a subdivision plat for lots up to 140 acres. Developers must also disclose to buyers that there is no guaran-

tee that lots will have potable water, maintained roads, utilities, and other essential services and amenities.

Governor Dave Freudenthal and Senate President John Schiffer gave the legislation bi-partisan support. Jim applauds the legislators’ commitment to “Wyoming’s rural landscapes and communities in the face of some strong opposition by developers.”

The law exempts subdivisions of up to 10 lots to provide for ranchers who want to divide portions of their land. However, Jim notes that usually it is not those in the agricultural community who break up large ranches for development.

“Wyoming ranchers tend to leave the land in better condition than when they acquired it,” he says. “It’s after a ranch is sold as an entire unit that developers split it into smaller parcels. That’s how hundreds of thousands of acres have been subdivided into 35-acre tracts.”

Wyoming’s 23 counties are considering whether or not to use their new authority. Where large-tract subdivisions are not a significant threat, counties may not implement the option. In other counties it may take the breakup of large ranches before commissioners

realize that planning and zoning can protect land values, county revenues and community character.

The Institute’s related work in Wyoming includes: identifying best practices for subdivision design; convening a growth management workshop for legislators and elected officials; researching growth projections and impacts; and promoting improved land use planning regulations and policies.

UPDATE

Jim Whalen and the Partnership for Wyoming’s Future (PWF) are encouraging further reform in the state’s land use and subdivision laws. The Corporations, Elections and Political Subdivisions Committee is drafting a bill that will have the support of PWF, the County Commissioners Association, the Wyoming Association of Realtors, the Wyoming Stock Growers Association and others.

“Jim motivated my committee to work toward a bill to promote cluster developments, which could be a key to Wyoming’s quality growth efforts and protection of rural landscapes,” said State Senator Cale Case, the committee’s co-chair.

The Sonoran Institute inspires and enables community decisions and public policies that respect the land and people of western North America.

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Jennifer Boyer, Brian Brush; Page 7 - courtesy of Ucross
Foundation, art by Gordon McConnell; Page 8 - Building
from the Best, Sonoran Institute files - Gulf of Calif. island,
Miguel Angel de la Cueva.

Friends,

Oil at \$140 a barrel. Congress defers action on a climate change bill.

The headlines can be disheartening — or downright depressing. But hold off on the Prozac. Some good things are happening in the West.

The Western Governors' Association is encouraging faster development of renewable energy and alternative fuels, and eight Western states have adopted progressive climate action plans. The best of these address transportation and recognize that better land use planning can reduce how much we drive.

California's plan calls for 13.5% of its greenhouse gas savings to come from transportation energy efficiency and smart land use. Arizona expects to save 26.7 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent with smart growth options. New Mexico plans to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by about 4% and Washington state by about 12% through transportation-related land use planning measures. Colorado, Montana, Oregon and Utah also include transportation and land use policies in their climate action strategies.

A proposed ballot initiative in Arizona could reshape growth patterns, provide alternatives to the automobile, and meld transportation infrastructure with conservation of wildlife habitat and open space. The Sonoran Institute is actively supporting this initiative for a tax to raise \$42 billion over 30 years for transportation improvements from commuter rail to bike paths to "fix it first" highway construction that emphasizes improving existing freeways, rather than building more roads.

Nationally recognized land use attorney Chris Duerksen also offers optimism in a recently published article, "Saving the World Through Zoning." Chris, a Sonoran Institute board member, describes the astute idea of using sustainable development codes to address energy conservation and production, climate change, food security, and health and safety.

"Local action is key," Chris writes. "A successful sustainable development code will have its roots in a sustainable community plan ... based on thoughtful, thorough deliberation and citizen engagement."

That brings us to the Sonoran Institute, which for 18 years has been working in the West to bring diverse community members together to make decisions and foster public policies that respect land and people. Our mission is reflected in the stories on these pages and in the other work we are pursuing as the West steps up to face critical climate change challenges.



