

Land trust selects Taos native as new executive director

By Matthew van Buren

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In her new position as executive director of Taos Land Trust, Taos native Patricia Quintana said she will work to protect resources and consequently provide more opportunities for young people to connect to the land.

Taos Land Trust seeks to permanently protect agricultural lands and open spaces, in part through helping landowners create "conservation easements" that prevent future development.

Quintana began her job with the Land Trust about a month ago, following the resignation of former executive director Ernie Atencio. Atencio had said he felt it was time to move on, and he has since been named to a special Conservation Advisory Committee for the state Land Office.

"We are so pleased to have Patricia on board," Board of Directors President Christopher Smith is quoted as saying in a Land Trust announcement. "Her qualifications are unique. She brings a broad professional perspective, a local's insight and a passion for our mission to the position of executive director."

According to application materials she submitted to Taos Land Trust, Quintana has more than two decades' experience in policy development, fiscal management, fundraising, organizational management and community outreach, also directing staffs from three to 200 employees.

"My entire career has been dedicated to the advocacy for the conservation of agricultural communities in Northern New Mexico and across the state," she wrote. "As a result, I am very familiar with the legal and tax complexities of land trusts and easements."

According to her application materials, Quintana has worked as the New Mexico Department of Agriculture's director of general services and special assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture and spent a decade as director of government relations for New Mexico State University (NMSU), among other positions. Between 2007 and 2011, she served as director of special initiatives for the NMSU College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, promoting the university's Agricultural Extension Service, securing funding, assisting rural community groups and establishing the Tribal Agricultural Extension Task Force.

She has also done international consulting, including helping to establish and strengthen women's business cooperatives. According to her application materials, Quintana has done consulting work in Mali, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Spain, Ecuador, Mexico and elsewhere. She has also developed and implemented educational workshops related to sheep and wool management and marketing in the Navajo Nation. Quintana said she returned to Taos last fall, after having opted for early retirement.

"I was born and raised here," Quintana said. "We had a farm there off of Witt Road."

She is now raising cashmere goats and Churro sheep on a 20-acre ranch in Taos Canyon.

"I have been re-establishing my grandmother's farm," she said.

From acequia and watershed restoration, she wrote in a letter of interest to Taos Land Trust, "to the cultivation and preservation of a threatened heritage breed, the Navajo-Churro sheep, Rancho La Fina has become a model farm and teaching laboratory" for the land, water and cultural issues of the region.

Quintana has been working with sheep for some time, having worked as director of agricultural marketing and producer development for Granados del Valle in Los Ojos and, in that capacity, marketed some of the first USDA-certified organic lamb in the late '80s.

With Taos Land Trust, Quintana said she sees an opportunity to preserve Taos' beauty, open spaces and productive agricultural lands. She said engaging young people in food production is important, "especially given where we are" in terms of climate change and its potential impacts in Taos.

Quintana said Taos Land Trust is a solid organization with a small but "very competent" staff, and she intends to work to build on the work Atencio did. She said she is still familiarizing herself with the operation and preparing for the task of fundraising in Taos. "It is a challenge," she said. "I have my ideas."

Quintana said fundraising requires forming relationships with current, past and potential donors, often one-on-one.

"It's a slow process," she said. "You have to establish respect and credibility."

She said several projects are in the works, and Taos Land Trust has been effective in reaching out to the community and making area residents aware of its mission.

"We get calls and inquiries everyday," she said. "It's a real mixture of individuals."

Quintana said the multicultural nature of the area complicates the Land Trust's work in some ways but also creates opportunities. She wrote in her application materials of her "good fortune" in "being able to return to my community and land."

"Coming full circle has been an interesting process," she said.

Quintana said she likes to keep a saying of her grandmother's in mind: "*Mi hija, si tu cuidas la tierra, la tierra siempre te va a cuidar a ti,*" or, "If you care for the land, the land will always take care of you."

For more information about Taos Land Trust, visit www.taoslandtrust.org or call (575) 751-3138.

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Patricia Quintana is the new executive director for the Taos Land Trust.

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