

We mourn the loss of our dear friend, Judy Ackerman, we at the Frontera Land Alliance.

Judy Ackerman, a local veteran, conservationist and avid supporter of voting rights, passed away at 6 p.m. on Sunday, November 6, 2022. She was 69 years old. Judy was first diagnosed with cancer in 2019, and despite her diagnosis she continued to work tirelessly protecting El Paso's community. She continued to lead hikes, educate our community, and share her joy of El Paso with everyone she encountered.

Judy was serving in the U.S. Army in 1995 when she was first stationed at Fort Bliss. She grew up in Pennsylvania and was not that excited about living in the desert. The minute she saw the Franklin Mountains she fell in love with El Paso. Since then, she immersed herself in outdoor excursions and learned about the flora and fauna that make the 24,000-acre Franklin Mountains State Park so special and unique.

She is well known for her work to protect El Paso's natural spaces, including Knapp Canyon (a part of the Franklins), the Rio Bosque Wetlands Park in the Lower Valley, and especially Castner Range in northeast El Paso, much of whose 7,081 acres — still owned by Fort Bliss — constitute 25 percent of the Franklin Mountains themselves. Judy was well known as a leader in the Castner Range Coalition's decades-long campaign to conserve the Range as a National Monument and was adamant when it came to protecting El Paso's natural beauty. About 10 years ago she was arrested (and released) after handcuffing herself to a bulldozer while protecting the Rio Bosque Wetlands Park from threatening construction at the Wetlands. Judy was also a staunch supporter of voting rights and fair elections and, as a deputized voter registrar, registered thousands of voters in El Paso County. In addition, she founded the Viejitas for Choice network to work for reproductive health rights.

Community leaders have issued the following statements honoring Judy's work and legacy:

*"For the past 25 years, Judy Ackerman has given back to her community with considerable support and endless involvement. She has taken part in many initiatives, often those that centered around land conservation. One that quickly comes to mind is the Knapp Land Nature Preserve. Judy has continuously and deeply supported the preservation of our Chihuahuan Desert and — specifically — the mountains and the foothills of the Franklin Mountains. Thanks to Judy's endless involvement (which ranged from often asking just the right questions, to educating others and motivating them to take action), we saw change happen. The best way to honor Judy's convictions is for us to stay involved and speak up for what is right. I will deeply miss my dear friend and steadfast partner in land conservation.*

— Janaé Renaud Field, Executive Director of The Frontera Land Alliance

*Judy Ackerman is and always will be my hero and heroine. We share many of the same common interests in social and environmental justice. We want to preserve our region's beautiful land, historic buildings and the people who live and work therein. We want representatives who put people first, especially people who have long been neglected by all levels of government. All in all, Judy Ackerman is a true hero. She does not merely "talk the talk," but she "walks the walk." El Paso needs so many more Judys in our midst! As co-moderator of the Community First Coalition, I can speak for our broad-based coalition in appreciation for all that Judy has done for El Pasoans and its natural resources.*

— Kathleen Staudt, Ph.D., UTEP Professor Emerita of Political Science

*Judy was one of my life heroes. Her fierce commitment to conservation and reproductive justice have been an example of what it looks like to care so deeply that you never leave the fight. My favorite memory of Judy is when we went on a hike together to see the vastness and beauty of the Knapp Land she helped designate as protected open space. We arrived and began our hike up to the hilltop (to also get a view of Caster Range). Near the end of our hike, we started talking about how important it is to "raise kids in the dirt with the bugs". Not surprisingly, that conversation led to discussing parenthood and eventually, we were discussing reproductive health care in a broken world. She always knew how to weave things together: our responsibilities to the land, each other, ourselves and all. Only the most beautiful, powerful people can turn such simple moments into profound opportunities to remember what is important; to learn along a shared path. There is no one on Earth like Judy Ackerman.*

— Xóchitl Rodríguez

*"Her presence is all over our League (of Women Voters of El Paso). She was our star for voter registration, redistricting, voting rights. My heart is breaking, but we need to honor her for all the work she has done for us."*

— Carol S. Wallace, President of the League of Women Voters of El Paso

*We have all benefited from Judy's relentless work and advocacy throughout our community. I've been inspired by her work firsthand as an Open Space Advisory Board and League of Women Voters of El Paso Member, though I fondly recall seeing her enjoying El Paso and expressing her passion for all that it offers in numerous local organizations throughout the years. There is one day with Judy that I particularly hold dear. Over Thanksgiving break one year, Judy invited my son and me to explore the Franklins together. On the hike, she taught my son about local plants, animals that we saw along the way, and helped him to appreciate the beauty of our natural environment. It was one of the best days that I've ever spent with my son. My son still brings up facts that he learned out there on the range with Judy. He is a teen now, but I know he still sees our Franklins through eyes of wonder and appreciation; a perspective and lens that I know Judy had so much to do with.*

— Alyssa Cervantes Benavides, Board Member, Open Space Advisory Board and League of Women Voters of El Paso

Judy's contributions to El Paso were recognized by the City Council as a Resolution on October 25th, at which time more than 30 minutes of the meeting were dedicated to Judy while people spoke, one after another, and brought tears to members of the audience as well as members of Council.