Luther Propst

Luther Propst, Executive Director

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*"The Bridger Mountain Range is a wonderful site. I love to see how it changes depending on the weather and time of day. The fence line is probably 80-100 years old and still standing."
- Jeremy Wheaton (www.jeremywheaton.com)*

*"One of my favorite things about the Gallatin Valley is the big skies. The clouds give an incredible sense of depth, making you feel smaller in this vast landscape."
- Chris Hamilton*



*"This is a photo of the Montana Horses annual spring drive in 2007 — a very exciting event!"
- Gwen Morgan (www.gwenmorgan.com)*



Montanans Capture SENSE OF PLACE

Shaping the Future of Our Valley: Picturing Our Place, a contest held last spring in Bozeman, Montana, challenged amateur photographers to capture what they treasure most in the Gallatin Valley. Their photos, including the selection of winning entries on this page, illustrate the values of area residents, who, like others across the West, share a unique sense of place.

Gallatin County Commissioners have proposed a county-wide zoning program — one of the first in the state — to protect important agricultural lands, scenic views, wildlife habitat, and air and water quality. To help build public support for the Commissioners' bold plan, Sonoran Institute staff joined with Gallatin Grassroots Forum volunteers to conceive and organize the contest. The Institute also works with Forum members to provide area residents with information needed to make decisions about the future of the county.

U.S. Senator Jon Tester, who attended a celebration to view the photos and honor the winners, said, "It's great to see folks in Gallatin County show appreciation for their land and people through photographs. Congratulations to the organizers and participants for pulling together an event that reminds us that we must recognize the past as we move into the future."



*"Herb Fisher built the Camp Creek Railroad in Amsterdam, Montana. When I look out my window I can see him giving train rides to families in the neighborhood."
- Ninia Baehr*



*"I took this of my Grandpa (93 years young) taking a walk along the edge of Hyalite Reservoir."
- Kathy Walker*



*"This photograph highlights the struggle between preserving our past and moving into the future. The valley will undoubtedly continue to grow and change. However, those of us who call Gallatin Valley home have been entrusted with preserving its unique history for generations to come. This exceptional responsibility is one of the many reasons the valley is a wonderful place to live."
- Jill Scaron*



STATE TRUST LAND INSPIRES VISION FOR Model Sustainable Community

Land around Phoenix is being consumed faster than the population is growing — much of it by auto-dependent, large-lot subdivisions. As climate and demographics change, however, developments with high carbon footprints will not be as desirable as walkable, transit-oriented, mixed-use communities.

Just east of the metro area, 275 square miles of mostly vacant land presents a rare opportunity to envision and plan the future of a large parcel, under single ownership, in the path of growth. Known as Superstition Vistas, this land will likely become home to a million people in the next 50 years.

Superstition Vistas is state trust land, granted to states upon entry into the Union to generate revenue for trust beneficiaries — primarily public schools. The Arizona State Land Department is in a position to holistically plan the parcel and be patient in selecting development options that best generate value for the trust.

Near rail lines, a major transportation corridor and an airport, the land adjoins the Superstition Mountains, an iconic Arizona landscape. Its central location in the Sun Corridor megaregion offers the potential to influence regional development patterns and shift the laissez faire, business-as-usual model for new communities.

All this potential captured the imagination of business and civic leaders, planning professionals, smart-growth advocates, academic institutions and non-profit think-tanks. They formed the voluntary Superstition Vistas Steering Committee to explore how the land could become a global model for sustainable development.

The committee hired Robert Grow Consulting, the chief architect of Envision Utah, to lead visioning and scenario-planning that considers land use, infrastructure, transportation, sustainability, economic prosperity and the state trust's financial return. The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy-Sonoran Institute Joint Venture, a committee member, is studying the environmental sustainability components, such as greenhouse gases, air pollution, water and energy use, landfill waste, and heat-island effects.

Serious challenges to fulfilling Superstition Vistas' potential include: pressure to auction parcels piecemeal to the highest bidder; developers and builders not yet responding to changing conditions and interest in smart growth; policies that promote automobile use, residential-commercial segregation, and low-density building; and regional land use, transportation and infrastructure planning that's in its infancy.

