

Press Release

December 14, 2017

From: EC Bar Ranch, Nutrioso, AZ 85932

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Subject: Acquisition of EC Bar Ranch by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission will protect threatened and endangered species in Apache County, Arizona

Title: EC Bar Ranch Acquisition Protects Endangered Species

On December 14, 2017, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission acquired the EC Bar Ranch, Nutrioso, AZ, consisting of 391 acres with over 3 miles of Nutrioso Creek, a perennial stream in the White Mountains of Eastern Arizona. The acquisition will provide long term protections to aquatic/wildlife habitat for endangered species that occur on the ranch and ensure stream flows are preserved for public recreation downstream at Nelson Reservoir. The ranch was acquired with funding from the State of Arizona Heritage Fund, an Endangered Species Act Section 6 grant award, and donation of the EC Bar Ranch Conservation Easement.

In 1996, Jim Crosswhite acquired the EC Bar Ranch and began restoration of Nutrioso Creek and upland pastures that had been historically overgrazed by livestock and wild ungulates. Crosswhite submitted grant applications to State and Federal agencies requesting public funding to match his own resources to implement agency recommendations to improve water quality and aquatic/wildlife habitat on the ranch. Agencies that supported improvements include:

- Arizona Department of Environmental Quality - CWA 319(h) Grant Program
- Arizona Game & Fish Department – Landowner Incentive Program
- Natural Resources Conservation Service - Environmental Quality Incentive Program
- US Fish & Wildlife Service – Partners in Fish and Wildlife Program
- US Environmental Protection Agency – Clean Water Act provisions

Milestones accomplished through collaborative sustainable partnerships with government agencies and environmental organizations over the last 20 years are:

- In 1996, Nutrioso Creek was rated in “non-functional” condition and listed by the US Environmental Protection Agency as a non-attaining waterbody under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act. By 2006, all recommendations in the *Nutrioso Creek TMDL for Turbidity Report* by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality had been implemented. In 2009, 3 miles of Nutrioso Creek on the EC Bar Ranch was delisted as a non-attaining waterbody by the US Environmental Protection Agency, making it the first instance in Arizona where a waterbody met water quality standards due to mitigation. Practices implemented by Crosswhite to restore a proper functioning condition included willow and grass vegetative plantings to restore stream function and habitat, stream grade improvement practices to reduce erosion, riparian fencing to manage livestock activities, 8-foot tall boundary fencing to exclude wild ungulates, and ranch management changes.
- In 2003, Crosswhite entered the first Safe Harbor Agreement in Arizona between US Fish and Wildlife Service and a private landowner. The Agreement was designed to help protect aquatic habitat on Nutrioso Creek for the threatened Little Colorado spinedace

and potential habitat for the endangered Southwestern Willow flycatcher. At that time, no other endangered species were known to occur on the Ranch.

- In 2006, the US Fish and Wildlife Service relocated native fish from Nutrioso Creek downstream on the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest to the EC Bar Ranch upstream. This was the first known instance in Arizona where a federally listed fish species, e.g. Little Colorado spinedace, has been relocated from public lands to private land. Even though aquatic habitat has been restored and protected on Nutrioso Creek, the spinedace may be the most at risk fish species in AZ.
- In 2009, Crosswhite created the EC Bar Ranch Conservation Easement covering 94 acres of riparian habitat and donated it to the New Mexico Land Conservancy. His goal was to eventually expand aquatic/wildlife habitat, agricultural, and open space conservation value protections to the entire ranch.
- In 2014, US Fish and Wildlife Service listed the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse as endangered and designated critical habitat on 12 miles of Nutrioso Creek, including 250 acres on the Ranch. In 2015 and 2016, field surveys requested by Crosswhite along the Creek resulted in multiple sightings and captures of jumping mice on the EC Bar Ranch. US Fish and Wildlife Service commented: *This is significant because it is currently the only documentation of jumping mice occupying private land in Arizona, and represents new location information for this endangered species.*
- In 2016, Crosswhite requested the US Fish and Wildlife Service extend the Safe Harbor Agreement to include the endangered New Mexico meadow jumping mouse. Crosswhite stated: *"I believe habitat restoration activities, protected under the Safe Harbor Agreement, contributed to recovery of the jumping mouse and made the EC Bar Ranch unique as the only private property where both the Little Colorado spinedace and New Mexico meadow jumping mouse occur. Collaboration on the Safe Harbor Agreement led to support for aquatic/wildlife habitat improvement projects and State acquisition of the ranch to ensure long term protections for these and other species in conservation need."*
- In 2017, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission and US Fish and Wildlife Service expanded aquatic/wildlife habitat conservation value protections in perpetuity through acquisition of 391 acres of the EC Bar Ranch as an Arizona Heritage Property. By so doing, all public and private investments in water quality improvements and aquatic/wildlife habitat restoration will be preserved and protected.

Crosswhite added: *Over the last 20 years, I have worked to implement recommendations by State and Federal agencies leading to restoration of Nutrioso Creek from a overused and degraded non-functional condition with poor water quality to a proper functioning riparian habitat where aquatic/wildlife habitat for threatened and endangered species has been recovered and protected for future generations. My experience illustrates that private landowners who are willing to develop collaborative sustainable partnerships with government agencies and environmental organizations can recover and protect species in conservation need, which ultimately results in long-term public benefits. Acquisition of the EC Bar Ranch by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission and US Fish and Wildlife Service has helped to realize my dream of restoring Nutrioso Creek with aquatic/wildlife habitat for all species managed and protected in perpetuity.*