**RESOLUTION**

*WHEREAS, Judy Ackerman has been a force for good in El Paso for over fifteen years and El Paso should feel fortunate that she chose to stay in our city when she retired from the United States Army in 2007 with the distinguished rank of Sergeant Major after 27 years of service; and*

*WHEREAS, Judy has worked tirelessly to ensure the conservation and preservation of El Paso's natural open spaces, on the mountain and down to the river with programs such as the Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition, the Friends of the Rio Bosque, the Sierra Club, the Frontera Land Alliance, and the Castner Range National Monument Coalition and they have all benefitted from Judy's participation; and*

*WHEREAS, Judy has rendered significant service to her many causes which deserves special recognition with one such instance being in 2008 she stood in front of machinery at the Rio Bosque Wetland for many hours, protecting it from the encroaching border fence; and*

*WHEREAS, in recent years Judy has been a dynamic force in the Castner Range effort, traveling outside El Paso as needed, to press for the declaration of this magnificent mountainside range as a national monument and when this finally does happen, Judy will deserve much of the credit, and*

*WHEREAS, volunteering one's time and resources has traditionally been, and continues to be, an elemental part of the essence and tradition of our country and is essential to its spirit and vitality;*

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF EL PASO:**

*That the City of El Paso is proud to recognize Judy Ackerman as she has been a benefit to both El Pasoans and visitors to our city, and recognition by the City is more than merited through her professional and personal contributions.*

*APPROVED this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_.*

**THE CITY OF EL PASO:**

**ATTEST:**

\_\_\_\_\_ *Laura D. Prine, City Clerk*

22-1019-368/1208592

*District 2 | Judy Ackerman Recognition RTA*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Oscar Leeser, Mayor*

**APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

\_\_\_\_\_ *Russell T. Abeln, Assistant City Attorney*

On November 14th, the County Commissioners Court praised Judy's work and issued a Resolution which declared



EL PASO COUNTY  
STATE OF TEXAS

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RESOLUTION



**WHEREAS**, SGM Judith P. Ackerman, known across the community as Judy, entered the Pennsylvania Army National Guard (PAARNG) in 1980 as a computer programmer in the 28th Infantry, and retired in 2007 with 26 years of service; her assignments and accomplishments included teaching a Primary Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Course as the only women in the cadre teaching combat arms entry level NCO Education System, serving at the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA) as lesson developer for the First Sergeants Course and as first sergeant of Equipment Maintenance Center Europe of 21st Theater Support Command in Kaiserslautern, Germany; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2001, Judy graduated from USASMA where she challenged soldiers to assess their homophobia, encouraged participation in Bataan, and caused the 52 Focused Females of Class 52 to network, and as SGM graduated from Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute Equal Opportunity Advisor Course in April 2003; and

**WHEREAS**, SGM Ackerman's "10 minutes of fame," in her words, came when the Army approved her suggestion and changed the size of the rank on women's class A uniforms, but her challenge for people to champion equal opportunity and to diligently build diversity provided inspiration for so many not only during but after her military service; and

**WHEREAS**, the Army first sent Judy to Fort Bliss in 1995 and she immediately fell in love with the Franklin Mountains, becoming a leader of the Save Castner Range movement, and one might argue that her service to the community grew exponentially after her military career as a Sergeant Major; born in Pennsylvania, she was an environmental activist since High School, starting with the first Earth Day; and

**WHEREAS**, Judy's passion for equality, and for the environment, manifested in work championing environmental, human and reproductive rights; she served as the Secretary of the Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition and as a member of Border Toasters, Toastmasters International, the Friends of the Rio Bosque, Celebration of Our Mountains, El Paso Native Plant Society, League of Women Voters of El Paso, Trans-Pecos Chapter Texas Master Naturalists, El Paso Rock and Cactus Club, and Frontera Land Alliance;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the El Paso County Judge and El Paso County Commissioners share the sorrow of her husband, Jamie Ackerman, and her friends and loved ones on her passing, and proclaim Monday, Nov. 14, 2022, as Judy Ackerman Day in El Paso County, Texas.

