Kelly K. Mensah: Hi, my name is Kelly K. Mensah of the US Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Region. My guests in the podcast today will be A.T. Cole, and Dick Evans, ranch owners in Southwest New Mexico, who are in the midst of partner's projects for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on their land outside of Silver City, New Mexico.

We're going to be talking today about U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ARRA partner's projects, their experience working with the U.S. Government, and what they had hoped to accomplish upon their land with the agreement. My first guest today is rancher A.T. Cole, recipient of ARRA project FFA #R2EA. How's it going today, A.T.?

A.T. Cole: Well, it's cloudy and overcast and we were hoping for rain, but it thundered like crazy, and not a drop.

KM: All right, so summarize for me, what exactly was your ARRA project?

ATC: Well, it was one of the installments to restore the eight-point-six mile reach of the Burro Cienega that's on the Pitchfork Ranch. We completed miles 2.6- mile 5 of the first tier of the cienega restoration.

KM: And what was the ecological significance of the cienega restoration?

ATC: The cienega of course is an endangered habitat. Only 20% of those that were in existence, as I understand it, before 1820 remain, and they are very unique southwest habitats. They only occur in this part of the southwest. "Cienega" means "cien-agua" or "slow-moving-waters." Literally "100 waters" and basically they are defined as "slow-moving waters or marshes." So basically they are wide, slow moving, shallow watercourses, that historically were, you know, a football field wide and an inch deep. Now they've been damaged to where they appear more like a creek than a cienega, so what we're trying to do is to restore that cienega by introducing over 100, so far grade control structures, which slow the water, induce a meander to keep the water to be more calm and to capture sediment. The intent, ultimately is to raise the inside bed of this watercourse back to the level it was before it started the insides.

KM: This sounds like a very long process; all-in-all how long do you think it will take to re-raise the bed?

ATC: Well, you know, we don't know. We've been told by those who are knowledgeable that it's not even realistic to do what we are attempting, but we think the cienega is so important that we're going to have a crack at it anyway. And we think, from the results that we've seen, we think that we can accomplish this, but I think that it will probably take most of the balance, if not all of the balance of our lifetimes, which is probably 25-30 years.

KM: What sort of plant and animal life are going to be affected by this project?

ATC: Oh, um literally hundreds, we have several hundred identifiable plants on this ranch that have been identified by the native plant society. We have lengthy lists of birds and mammals and reptiles, etc., etc. I suppose, one bird of consequence if you will, is the Willow Flycatcher, which is not here in terms of its breeding although it has been present. And our watercourse, as it gets richer and fuller and

wider then we understand that they will come. We've already introduced the Chiricaua Leopard Frog, the Aplomado Falcon directly into the cienega, we've introduced the Gila Topminnow, which has been extricated for some time. and we understand, at least at one point that it was the only location in which this fish existed in New Mexico. There may be other now.

KM: Give me a little information on how the partner's project works; who approaches whom and that sort of thing. How does that process work in some ways?

ATC: We contacted them and Nancy Riley, who is stationed in Albuquerque, contacted us. We submitted a proposal and they funded us. We also have an association, so we really have 13.5 miles of the cienega when you include the ranches that are north of us, which are the C-Bar, Dick Evans and the Prevolt Ranch. So we have the Upper Burro Water Bed Association. She's now funding those ranches also, because obviously to restore an entire watercourse, it's advantageous to treat the entire watercourse rather than just our section of it.

KM: Do you find, in the rancher community itself, that there is kind of an anti-government backlash about this sort of thing?

ATC: Well, there's just no question about that. We're really the easy marks, because in truth while we do have some cattle, we're not cattle ranchers, we are retired from other professions, so more accurately we like to categorize ourselves as "ranch owners." We're surrounded by seven ranches, and the C-Bar ranch has been in production since 1903, so this ranch has been in cattle for well over a century. So we do talk of these issues with our neighbors, and there is, to put it mildly, a reticence. Although I think that's changing over time because there are some efforts being made to partner ranchers with environmental groups to better serve the bio region and the Pulvera Coalition is kind of the primary example of that.

