



Conserving Natural Resources: Sustainability at Work

At SONRI “conservation” means the wise stewardship and prudent use of natural resources in order to sustain life today and ensure the availability of resources in the future. From protecting vernal pools in California to managing pine barrens in New Jersey, SONRI’s Principals have been leaders in innovative partnerships for natural resource conservation for over 20 years.

Meeting the Challenges of Sustainable Conservation

The biggest challenge in conservation today is “how do we pay for it?” Federal spending can only go so far, private foundations were devastated in the recent economic downturn, some states invest heavily, while many ignore the need completely, individual gifts won’t meet the need, and local government budgets are strained to their limits. The answer in most cases lies in forming partnerships to leverage multiple sources of funding to accomplish multiple goals on the land.

A case in point occurred in recent years in southwestern Oklahoma. A newly formed land trust was looking for ways to help ranchers conserve lands with prime soils, keeping the land in agricultural production as opposed to converting it to other uses in the area around Lawton, Oklahoma. Coincidentally, the United States Army was looking for a way to create buffers around Ft. Sill, the Army’s primary artillery training base, to protect the mission of the base from encroachment by urban sprawl. Happily, many of the soils of interest are in close proximity to the post.

Steve Bonner, SONRI's President, working through the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, helped the land trust build a unique partnership with the military, state and local government, and local economic development and agricultural interests to bring multiple funding sources to bear on the needs. Funding from the United States Department of Agriculture, Department of Defense, Oklahoma Governor's Military Planning Commission, Comanche County Industrial Authority, and other sources is working today to build on the over 2,000 acres protected over the past few years, with a long-term goal of 20,000 acres in the area around Ft. Sill and Lawton, Oklahoma.

But the really important part of this project is the way it support multiple objectives for the public good. A military mission vital to our national defense is protected, unique agricultural lands are kept in productive use permanently, open land is kept open to act as a filter for stormwater runoff and provide habitat for plants and animals, and the City of Lawton is working with the landowners to develop a recreational trail which will support their growing tourism industry. But perhaps most fundamental is the benefit to the individual landowners and ranchers. Mr. A.J. Ryder, the first rancher to participate in the project, was asked about his motivations by Steve Bonner:



“Son,” said Mr. Ryder, “I’m 75 years old and can’t afford to retire. This will not only help me do that, but also ensure that the land I love will never become a Wal-Mart, and will always be there for my family. That’s as good a reason as there is.”

Helping People Think Sustainably and Ready to Help You

Whether working on massive infrastructure projects or the formation of a new citizens’ group, SONRI brings the concepts of balance between economic development, environmental impact and social responsibility to everything we do. SONRI’s extensive experience in government, nonprofit organizations, conservation and community planning, and private sector commercial ventures provides our clients with unique perspectives and winning skills that ensure success. SONRI is ready to support you and your partners to help you achieve your goals now and into the future. To learn more about how we can help your organization be a leader, visit www.sonricorp.com.

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