**SIGNED**, this 14<sup>th</sup> day of November 2022

\_\_\_\_\_  
Commissioner Carlos Leon, Pct. 1

\_\_\_\_\_  
Commissioner David C. Stout, Pct. 2

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Commissioner Iliana Holguin, Pct. 3

\_\_\_\_\_  
Commissioner Carl L. Robinson, Pct. 4

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ricardo A. Samaniego, County Judge

November 14 to be Judy Ackerman Day. I urge you to read this Resolution which has been included for your review.

## Tributes to Judy Ackerman and memories of her

A Tribute to Judy Ackerman: Recognize her leadership in a strong resolution!

Judy Ackerman is and always will be my hero and heroine. We share many of the same common interests in social and environment justice. We want to preserve our region's beautiful land, historic buildings and the people who live and work therein. We want representatives who put people first, especially people who have long been neglected by all levels of government.

As an individual, I became instant friends with Judy some years back - I can't even remember when, but I proudly sat next to Judy many times, challenging the excesses of business profiteering that would undermine El Paso's precious resources and people. Some examples of her challenges:

\*Challenges to voter suppression, with the aim of better representation. Judy stood for FAIR elections as a committed member of the League of Women Voters. She worked with the League and Fair Maps Texas to educate people on redistricting local and state boundaries in fair, non-partisan ways. A Deputized Voter Registrar, I remember so many scenes with Judy holding her constant sign asking people whether they were registered to vote. Judy registered THOUSANDS of new voters.

\*Challenges to I-10 widening downtown, which TxDOT attempts to impose upon us, despite the lack of congestion there, the disaster construction would bring to El Paso's downtown, and the undoubted additional pollution that attracting more cars and trucks would bring to the area. El Paso roads need to be fixed and maintained, NOT widened. Judy attended Teach-Ins, made posters, and joined people at City Hall to say NO to this ludicrous initiative.

\*Challenges to the threats to reproductive health and planning for parenthood. Judy started the network Viejitas for Choice, and I became a proud participant. Judy always stood for freedom from patriarchal control over our bodies, as did many of her veteran friends who joined her at City Council as recently as several months ago.

\*Challenges to ignorance and inaction on climate change. Judy no doubt signed AND collected signatures for the Sunrise petition for a Climate Charter that would make El Paso the first in Texas to take serious action toward greener jobs, greener development, common-sense solar/wind building incentives, and environmental health. Judy ALWAYS sought to preserve open spaces in our beautiful region.

All in all, Judy Ackerman is a true HERO. She does not merely "talk the talk," but she "walks the walk." El Paso needs so many more Judys in our midst! As co-moderator of the Community First Coalition, I can speak for our broad-based coalition in appreciation for ALL that Judy has done for El Pasoans and for the natural resources of the region. Judy participated in many of our speaker events and general meetings.

Thank you for listening and putting this statement into the public record.

Kathleen (Kathy) Staudt, PhD  
Professor Emerita of Political Science

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Judy is known for so many things—active participation in hundreds of meetings, decades-long work as Secretary of the Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition (whose info-packed newsletter reached thousands), persistent advocacy of land conservation (especially of the Franklin Mountains and their foothills), and above all El Paso’s beautiful Castner Range. But the one thing we will longest remember about Judy is her supersonic ability to get thousands of folks to sign petitions. One short story will serve to illustrate that. In March of this year, the Frontera Land Alliance and the greater Castner Range National Monument campaign hosted United States Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland to hike near the Range and to meet with its campaigners. To that end, a Breakfast Roundtable was held on Saturday, March 26 at the Museum of Archaeology. The invitees were all supporters of making the Range a monument. Thus all had already signed the petition letter to President Biden, right? But leave it to Judy to see that they had! So at both the Breakfast and then at the Press Conference, Judy systematically approached every attendee and asked “Have you signed the letter to Biden?” Several dozen had still not signed! And leave it to Judy to get them to sign, right then and right there, thus adding more names to the 137,000-plus letters—many the products of Judy’s own work—that were already sent to the White House. Toward the end of the morning, Judy was exhausted but—once again—land conservation in general and Castner Range in particular were the winners. Thanks, then, to Judy for that, and for so much more as well.

Richard Teschner,  
UTEP, FMWC, Frontera and many more

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When you think of our mountains you automatically think of Judy Ackerman, and when you think of Judy you automatically think of our mountains; There are many great memories with Judy that is hard to choose, but one that sticks with me (may be because I am a park ranger and I am usually talking about our mountains, state parks, and other natural spaces) is this one: After one of our annual tramway celebrations at Wyler Aerial Tramway Judy email me and our park superintendent at the time to thank us for the “thank you” goody bags we had given to the exhibitors and volunteers that had helped during the event, her email said “we are just grateful for the opportunity to spread the word about our mountains”. How was she thanking us, when this event would have not been possible without volunteers like her?