However, there is growing understanding that sustainable development could prove highly marketable. Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano has improved state collaboration with communities to promote smart-growth patterns, and she is spearheading a ballot initiative to fund commuter rail between Tucson and Phoenix — on a proposed route through the Superstition Vistas. Diverse interests are backing an initiative to reform state trust land management that would allow more flexibility in planning and development. The Sonoran Institute supports both initiatives.

Superstition Vistas Steering Committee members believe the energy efficient, sustainable development they envision is possible and profitable, can counter climate change impacts, and can create vibrant, resilient, safe communities with a high quality of life. Achieving this vision will give the world a model for a better future.



PHOENIX LANDSLIDE

Times were good in Phoenix a decade ago, yet asking voters for a 10-year, tenth-of-a-cent sales tax to acquire mountain preserves and develop urban parks was risky and unprecedented. To the surprise of many, the measure passed with an 80 percent landslide.

With the 10-year sunset looming, Phoenix's elected officials made a tough decision — in a time of home foreclosures and disconcerting economic news — to place a reauthorization measure on the ballot to generate an estimated \$1 billion over the next 30 years.

On May 20, 2008, Phoenix voters reapproved the measure with a breathtaking 83 percent "yes" vote. Turnout was the highest ever for a Phoenix special election. The Sonoran Institute was among the 17 organizations and individuals who placed "pro" statements in the Ballot Guide, which went to 521,000 households.

"These results indicate that public support for open space is real and enduring, through good times and bad," says Eric Gorsegrner, the Institute's Sun Corridor associate program director. "We believe that is true throughout the West."



Planner Finds Energy & Synergy in Mojave Desert

Several months in southern California's Morongo Basin have changed how I see this Mojave Desert landscape. I better understand the passion of the people who are working to conserve this special place, which is filled with wonders that surpass stereotypical notions of hot, dry emptiness.

Many of these amazing folks were at the Morongo Basin Open Space Group's strategic planning retreat in January, which I attended during my interview process with the Sonoran Institute for



I better understand the passion of the people who are working to conserve this special place, which is filled with wonders...

the position as regional land use planner here. Marjo Curgus, who oversees the Institute's community leadership training programs, asked retreat participants to name their favorite things about living in the Basin. I recall the answers: the weather, the wildlife, the night skies, natural beauty, sense of place and community, dirt roads, fresh air, birds, and my favorite, the "juicy, restorative energy."

In March I packed up my dogs, cats, looms and books and made my way to Wonder Valley near Twentynine Palms. While intrigued by the people and their love of this place, I wondered how I would ever adapt to such a landscape, even one populated by the iconic Joshua tree.

While still a newcomer, I already feel much more akin to the local people. I enjoy my work with the Open Space Group (OSG) whose members represent 21 agencies and organizations (see sidebar) that began collaborating in 2006 to protect this region's open spaces and unique landscapes. My role includes public information and outreach, program management, and importantly, organizational and technical assistance for implementing the OSG's action plan. Committees are addressing conservation mapping, communications and outreach, regional trails, and community

buffers and separators.

An OSG team attended the Sonoran Institute's Western Leadership Institute (see story this page) and is using strategic messaging lessons learned there for outreach to local communities and decision makers. In June, the OSG's first public educational forum drew 36 community members to a panel discussion on habitat conservation plans for the region. An August workshop is planned to set preliminary conservation priorities and goals.

Stay tuned for further reports of progress and desert synergy happening here in the Morongo Basin.

MORONGO BASIN OPEN SPACE GROUP MEMBERS

Basinwide Foundation
Builders Industry Association,
Morongo Basin Chapter
Bureau of Land Management, Barstow Field Office
California Department of Fish and Game
City of Twentynine Palms
Copper Mountain College
Hi-Desert Water District
Joshua Basin Water District
Joshua Tree Municipal Advisory Council
Mojave Desert Land Trust
Morongo Basin Conservation Association
Morongo Basin Property Association
Morongo Valley Community Services District
National Park Service,
Joshua Tree National Park
National Parks Conservation Association
San Bernardino County
Sonoran Institute
The Wildlands Conservancy
Town of Yucca Valley
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U. S. Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center

HELPING CITIZENS HELP THEIR COMMUNITIES

Seven teams converged in Salt Lake City in May for the Western Leadership Institute, a Sonoran Institute workshop to build leadership and campaign advocacy skills for citizens working on a variety of issues to enhance their communities.

