



LA CIÉNEGA

Cuenca Los Ojos Newsletter



*Protecting, restoring, and rewilding the biodiversity of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands for over 40 years.
We bring back water, soil, and life.*

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Cuenca Los Ojos' first newsletter! *Cuenca Los Ojos* translates to "watershed of the springs," and *ciénega* means wetlands.

"If it can be done here, it can be done anywhere"
- Valer Clark, CLO Founder



A MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER

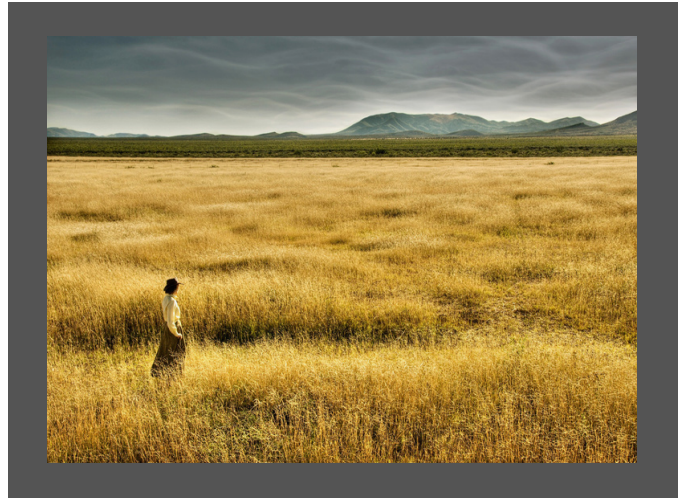
Now that the Climate Summit in Glasgow has ended, I find that the world is in a new place. I believe that finally we—as a globe—are reckoning with the reality that we cannot recklessly continue to abuse our natural resources. Some will say that not enough progress was accomplished at the Summit, but I think we must take our wins where we can get them. In the 40 years I have worked in land restoration, I have witnessed firsthand how even the smallest changes can make big differences in a landscape. How a series of small rock structures strategically placed can result in the re-greening of a hillside and the restoration of the flora and fauna of a micro-ecosystem. Similarly, small wins at a climate summit can result in a ground swell of people prioritizing the health of the planet.

In the spirit of prioritizing the health of the planet, I have made some significant decisions for CLO over the last three years to help position our organization for long-term sustainability and success. First, we transitioned the organization from a private family foundation to a 501c3 public charity. Second, we permanently protected Cuenca de Los Ojos lands in Sonora, Mexico with the help of U.S. and Mexico partners, specifically the Wyss Foundation and Fondo Mexicano para la Conservación de la Naturaleza. Third, we hired our first full-time executive director to help us meet the challenges of these transitions. With these changes, I believe CLO is on a course for long-term sustainability and success.

For those of you who know me well, this next part may make you chuckle. Many of you know that I have not been shy about blaming people for harming our environment; perhaps I am getting a little sentimental, but I now think that our greatest chance for survival is the power of the people. I see that people are eager to do the right thing.

People young and old across the world are demanding that governments and companies prioritize the planet's health. Many are voting with their pocketbooks: they are conscious about the purchases they make and how they live. My hope grows when I see that people are beginning to recognize and value ecosystems and how individual's decisions can make a difference.

At the same time, I also hear that people don't know what they can do to make a difference. I feel very fortunate to have been on the front lines of conservation and rewilding this corner of the earth for much of my life. I recognize most people do not have this luxury. Many friends who thought that by recycling and taking public transportation were doing their part now feel at a loss. They now understand that much more is needed to stop the warming that was set in motion long ago.



I recognize how frustrating it must be to feel powerless and I would like to offer some encouragement for those who are in this camp. Thankfully there are so many organizations that are doing great work to address our changing climate and to protect and rewild significant lands. I encourage everyone to find and support organizations that focus on what is important to them. If you care about the rainforest, please support rainforest protection organizations. If you care about the ocean, please support organizations dedicated to protecting our oceans. If you care about restoring water in arid regions and securing wildlife corridors, I humbly ask that you consider supporting CLO.

Our work to protect, restore, and rewild the arid border grasslands is just beginning. While much of our work has already reversed decades of landscape degradation, we have much more to achieve. **With your continued support we aim to further increase ground and surface water flows, increase habitat for pollinators, migratory birds, and native fish, and build landscape connections to expand wildlife corridors for megafauna species such as the jaguar.**

All of this started with a few rock walls strategically placed on an eroded hillside 40 years ago. Today, we are embarking on a global mission to improve the planet's health in this very critical borderland region. It is a new day for CLO and I am truly grateful to all who have been part of this journey. All of you have touched me in how thoughtful and generous people can be with their time and expertise and for that I say **thank you**. I hope you will continue (or begin) your journey with CLO as we strive to secure a lasting legacy for our planet's health.

Valer

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREETING

Greetings and welcome to our inaugural edition of La Ciénega – a monumental milestone for a monumental project. I would like to thank Valer Clark, Valerie Gordon and the Cuenca Los Ojos (CLO) Board for their faith and trust in me to take the helm of CLO as we embark on CLO’s next chapter.

The last two years have been fast and furious. As Valer stated, there are many challenges facing our planet’s health and land conservation efforts. At the same time, there are reasons to be hopeful and I believe CLO is one of them.