Diana Moy  
Franklin Mountain State Park

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Judy is a very outspoken and passionate icon in our community who supports many causes from women reproductive rights, human rights, to the conservation of our natural and open spaces which is how I got to meet and collaborate with her. Judy has played an important and essential role in the conservation of natural spaces like Franklin Mountains State Park, Castner Range, Lost Dog, and Knapp land. Not only has she worked hard to help conserve those areas but she has inspired and will continue to inspire many of us in El Paso young and not so-young to be actively involved in conservation issues in our area.

Unknown

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I would like to express support for a resolution to honor Judy Ackerman's work. Judy has worked tirelessly for open space for our community for many years.

Melissa Kirkham  
Knapp Land/SOS

Judy is a very caring and compassionate woman. She not only cared about establishing a state-wide redistricting commission and saving our environment and open space, she cared about others.

Two years ago, when children were being moved to Ft. Bliss after being separated from their families, I volunteered to get books for the children so they would have books to read during their stay at Ft. Bliss. When I mentioned this to Judy, she immediately wrote a check for \$500 to purchase books in English/Spanish for these children. Judy was instrumental in establishing a small library of books in English/Spanish that children could take and read while being housed at Ft. Bliss. We were told by the Ft. Bliss officials that the children had established a reading club while being housed at Ft. Bliss. Judy's generous donation made the lives of these children livable and better and provided them with resources to continue to learn and to learn the English language.

She is an amazing woman and I'm proud to call her my friend.

Emma Acosta

Former City Representative

Executive Director, Books are Gems

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Judy and I met sometime around 2004 when we organized the first Poppies Celebration and did all we could to stop the border wall from being built at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park. She quickly became one of El Paso's conservation heroes when she chained herself to a bulldozer at the construction site and was arrested.

After nearly two decades of working together to engage our community in valuing land conservation I would say the most memorable and most important thing we did together was when in 2014 she asked me to attend a Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition meeting to talk about the Castner Range. At that meeting I encouraged the Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition to move in the direction of asking President Obama to declare the Castner Range of the Franklin Mountains as a National Monument. Several years earlier I crafted the environmental platform for Congressional candidate Beto O'Rourke and was confident that he would help. In addition to Beto who played a major role in protecting the range Congresswoman Veronica Escobar later introduced legislation in support of creation of the National Monument.

None of this would have happened without Judy's leadership and drive. Without a doubt I can confidently say that Judy Ackerman is one of the greatest El Paso Texas conservation heroes in the history of the city.

Rick LoBello, Education Curator, El Paso Zoo and Botanical Gardens

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We have all been honored by this courageous heroine of El Paso!

We must and will continue the fight for equality, freedom, voting and environmental rights through the lens that she taught us. (That's what she would expect.)

We are with her in solidarity. The work continues...

Paul Franceschi

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My story is the same for every hike with her. She would scope the path to make sure it wasn't too hard for me. If it was, she would redirect us to a different route.

She taught us all about the geology, the plants and insects, and how to use them. etc.

She showed me how to zigzag across loose rocks coming down the hills so that I wouldn't slip.

She always gave beginner hikers a map so that they would keep on hiking.

I can keep going on and on.

Candy Aguiar

Neighbor and Knapp Land/SOS

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I recall Judy as energetic, dedicated to environment and cultural issues, cooperative in team efforts, and a source of innovative ideas to develop and promote public programs. She was involved in the initiation of the Poppy Festival. Her husband played guitar in our blues group at the museum.

Marc Thompson  
Former director of the Archaeology Museum

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Dear LWVEP Members,

Our dear Judy Ackerman is in Hospice care, and we would like to honor her for all the work she has done for our community, and especially for our League. Her presence is all over our League. She was our star for Voter Registration, Redistricting, Voting Rights. My heart is breaking, but we need to honor her for all the work she has done for us. Please send her love and support during this very difficult time. If anyone would like to respond to the below message from Frontera Land Alliance, please do so.

Holding Judy in our hearts,

Carol S. Wallace, President  
League of Women Voters of El Paso  
*"Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy."*

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If I had to choose one word to describe Judy it would be "indefatigable."  
Connie Crawford

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Judy was one of my life heroes. Her fierce commitment to conservation and reproductive justice have been an example of what it looks like to care so deeply that you never leave the fight.

My favorite memory of Judy is when we went on a hike together to see the vastness and beauty of the Knapp land she helped designate as protected open space. We arrived and began our hike up to the hilltop (to also get a view of Caster Range). As Judy always did, we stopped and admired every flower and plant blooming along the way. The way I do with my young daughter, Judy and I picked up litter and stuffed it in our bags to make sure we were also cleaning the land as we made our way. I was picking up an old can and looked over to see Judy was picking up a plastic bag at the same time. I thought to myself "Woah, for this moment I feel worthy to be hiking with Judy Ackerman".

