

Northern Altar Valley Reserve



Buckelew Farm

Fee lands: 505 acres
State grazing lease: 2,000 acres
BLM federal grazing permit: 200 acres
Cost: \$5,080,467
Acquired: October 13, 2006
Fund: 2004 Bond Funds
Partner: Arizona Land and Water Trust

Background

Most who know of Buckelew Farm know of it because of the annual fall pumpkin festival and corn maze just outside of Robles Junction (Three Points) on Highway 86. But what many probably don't know is the Buckelew family had been approached in 2006 with a very lucrative offer to sell the farm for a housing development. Instead, the Buckelew family approached the Arizona Land and Water Trust and Pima County to save the farm and other grazing lands south of the farm. On October 13, 2006 the County purchased a total of 505 acres with 2004 bond funds, which included 420 acres of mostly irrigated farmland north of Ajo Highway, and 85 acres on undeveloped ranch land south of the highway. In addition, a 2,000-acre State grazing lease and 200 acre BLM federal grazing permit came with the property. Water rights include 1,092 acre feet of grandfathered irrigation water rights associated with two irrigation wells with the right to irrigate 324 acres of farmland, and a Type II non-irrigation water right of 8 acre feet per year. These lands expand upon a previous 500-acre property the Buckelew's sold to the County in 2002, funded through the County's Floodprone Land Acquisition Program. The Buckelew family kept 9 acres that include a house and other farm related buildings.

History

Bob Buckelew and his wife Clara purchased this property in 1954 after they had been leasing it for several years to farm cotton. Over the years, Bob and his wife gifted the property to their children, Nick Buckelew and his sisters. Portions of the original property were sold to the City of Tucson to retire water rights. Nick and his wife Laurie purchased the 85 acre property south of the highway during the 1980s, along with the 500 acre property sold to the County in 2002. The Buckelew family has owned and operated the Bucks-Kin Farm since 1954 and has a special tie to the land of the Altar Valley. Like many families in the Altar Valley, the Buckelews have worked the land for generations and developed close ties to it. Nick Buckelew's father has strong beliefs about conservation that underpinned the process to protect the farm.

Biological Resources

Although most of the land north of Ajo Highway is farmed, 80 acres remains in natural condition, partly along Brawley Wash, partly on the southeast corner of the property, and partly as a small riparian area of 5 acres around a stock pond with water most of the year in the northeast corner of the property that supports native and migratory wildlife. The 85 acres south of the highway is relatively undisturbed and used for grazing. The property falls within the Conservation Lands System categories of Multiple Use, Important Riparian, Special Species Management Area for the cactus ferruginous pygmy owl, and an agricultural in holding. Protecting the Buckelew family lands also protect biological resources and habitat for the Swainson's hawk, Bell's Vireo, Western yellow-billed cuckoo, Western yellow bat, western burrowing owl, Tucson shovel nosed snake, and Pima pineapple cactus.



Buckelew ranch land south of Ajo Highway looking west towards the Black Hills. Photo by John Sullivan.

Management and Recreation

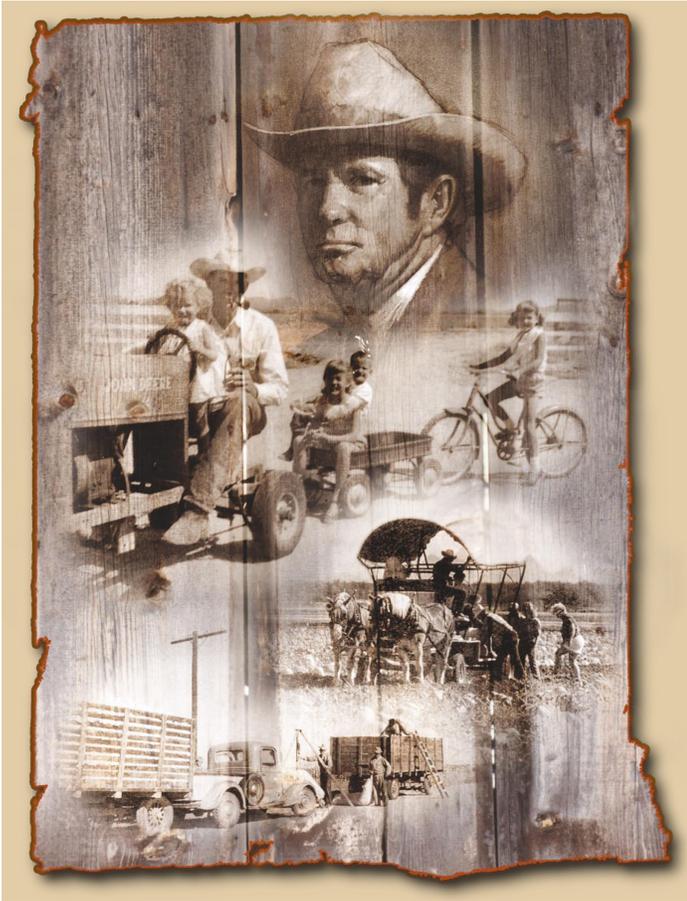
The Buckelew family will continue to farm portions of the land, while working with Pima County to enhance habitat for wildlife on other portions of the property, providing wildlife viewing opportunities for the public, developing outdoor educational opportunities for an adjacent school, and continuing the traditional fall pumpkin festival and corn maze. Grazing will continue to occur on the state and federal leases.



It is estimated that about 35,000 people attend the annual Pumpkin Festival and Corn Maze at Buckelew Farm. Photo from www.buckelewfarm.com



A 5 acre riparian area exists northeast of the farm fields. Photo by Pima County.



The Buckelew Family. Photos from Nick Buckelew

Ongoing Property Improvements

- Recent projects include new fencing to improve movement of livestock between pastures during the short grazing season.
- A restoration project is being developed along the Brawley Wash adjacent to and down stream from the Highway 86 bridge.
- Nick Buckelew has been looking at alternative crops and land uses to enhance public activity at the farm.
- Parts of grazing areas south of the highway have infestations of the invasive exotic plant buffelgrass, where control efforts were initiated in the summer of 2010.