KM: And what would you say to someone that sort of had this sort of wariness about entering into an agreement?

ATC: I guess I would say to them that they ought to talk to other ranchers, or ranch owners who have taken advantage of these government programs. I mean, there's no question that there is a certain amount of brain damage that goes with the program because of the accounting requirements, because you've got to advance this money before the reimburse you. You know, for some people it's very difficult to advance $25,000 in a program, that's hard to do…particularly hard for a working rancher who's operating on an extremely thin margin.

KM: Well thank you very much Mr. Cole, I appreciate all of the information and I hope everything goes well with your project.

ATC: OK, thank you.

KM: Joining me now is Rancher, Dick Evans, also of Southwestern New Mexico. You are a working rancher, is that right?

Dick Evans: Yes I Am!

KM: All right, tell me about your ARRA project, what exactly did it entail?

DE: We had two canyons that were pretty adversely impacted around the turn of the last century, in that during the 1920's and stuff they had put up dikes to keep floodwaters off of their farmland. Of course, in doing that they started channelization of what used to be a wide flood plain. So this initial one was to start disrupting these floodwaters, get them spread back out over the wide basin and start re-vegetating then.

KM: What is going to be the ecological significance of the project once it is complete?

DE: Well, several things; one, we have areas that we have as much as ten feet of soil that has vertical walls on it now that have been cut, which had adversely impacted the water table dramatically. And of course with impacting the water table dramatically you change the vegetation which has happened all over the Southwest; once you started impacting the water table your vegetation types changed dramatically, and of course the riparian area diminished. So the overall impact is to re-establish this as much as possible to the historical floodplains, and of course with changing the vegetation the habitat for animals is going to change dramatically, we'll have a lot better habitat for mammals, we'll also improve springtime, which is one of the roughest grazing times for both deer and cattle.

KM: Being a rancher, were you worried about working with the government in this way in the beginning?

DE: Yes, I would have to say yes. I really needed assurances. I don't think I'm as worried as some of my neighbors, I've got some neighbors who are so anti-government involvement, I don't know if they will ever look at doing a project that is to their own benefit because the government is involved. I did not have a fear of them taking over my property rights, but I did have concerns that they would have restrictions that would be unrealistic. For me, my situation is very different than A.T. Cole's, for me it had to make, on the long term, it had to make economic sense. On the long term, restoring this old farmland, actually if I was having to do it by myself, it would be a 20 year project instead of maybe a five or ten year project because economically you can only afford to put so much effort into a project that is not going to show a return for a long-long time. From that standpoint I think the greatest concern was the restrictions they might want on that land would be too prohibitive to be involved, but so far, Fish and Wildlife has been very reasonable to work with.

KM: So, would you say that so far the project has made ecological, as well as economic sense for you?

DE: Oh yeah, definitely, very definitely. We've just done our first phase of the project which is we've just done our first seeding…plant material seeding, and then we did a lot of planting of Giant Sacaton of where the flood plain is going to be. Right now, we're just establishing the plant materials, so we're still three-to-five-years away from where you are going to see something that you can walk in and say, "Wow, this has really made a big difference." In this country where you don't have irrigation, re-

establishing, changing the plant material is a slow process, that's really one of the difficult things vs. the eastern United States.

KM: What do you see as the total time frame of the project?

DE: Oh, uh, the total time frame? I'm probably going to be involved in this for ten years. If we are able to find the grant money over that period of time, we will accomplish quite a bit. If we are not able to continue to find grant money, I will be involved in this over 20-25 years (laughs). The rest of my life – since I'm 63.

KM: Well thanks a lot. I appreciate the time you've taken here today.

DE: You bet!

KM: And I hope the project works out well for you the next 20, 25 or how other many years of life you have left.

DE: OK, thank you very much.

KM: That's Dick Evans and thank you very much.