We made our way up and eventually down, sharing epic stories of our shared love for tight, untouched canyons nestled safely in vast open spaces that only the best adventures reveal. The rains had recently dumped on the desert so the air was thick with water, the dirt moist enough to see our

footprints left behind- marking our shared path in that moment and through that beautiful space. There were millipedes everywhere doing their important work and Judy never failed to say hello as we stepped around them. We found one millipede making it's way on the edge of a prickly pear and Judy insisted i take a picture with it. I squealed and said "my daughter would be so squeemish!" Judy replied "well tell Calista to get over it! These little guys don't hurt anyone and they're fun to feel crawling on your hand. She's missing out. Look at all the legs they've got." She took a video for me to share with my daughter.

We started talking about how important it is to raise kids in the dirt with the bugs. Not surprisingly, that conversation led to discussing parenthood and eventually, we were discussing reproductive healthcare in a broken world. She always knew how to weave things together- our responsibilities to the land, each other, ourselves and all.

Only the most beautiful, powerful people can turn such simple moments in to profound opportunities to remember what is important; to learn along a shared path.

There is no one on Earth like Judy Ackerman.

Xochitl Rodriguez

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Thank you for the opportunity to share our gratitude and celebration of Judy's work throughout our community.

We have all benefitted from Judy's relentless work and advocacy throughout our community. I've been inspired by her work firsthand as an Open Space Advisory Board and League of Women Voters of El Paso member (though I fondly recall seeing her enjoying El Paso, and expressing her passion for all that it offers in numerous local organizations throughout the years).

There is one day with Judy that I particularly hold dear. Over Thanksgiving break one year, Judy invited my son and I to explore the Franklins together. On the hike, she taught my son about local plants, animals that we saw along the way, and helped him to appreciate the beauty of our natural environment. My son was experiencing a difficult time in school that year, but he seemed so free during that hike. It was as if he forgot about his worries, and returned to just being a kid with Judy. She spoke to him so caringly, to pique his interest in all that we encountered on the hike, but also spoke to him as a peer: a fellow nature enthusiast. I was able to share precious moments of just being present out there, in our beautiful surrounding landscape, with my son, listening to Judy's descriptions: the wonder in her voice, passion to preserve our natural landscape, and gratitude to Mother Nature for Her provision of it to us. It was one of the best days that I've ever spent with my son. And I have Judy to thank for it.

I know Judy has taken hundreds of us on such hikes throughout her years, but to my son and I: Judy, with her storytelling and her hikes: is one in a million.

My son still brings up facts that he learned out there on the range with Judy. He is a teen now, but I know he still sees our Franklins through eyes of wonder and appreciation, a perspective and lens that I know Judy had so much to do with. Attached are pictures of that day.

With gratitude and kindest regards,  
Alyssa Cervantes Benavides  
League of Women Voters of El Paso

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Thank you for collecting stories about Judy! I have known Judy for almost 10 years; most of our interactions are around reproductive rights. When I first met Judy we were tabling for a reproductive justice group on the UTEP campus. I forget what we were doing exactly-- collecting signatures, raising awareness...I don't know! We had just gotten to the table, and a few of us were standing there, waiting for people to approach the table. But not Judy! She got out into the courtyard and was waving around the fliers, shouting out to people about whatever we were trying to do. She was so bold and courageous!

Thanks,

Ophra Leyser-Whalen

Associate Professor

UTEP Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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I think I first noticed Judy when she testified to the City Council on the importance of having separate buildings for El Paso's Main Library and the Mexican American Cultural Center. Since then it seems she's been part of every gathering and issue of importance to me, including Celebration of Our Mountains, presentations of the El Paso Social Justice Forum, reproductive rights rallies, and petitions for including the climate charter and election reform on upcoming ballots.

She is an inspiration, a role model, and a kick in the backside to keep on going!

Kathy Kapenga

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Dear Judy,

Looks like you're stepping over into another dominion.

A place with Yahweh where you will have a perfect body.

Where there is a utopian environment without developments and pollution.

I will miss your compassion for the city environment to conserve the Franklin Mountains and Castner Range.

I will miss your courage to visit the Secretary of the Interior in Washington DC to conserve a federal owned mountain range.

I observed your volunteer service that encouraged me to join the El Paso League of Women Voters.

I will miss your service to the League and to the community.

Farewell, until we meet together in the other dominion with Yahweh in Heaven. Shalom

BettyAnn Halliburton

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Such hard news for Judy's family, friends, and the city she loved and worked so persistently to protect. She looked so good at the LWV picnic in June, this is a real shock. Holding all in the Light of comfort and peace, especially dear Judy.

