

Upper Santa Cruz and Southern Altar Valley Reserve



Rancho Seco

Fee lands: 9,574 acres
State grazing lease: 21,662 acres
BLM Federal grazing permit: 5,699 acres
Conservation easement: 478 acres
Cost: \$18,503,948
Acquired: May 19, 2005
Fund: 2004 Bond Funds
Partnership: Arizona Land and Water Trust

Background

The 37,000-acre Rancho Seco property is one of several working ranches owned by the County in the Altar Valley and Upper Santa Cruz Valley. Located north of Arivaca, it is visible to those driving on Arivaca Highway, which bisects the ranch. Rancho Seco adjoins the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge on the west and the County's Sopori Ranch and Marley Ranch Conservation Area to the north. The ranch is actually made up of two ranches known as the Santa Lucia Ranch and Rancho Seco.

Historical and Cultural Resources

An inventory of known archaeological and historic sites, mostly concentrated along Arivaca road and within the Cerro Colorado Mountains, indicates prehistoric use of the land between A.D. 900 and A.D. 1450. These sites were undoubtedly established because of the presence of water and arable land along Sopori Creek and its secondary drainages.

Historically, the property was used for ranching and mining. The Cerro Colorado/ Heintzelman Mine opened in 1858 and later became known as the Heintzelman Mine named for Samuel P. Heintzelman, the first company president. In 1861, with the mine subjected to continued Apache attacks and plagued by continuous stealing and desertion by the Mexican and Indian workers, John Poston, co-owner of the mine, executed one of the workers caught stealing to set an example. His workers rose in rebellion, murdered John Poston, and destroyed the mine workings. Mining resumed after the Civil War, and nearby Arivaca became a ranching and mining boomtown. Ruins of the Cerro Colorado mining district settlement and Poston's gravesite remain within Rancho Seco.

Biological Resources

The ranch crosses the divide between the Altar and Upper Santa Cruz Valleys, and includes portions of the Cerro Colorado and Las Guijas Mountains, and portions of the Sopori Wash and Las Guijas/Calera Wash complex. The property presents a good example of semidesert grassland and open mesquite woodland. Surveys of the property found that several Priority Vulnerable Species are thought to be present, including California leaf-nosed bat, Mexican long-tongued bat, Bell's vireo, and Abert's towhee. The majority of the ranch lies within the Multiple Use Management Area of the Conservation Lands System, with a smaller amount of Biological Core lands, and portions of two Important Riparian Areas. The ranch provides a critical wildlife corridor between the Altar Valley, the Tumacacori Mountains and Santa Cruz River Valley.



Rancho Seco View of Cerro Colorado Mountains – Photo by Trilby Dupont, Arizona Land & Water Trust

Management

The ranch is managed as two separate working ranch units, both under agreements with the County, and is stocked well below allowed use levels. Ongoing monitoring of rangeland condition is done on both the County fee lands as well as the grazing lease lands. Due to the proximity to the border, significant impacts on management activities exist as a result of illegal border crossers and related enforcement activities on our lands, as well as drug trafficking related activity. Much of the Rancho Seco lands are also still open to mining.

Recreation

Rancho Seco is a large landscape that allows many outdoor recreational activities year-round. With a mix of County, State and Federal lands, regulations vary by agency and due to the remoteness of the lands, little informational signage is in place. Visitors should know the different agency rules and property boundaries before they go. Typical outdoor activities include small and big game hunting, hiking, horse riding, ATV use on existing roads, wildlife watching, camping, recreational mining and mountain biking. Visitors should be prepared for a semi-wilderness setting with rugged, unimproved and poorly marked roads. Visitors should be aware of the potential for camp or vehicle vandalism.



Sketch of Heintzelman Mine 1859



View of Rancho Seco – Photo by Randy Prentice

Ongoing Property Improvements

- Numerous water enhancement projects have been completed on the ranch for wildlife. Including solar-powered wells.
- Maintenance and repair of fencing and the installation of cattle guards is necessary due to vandalism.
- Sportsmen groups and other volunteers spend at least one weekend annually picking up trash left behind by border crossers. Over the past five years over 120 cubic yards of trash has been collected off the ranch by the volunteers.
- Additional permanent vegetative monitoring transects have been established on the ranch in representative ecological units and are surveyed twice annually.