Teams from Morongo Basin, Calif., Gallatin County, Mont., and Archuleta County, Colo., are focused on open space protection. Missoula County's team works to protect Montana agricultural lands and promote local food. Ravalli County, Mont., is creating a water quality protection strategy. The Kootenai, Idaho, team is building public support for a new comprehensive plan. The group from Park County, Mont., includes youth leaders interested in community development, such as an environmental education/skate park in Livingston.

Participants learned about team dynamics, facilitation, engaging the public in planning decisions, and strengthening collaboration. Experts discussed the importance of a clear, thoughtful campaign strategy and effective communications. Teams left with action plans and communication frames to immediately put to use.

In a recent *High Country News* story, Morongo Basin team member April Sall discussed implications of a planned energy transmission corridor in the Mojave Desert. Missoula County's Paul Hubbard was interviewed for a May *New West* article, "In Missoula, Stopping Subdivisions from Eating Up Local Food."



AROUND THE WEST *in a word*

La Ruta Ecotours plans two fall trips

Colorado River Delta, October 23 – 27
(in partnership with the San Diego Natural History Museum)

Explore the Colorado River Delta, once one of the greatest desert estuaries in the world. Discover the culture of the Kwapa, the Delta's original people, and enjoy colorful history, culinary delights and memorable scenery as we visit Yuma, Mexicali and the Hardy River corridor. Travel by panga in the Upper Gulf of California to the mouth of the Colorado River and by canoe through La Ciénega de Santa Clara, the largest wetland in the Sonoran Desert and the heart of the Pacific Flyway, with more than 380 species of birds.

Culture & Flavors of the Río Sonora, November 15 – 18
(in partnership with the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum)

Follow the Río Sonora through the quaint towns of Ures, Banamichi and Arizpe to encounter the rich gastronomic and ranching heritage of rural

Sonora. The scenic route offers a glimpse into 400 years of northern Mexico's history, including the miners' strike that precipitated the Mexican Revolution. Visit mission churches, taste artisanal *piloncillo* (sugarcane), observe the making of *bacanora* (agave liquor) and prepare traditional recipes.



Call *La Ruta* at 520-886-6555 for information or reservations.

Designing the New West

Given the outstanding landscape and quality of life, it's no surprise that the Northern Rockies area is one of the fastest growing in the country. "Designing the New West – Architecture & Landscape in the Mountain West," a conference sponsored by NewWest.Net and the Sonoran Institute, attracted more than 200 architects, developers, local officials and members of the conservation community to share their views on how the region can grow in a way that enhances communities, protects the environment, and conserves the unique sense of place. The conference highlighted the urban and rural development best practices featured in the Sonoran Institute book, *Building from the Best of the Northern Rockies*. These are also being shared at hands-on workshops for people involved in designing new developments for small towns and rural areas.

Board welcomes new members

Christopher (Chris) Duerksen, a new member of the Sonoran Institute Board of Directors, is a land-use lawyer and managing director with Clarion Associates, a land use consulting firm in Denver. A co-founder of the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute, Chris has written and spoken extensively on land use and conservation issues.

Bob Keiter, founding director of the Wallace Stegner Center for Land, Resources and the Environment at the University of Utah S.J. Quinney College of Law, has also joined the Sonoran Institute board. He serves as a trustee of the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation and the National Parks Conservation Association.

The board reluctantly accepted the resignation of David Parsons, and Lollie Plank and Darlene Lavender completed their terms in November 2007 and March 2008, respectively.

Institute opens Colorado policy office

In May, the Sonoran Institute opened a new office in Denver and hired Rich McClintock as Colorado Policy Director to lead legislative and policy reform work involving growth, energy, water and related issues. Rich's first steps are refining our Colorado policy agenda and meeting with key stakeholders. He is also engaging in the public discussion of a ballot measure to increase funding for clean energy, wildlife habitat and sustainable communities by eliminating a property tax loophole for the oil and gas industry.