Vona Van Cleef

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I am very heartbroken to hear about Ms. Judy. She had been an inspiration to so many people showing everyone that nothing is impossible when you love what you do and love the community that you live in, but most of all the love for the people with which you fight to get things done for all. Her smile is so contagious and makes you smile with her. I remember when we stood outside of UMC and Providence Memorial singing Christmas Songs to all of the many traveling Nurses and our own Nurses in the cool ,giving them a small token of appreciation for taking care of many families that were in the hospital while the Covid Virus was the strongest. The participation with AVON in the conferences, Redistricting for all the areas here in El Paso TX, all the bike runs that she did to bring awareness for Cancer, Mental Health, and other causes, the preservation of our Franklin Mountains - OMG so many more things that she did. Judy in bringing joy to many ladies who just didn't have enough to get something on the table when she would have a display of her Avon but would find a small something and brighten up their day. She travels with friends and family with a smile that would warm your heart that words can not explain. The last post on her Facebook that I saw was about her trip to New York at the Grand Central Station, Time Square, and Rockefeller Center. She showed me by example unity, respect, determination, but most of all humbleness to keep in everything you do and how that will make you be true to yourself and to others I have been extremely honored to have met her, worked with her, and giving back to our community together has been more than words can ever say. I will always keep her in my heart but most of all in my prayers for her and her family. I know that a lot of people who know her have made her part of their families.

Lucilla Najera

Thank you Representative Anello for placing this item on the agenda. Judy Ackerman's love for El Paso, our people and our natural environment is incredibly powerful. Her love for this community is powerful because it transcends generations. Her love for this community is powerful because it reminds us that the fight is still worth fighting. Her love for this community is powerful because it is relentless, unapologetic, and joyful. Judy has committed her time, her intellect and her money into making our city government more fair and more sustainable. Her investment in our community will continue to bear good fruit for many more years to come - the proof of that is in the young people who consider her a mentor and an icon of El Paso's progressive causes. Thank you Judy for serving our country and our community. We love you.

Veronica Carbajal

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This is Sylvia Carreon, president of the Mission Valley Civic Association and I know Judy Ackerman thru all her work projects for the upper valley, but am most familiar with her through the League of Women Voters and the Redistricting of the State of Texas and the City of El Paso. She was very instrumental in teaching me the process in getting involved in redistricting if we wanted our voices heard in the Mission Valley. I did not know of her illness, and it was a shock to hear of her situation. Judy taught me not to give up on a good fight if I believed we could get things approved in our favor. Judy is a true God-sent trailblazer and feel honored to have met her acquaintance! Thank you

#### Recognition for Judy Ackerman

Judy Ackerman has been not only a leader, but also a worker and the glue that brought people together to do what needed to be done for El Paso. If no one was available to help she simply did what needed to be done herself and never criticized others for their absence.

Judy didn't concern herself with people on the other side of an issue. She just focused on a clear, simple message. She went about joining others and gathering people of like mind in the service of El Paso issues she felt were important.

The emails, social media, phone calls, face-to-face contacts, door knocking, attendance at City Council and Open Space Advisory Board meetings, it seemed that there was never a moment when she felt she had done enough.

Judy led the effort to save the natural open space called the Knapp Land on the Northeast side of the Franklins. Simply by going door to door and informing residents they became volunteers who joined

in the effort and today there is a City Council approved conservation easement on about 350 acres of the Knapp land.

Along with many others, Judy continued her trademark process on behalf of the Lost Dog area on the Northwest side of the Franklins, going door to door to get out the vote. Along with dozens of volunteers the result was over 80% of El Paso voters voted for a citizen led initiative to protect about 1,100 acres of natural open space through a City Council approved conservation easement.

Judy was a long-time volunteer at Rio Bosque and she brought the idea for an annual Poppies Fest to El Paso Museum of Archaeology director Dr. Marc Thompson in 2007. Poppies Fest attracts more and more participants every year. Judy never failed to staff a booth for Earth Day. She consistently supported Insights and participated in public events to introduce people to the dinosaur footprints.

Most importantly she has been a key volunteer over many years in the effort to have Castner Range named a national monument.

Judy has been a long-time member and activist for the League of Women Voters get out the vote campaign every. During her last stay in a hospital, I was on the phone with her when a hospital worker came into her room. She had a bunch of voter registration forms and immediately said to the worker, are you registered to vote? No? Well, here's the voter form, your vote is needed. And the person happily took the voter form.

Judy loved to dance to live music and routinely drove up to Las Cruces to participate in their contra dance and folk-dance events. She was always taking OLLI classes at UTEP and loved learning new things. She made time for local museum visits and live theatre.

