

## My Turn

Kristina ortez de Jones & Carl Colonius

# Taos County conservation and trails plans launched

*The Taos News, 11/2/2017*

Taos County has an opportunity to become the kind of place where every person has close-to-home access to parks, trails and open spaces, and feels connected to the land and water that sustain us. And now we are ready for action.

We're excited to announce the completion of the Taos County Community Conservation Plan and the Enchanted Circle Trails Plan, projects that have been underway for two years. The two plans identify and prioritize projects, based on feedback from hundreds of diverse Taos area residents, about how to increase our quality of life, enhance community health and protect the places that make our region unique. A website is now available for the public to learn more and stay updated about this proposal: [TaosTierray-Trails.org](http://TaosTierray-Trails.org).

The Taos Land Trust and Enchanted Circle Trails Association, along with other local and national organizations conducted a rigorous public process to develop these two plans. Over the last couple years, this collaboration has held numerous community meetings, events at local businesses, surveys and focus groups. We did our best to reach out to all community members — not just those willing to come to meetings — and in the end, we heard from thousands of residents from throughout the region.

It's clear that our communities feel a need to restore, conserve and protect the land and water that surrounds us. We heard that you want to protect our water and agricultural traditions — including our acequias. It's clear that our communities want safer routes for bicyclists and pedestrians, better trail heads and signage, and more opportunities to connect to public lands.

This all makes total sense to us. Spending time outdoors and connecting to the natural world is a big part of living in Northern New Mexico and always has been. There's a ton of research showing that being outdoors reduces stress, improves attention and enhances overall mental well-being.

With the help of Taos County residents and community leaders, we think it should be easier for kids and families to spend time outdoors. We need to build more parks, trails, and safe routes that connect communities with each other so we have the option to not drive from home to work or school. These are important for the entire community — even more so for those with limited access to safe outdoor recreational areas, children, seniors and people with disabilities.

These plans also have the potential to provide significant economic, cultural and environmental benefits to the community.

Public outdoor spaces will attract new visitors and businesses to the area. Improved trail systems can cut down on time spent in transit, increase property values and increase community vitality.

On top of all that, thoughtful conservation projects showcase our culturally and environmentally important areas. Protecting our farms and working lands will give us access to good, local food. It improves the quality of the water we drink and what we use to sustain our land.

We can make it happen because we've heard you. Taos Tierra y Trails represents what you think our priorities should be. So, thank you. Thank you for your commitment to guiding us forward. We hope you'll come celebrate this work with us at the Taos Mesa Brewing Tap Room, Saturday (Nov. 4) from 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

*Kristina Ortez de Jones, Executive Director, Taos Land Trust. Carl Colonius is head of the Enchanted Circle Trails Association.*

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