

## Arizona Ranches Plan to Protect Land and Adapt to a Changing Economy

**Mandy Roberts Metzger**, President, Diablo Trust

**T**wo independent working Arizona ranches – the Bar T Bar and the Flying M – comprise what is known as the Diablo Trust. Located in northern Arizona 160 miles northeast of Phoenix, the boundaries of Diablo Trust encompass 426,000 acres of intermingled private, state, and federal lands. The ranches have protected open space and recreational opportunities for five generations.

Ranches, however, are increasingly threatened by global competition and incentives to convert to subdivisions. To address sustainability of the Bar T Bar and Flying M, two ranch families joined with a group of Flagstaff environmentalists and state and federal agency personnel to create the Diablo Trust in 1993. Today, Diablo Trust is one of the West's oldest and largest grassroots collaborative land management teams.

What is the advantage to Arizona for sustaining these ranches? Summer rainfall and winter snow feed clean water through Diablo Trust rangelands. The moisture creates a diverse plant community that supports wildlife, healthy watersheds, and food production. Wildlife and livestock seasonally rotate between higher and lower elevations allowing the land rest time to build next year's forage. It is a beautiful and productive place.

In contrast, Maricopa County has grown an average of 313 people a day since 2000. Americans, for the first time, import more food than they grow at home. Deserts and high plains are continually devoured by new development. Water supplies have been endangered by growth and the neglect of watersheds.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "When the well's dry, we know the worth of water." The same can be said of open space. With many places seeming to abandon any notion of sustainability, Diablo Trust partners feel the responsibility to become a leader in building sustainable rural economies. Their first task has been to

create a workable long-term plan to guide land use. This has not been historically supported in rural areas.

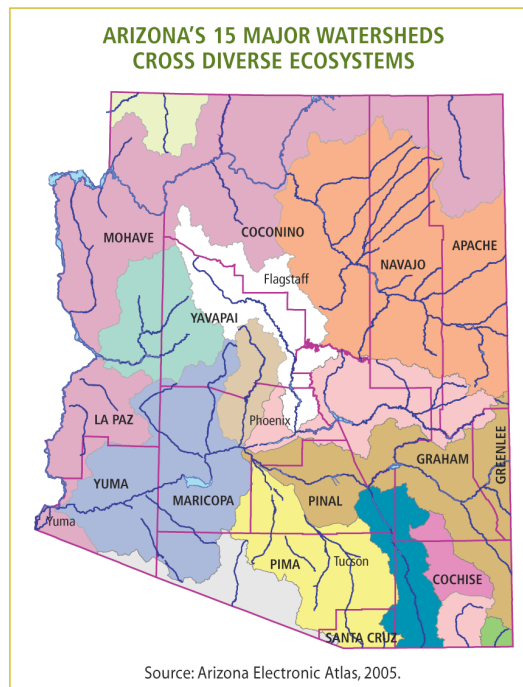
Fortunately, Coconino County leaders have long thought "outside the box" when it comes to rural land use planning. They first began fostering community-generated plans to guide development of unincorporated population centers. More recently, they authorized one of Arizona's first rural plans to guide county actions in places where no population centers exist. This was the Diablo Canyon Rural Planning Area. The resulting plan completed by Trust participants and collaborators in 2005 provides a toolkit and pathway for finding grazing-compatible economic opportunities that will keep the ranches operating into the next generation and beyond.

Among the conclusions of the plan: Trust lands can be used to supply substantial amounts of alternative energy – wind, solar, and biomass. Native seeds can be marketed sustainably alongside local beef. The restoration of 75,000 grassland acres can create opportunities for

research and watershed management. Open space, as well as historical and archaeological sites, can be preserved by employing transfer of development rights, directed development, and conservation easements. Most important, the county and Diablo Trust can continue to work together to preserve sustainable open space. Around the planet, billions of acres exist that are similar to the American West in geology, topography, soils, habitats, watersheds, and food and fiber production. The Diablo Trust experience will provide a hands-on laboratory for new ways to address sustainability in many of these places.

This is a hopeful effort, filled with promise.

Mandy Roberts Metzger has worked as a senior natural resource policy advisor in Washington, D.C., and currently serves on the Arizona Growing Smarter Oversight Council, the Arizona Water Institute Advisory Board, and the board of the Coconino County Sustainable Economic Development Initiative.



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