It seemed like the Franklins were her best friend. Even after a painful recovery from surgery, she started by walking to her mail box and slowly but surely was again climbing the mountains. She especially loved introducing people to the Franklins and all the plants and animals as well as the geology, the soils, the arroyos that carried stormwater and the history.

Judy would drop everything and respond if a friend needed help. Once I had a serious injury due to a fall. When I called Judy, she was ready to take me to the doctor and the emergency room and stay with me until it was safe to leave me back at my home.

I've never met anyone like Judy Ackerman and I think I never will. She never drew attention to herself yet her imprint on El Paso is deep and wide. We are all in her debt.

Marilyn Guida

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Judy has done so much and meant so much to El Paso that I can't choose one memory to describe her.

Judy is not a force of nature, she is THE Force of Nature. For decades she's lead the fight for democracy and conservation in El Paso.

No one person can step in to replace her efforts in this wide variety of causes. It's up to all of us to pick up a piece of her work to carry it forward. And we must teach our children, grandchildren and those around them to pick up pieces as well.

Thank you Judy.

Don Baumgardt

For the past 25 years Judy Ackerman has given back to her community with considerable support and endless involvement. She has taken part in many initiatives, often those that centered around land conservation. One that quickly comes to mind is the Knapp Land Nature Preserve. Judy has continuously and deeply supported the preservation of our Chihuahuan Desert and—specifically—the mountains and the foothills of the Franklins. Thanks to Judy's endless involvement (which ranged from often asking just the right questions to educating others and motivating them to take action), we saw change happen. The best way to honor Judy's convictions is for us to stay involved and speak up for what is right. And so I thank you for honoring her legacy, but I will deeply miss my dear friend and steadfast partner in land conservation.

Janae' Reneaud Field

---

Judy has been an inspiration to me - and so many others! Even when battling cancer she continued to work for causes she considered important, and many of us will appreciate her work as we enjoy the natural open space that she helped save. I hope that President Biden will designate Castner Range as a National Monument, rewarding her dedication to this project. She is admired and appreciated by so many. Thank you Judy for what you have done!

Marshall Carter-Tripp

---

Judy Ackerman... El Paso's North Star.

What can be said about Judy that hasn't been said before. She was our desert transplant. Not a native, but a fierce champion for our Northern Chihuahuan desert mountains. She loved this desert, its community, its people. She was not only a friend to our El Paso, but one of its greatest advocates.

What did she advocate for? For just causes ... social justice was her bedrock. With her clipboard in hand, she was always asking for us to sign a petition for ... clean air, clean water, safe highways. She stood tall and advocated to protect our mountains, women's basic rights to choose, voters' rights to free and fair elections.

Judy has been a friend to our League of Women Voters of El Paso since I can remember. When did I first meet her? I'm not quite sure, but I'm sure it was at a March, a protest, or maybe she asked me to sign a petition to protect Lost Dog Canyon, or at a party for Planned Parenthood.

Judy has always fought the good fight. And she was always there when you needed her. Judy, we are here for you now ... to honor and to commend you for what you have done and for what you mean to those who love and respect you.

Thank you, my friend. I ❤️ you more than words can say.

Carol S Wallace

to do what needs to be done  
to protect them.

Thank you,  
Your rock,  
Peace out.

- Meghan Curry Parks

Judy,

Thank you for teaching me how to swing a sledgehammer with proper body mechanics, for being a very rowdy nerd, community glue, & certified bad ass. I have always respected the hell out of you and would be psyched if I could bring about a fraction of the good works that you have. Our mountains will stand protected because a whole generation has learned from you how

10-13-22

Dearest Judy,  
Hello sweet friend.

I wanted to write this letter to let you know how much I love you and to tell you how valuable your friendship is to me.

I have always had such respect and admiration for you ever since we first met at some meeting downtown concerning the Knapp Land. I remember it like it was yesterday. I said to myself "I want to know her". Thankfully, we became friends! I am not sure what you saw in me. (LOL) I always have felt like I got the better part of the bargain in our friendship.

Our many hikes together will always be my most precious memories of you and El Paso. One of the things I love about you is that you are almost always up for a hike! Your excitement and love of the mountains is contagious. I have learned so much from you over the years on our hikes. You are always patiently teaching and reteaching me the names of plants and showing me new things. We hiked "Red Gates" together and even named it together! What fun that was! I remember another hike near the tin mine when we found a high rock and sat down and ate our lunch on it. The view was gorgeous and for miles. Everything always tasted better on our hikes. You always share your trailmix with everyone. I love that about you! You are such a giver... with

your knowledge, your enthusiasm, your kindness, and yes, your trailmix!