Rich will also build an action network of elected local officials in the Intermountain West, who know best about the challenges of rapid growth and change. The Institute envisions this network to be a powerful voice for better land and water policy at the federal level.

New director leads Sun Corridor work

A chance to help preserve natural beauty, promote intelligent development and work on big-picture issues attracted Dave Richins to join the Sonoran Institute as Sun Corridor Legacy Program director. Dave will lead Institute efforts to create a model for a sustainable desert community and to promote clean and secure energy, better transportation between Phoenix and Tucson, and conservation of the Sonoran Desert and free-flowing rivers.





Wyoming Foundations Blend Conservation, Research, Arts

In a quiet, remote place where a highway sign reads, Ucross, Wyoming, Population 25, Altitude 4085, two international nonprofits, the Apache Foundation and the Ucross Foundation, are hard at work.

The Apache Foundation works to make the world a better place through scientific study, application of environmentally sound land use planning principles, and tree planting as a method of carbon sequestration. With a goal of planting a million trees, the Foundation's Tree Grant Program has provided counties, cities, schools, churches or other nonprofits more than 415,000 native saplings for projects since 2006.

Established by Houston-based Apache Corporation, an independent energy company, the Apache Foundation leases and operates a 20,000-acre cattle ranch owned by the Ucross Foundation. More than half the ranch is held in a conservation easement by The Nature Conservancy's Wyoming Chapter.

The Ucross Foundation, created in 1981 by Apache founder Raymond Plank, runs an internationally known residency program for artists, composers and writers. Among its many celebrated past Fellows are Pulitzer Prize winner Annie Proulx and successful writers Terry Tempest Williams and Elizabeth Gilbert.

Conservation, land research and the arts all come together at the ranch, where the Sonoran Institute Board of Directors recently held a three-day meeting courtesy of the two foundations and at the suggestion of former board member Lollie Benz Plank.

Ucross Foundation also hosts conferences, such as a recent community symposium on coalbed methane development in the Powder River Basin. And it operates a public art gallery, where a reception for the Institute's Board and friends was attended by Montana artist Gordon McConnell, whose painting exhibition, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, was on view in the gallery.

Duo Supports Collaborative Conservation

Jane Ragle and John Smith believe that we have a responsibility to be careful stewards of our planet. They support the Sonoran Institute's approach to conservation, especially its emphasis on collaboration.

"I believe the thoughtful way the Institute involves community in conservation is the only way to create real and lasting change," Jane says. She not only donates to demonstrate her commitment to this approach, she is also a Sonoran Institute board member.

Jane and John support and feel passionate about several charitable organizations.

"You don't have to be wealthy to give," Jane says. "Everyone can be a philanthropist."

THE SONORAN INSTITUTE'S HUMMINGBIRD SOCIETY

The hummingbird, an important pollinator, ranges across the West from Mexico to the Northern Rockies — the same area where the Sonoran Institute promotes conservation and helps communities blossom. The Institute's Hummingbird Society members receive monthly emails about Western issues, a distinctive gift of appreciation, and invitations to special events. For information, contact Jessica at jristow@sonoran.org or 520-290-0828.

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BUILDING FROM THE BEST

These are three of the seven projects the Sonoran Institute honored at its Building from the Best event in Tucson in March. The Curley School, below, was recognized for Creative Redevelopment & Rehabilitation. The rain-harvesting system is part of the Lee H. Brown Family Conservation Learning Center, which received the Green Building award. McClintock's Restaurant was selected for Regionally Appropriate Architecture.



The Institute is launching a Building from the Best of the Gulf of California (BBG) initiative to promote a vision for tourism and coastal development that respect the region's water, land and people. The project has three principal components:

- Establish best practices for development that integrates conservation and community character and protects areas with high conservation values;
- Develop and market geotourism to build support for a sustainable approach to coastal development; and
- Research the economic, social, cultural and environmental components that support alternative visions and scenarios for tourism and development.

Lindblad Expeditions, National Geographic Society and Mexican Fund for Conservation of Nature are helping organize a special tour in southern Baja California this fall to raise funds for the BBG project.