A snapshot of our work these past two years includes:

- Permanently protecting CLO’s 121,000-acre preserve;
- Securing an operational endowment in Mexico with the help of the Wyss Foundation and Fondo Mexicano para la Conservación de la Naturaleza.
- Partnering with Bat Conservation International and Borderlands Restoration Network (BRN) on native agave propagation;
- Hosting the Sonoran Field Course with BRN, a course designed to introduce students in Sonora, Mexico to land conservation opportunities in their region;
- Conducting scientific research and monitoring with Alejandro Ganesh Marin, a University of Arizona PhD student who has deployed 140 trail cameras throughout CLO to study and document CLO’s wildlife corridors;
- Working with Dr. Alejandro Varela on the reintroduction of the Yaqui catfish to the Cajon Bonito;
- Developing a holistic monitoring protocol with the help of Martha Sample at Northern Arizona University, to ensure our management decisions stay true to science; and,
- Managing Rancho El Uno in Janos, Chihuahua, a 50,000-acre preserve with a conservation herd of over 280 bison.

All this great work occurred against the backdrop of the environmental impacts created by the construction of the border wall. This is no doubt a turning point in continental-scale conservation, but I believe CLO is best positioned to engage with partners on both sides of the border to achieve solutions for safety, security, and the environment.

As you can see, our next chapter is full of hope and possibilities. On behalf of CLO, I thank you for your support and look forward to continuing our great work with all of you.

In Cadence,

Jeremiah H. Leibowitz
Executive Director



Bat pollinating agave



Sonoran Field School



Yaqui catfish research



Rancho El Uno

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CLO U.S. and CLO A.C.



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MEET THE RANCHO EL UNO STAFF



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Foreman



Ofelia Migdalia Campos Escarcega
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Karen Guadalupe Suarez Lira
Administrative Assistant



Nancy Hernandez Rodriguez
Manager



Cesar Tomás Bustamante Sarellano
Maintenance Manager



Mauro García Valdez
Cowboy



@ranchoeluno

CLO LANDS ARE PERMANENTLY PROTECTED!

This year, CLO staff, partners, and supporters came together to complete a three-year process to permanently protect CLO's lands in Sonora, Mexico. While U.S. landowners can use a conservation easement to protect their land, unfortunately, the same option does not exist in Mexico. Following much deliberation and analysis, CLO was able to convey the lands into a trust, or in Spanish a Fideicomiso, which in practice achieves the same objectives as a conservation easement.

A huge thank you goes out to Valer Clark and Valerie Gordon for blessing the process, to Lorenzo Rosenzweig, the former director of Fondo Mexicano para la Conservación de la Naturaleza A.C, who helped the project gain operational and financial traction, to Tom Sisk, Marcey Olajos, and the Wyss Foundation for championing the project, and Renée González, Fondo Mexicano's current director for helping bring the CLO, Wyss Foundation, and Fondo Mexicano partnership across the finish line. In addition, a special thanks to José Manuel Pérez Cantú, Oscar E. López Bujanda, and Gerardo Lagarda for the crash course they endured in learning Mexican legal and banking regulations to help complete this project.

What further helped cement the land's protection was the generous financial support provided by the Wyss Foundation and Fondo Mexicano to establish an operational endowment in Mexico to secure the project's basic operating costs. While this is a huge step towards advancing CLO's mission, it is only the beginning. CLO is now tasked with securing resources to fund all its restoration work. We thank all those who helped get us to this milestone, and we appreciate your continued support to help us achieve new ones.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These last two years would not have been possible without the dedicated financial and project support of Valer Clark, the Bobolink Foundation, the EJK Foundation, Fondo Mexicano para la Conservación de la Naturaleza A.C., Northern Arizona University, and the Wyss Foundation.

Valer Clark

The reason we are here. Over the last 30 years, Valer's personal investment to acquire the CLO lands and fund its restoration has brought us to this moment. This, coupled with her decision to permanently protect the lands through a trust and establish a U.S. nonprofit, is another testament of her dedication and vision to holistically restore this U.S./Mexico borderland region.



The Bobolink Foundation's mission is to: Advance conservation and stewardship of biodiversity through the protection of natural areas, education, and building local constituencies for nature. Thankfully, they believed that CLO's mission aligned with theirs. During the two-year period we were negotiating the terms of the trust and laying the foundation for

permanently protecting CLO's lands, the Bobolink Foundation's support ensured that we continued to meet our mission while simultaneously completing the next phase of our long-term conservation objectives. A very special thanks to the Bobolink Foundation for their unwavering commitment to CLO's success.

EJK Foundation

A very special thanks to the Emily J. Knobloch (EJK) Foundation and its trustees Carla Knobloch and Steve Sharkey, and foundation administrator, Elizabeth Love. While we never were able to meet Dr. Emily Knobloch, her life and passions have provided much inspiration to our work. The EJK Foundation seeks to protect ecologically valuable landscapes throughout North America, and we are extremely grateful of their belief that CLO represents a place worth protecting. Their generous support ensured that we could focus on formally protecting CLO's lands and continue our conservation and restoration mission.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



FONDO MEXICANO PARA LA CONSERVACIÓN DE LA NATURALEZA (FONDO) Fondo is a world-class leader in conservation finance throughout Mexico. With 27 years of conservation investment and project management experience, they were a key partner in providing the financial, legal, and administrative expertise to help protect CLO's lands. In addition, CLO is grateful for their generous support of matching funds towards CLO's operational endowment. A special thanks to Fondo's former director, Lorenzo Rosenzweig, for the vision and determination to help CLO reach its protected status, and to Fondo's current director, Renée González, and her staff for carrying the baton to the finish line.



A special thanks to the Landscape Conservation Initiative at Northern Arizona University. Tom Sisk, the recently retired Olajos-Goslow Chair of Environmental Science and Policy, and Marcey Olajos, NAU alumna and conservationist, helped design and champion CLO's land conservation efforts from 2017-2021. Their support and advocacy resulted in several key contributions, fostered important cross-border relationships, and helped secure Valer Clark's legacy while permanently protecting CLO's lands.



CLO is grateful to the Wyss Foundation, which provided a generous grant towards the establishment of an operational endowment in Mexico for CLO's preserve.



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Thank You!

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