We realized early on that our opinions differ on some subjects. The beautiful thing about our friendship though, is that instead of holding that against each other, we have been able to talk about those things and learn from one another. I remember on several occasions you saying "Christi, tell me how you feel about such and such. I want to hear the other side". We could rationally discuss things we differed on without judgement or anger. That is special. You are special. You mean the world to me.

I want to say one more thing before I close this letter. This comes from my heart. Just like in our many talks Judy, I won't tell you what to believe, I will just tell you what I believe. I believe in Heaven. I believe in Jesus. I don't think that everything is over when we quit breathing. It brings me much comfort to know that I can see my loved ones again and that goodbye is not final. I believe Jesus is the way to Eternal Life. I will not say anything further except that if you feel Jesus knocking at the door to your heart... please allow Him in for a conversation. Talk to Him the way you always talked to me. Share with Him your doubts and concerns. Give Him a chance to convince you of His love for you.

You are in my thoughts constantly. I pray for peace and comfort for you and your family. I would love to hear your voice if you feel up to calling. FRIENDS FOREVER! WITH MUCH LOVE  
Christi

Dear Judy,

I want you to know what an amazing positive influence you have been in my life. About 15 years ago I went on a hike with you either w/ Celebration of our Mountains or a meet up - that part I don't remember. You took the group on a diversion path into the Castner Range area. Telling natural history of the area, you made the Chihuahuan Desert come alive for me.

I had recently moved to El Paso and wasn't sure if this town was the right fit. But after that hike you led, my perceptions about the desert changed. Past forward to the present. It was you who convinced me to join the Sierra Club. With that, your influence on my life has brought hundred of teens to "find their mountains." You were the one to encourage me to become a master Naturalist. & which, & my knowledge of the desert has widen. Your fierce spirit to fight for the protection of our mountain has greatly influenced me, too. →  
from

collecting signatures for Castner Range  
and Lost Dog Protection to volunteering  
at the Rio Bosque. Thank you, Judy.

I admire you so much! Thank  
you for always being the person  
who walks the walk. I hope that  
one day I could be half the woman  
you are! Thank you for being a  
woman who inspires!



♻️ Recyclable and printed with vegetable-based ink on recycled paper  
PHOTO CREDIT: BLM.GOV

Forever with  
love,  
Naysa Hardin

Dear Judy,  
Elia missed you! You really  
mean the world to me and you  
have inspired me more than  
you know... One of those ways  
is to fearlessly defend what  
you care for and love.

From the moment you danced  
into my orbit, it was  
fast-paced, boots on the  
ground, big voice and big  
hat, let's get to work and  
take care of the Franklins,  
its cutters, its flowers and  
its people. Elia so thankful  
that the Franklin Mountains

brought us together and  
we got to join forces  
for 3 years. I kept thinking  
Elia'd come back, but school and  
Jero and everything else kept  
me west, but knowing you &  
the El Paso family were here  
brought so much joy!

I love you and your  
spirit and your advocacy  
so much ♥

Thank  
you for being  
my friend, love,  
my Adriana



Oct 2022

Dear Judy,

I speak for millions  
of El Pasoans who  
LOVE you, from  
Viejas for Choice +  
Justicia Fronteriza to  
Sunrise and all the  
environmental groups.

Oh... and how many  
voters have you  
registered ?!!

Love,  
Kathy Staudt

10/8/22

Dear Judy,

As we begin another "Celebration of the Mountains" I was reminded of you and all your advocacy for the Franklins. The last time I saw you (maybe 2 years ago) you were on a trail and I was having a very difficult time making it over the rocks. When I saw you, however, I knew I was okay and <sup>when</sup> you escorted me, Richard and another hiker <sup>we</sup> were fine. Just seeing you gave me energy. That was one of the things I admired about you - showing up at rallies with pink cat ears, sitting in countless meetings, and tromping the Bataan march for remembrance. My life has been one of public service, always cheerful and ready for a laugh. I can only hope it continues.

Mary Lou Parker

Dear Janae - I read the article about Judy and learned so much about her life and her passions. She was the kind of person I have always said I want to be - one who keeps her activism and passion for change alive as she grows older (even as we learn just how hard it is to make real change).

I'm not a beer drinker, but I'll think of her as I raise my wine glass toast to what I'm thankful for this Thursday. I hope you and your family have a restful holiday.

All my best,  
Shara

Dear Jamie, Sue, Fred and Judy's family,

Judy had such a big heart for everyone and it showed in an infinite number of ways. Sharing her joy with life and important causes seemed to always be pouring out of her. The Poppies Fest, the Master Gardeners, Rio Bosque, the bats, the Franklin Mountains, reproductive rights, music, dancing, sharing food, City Council meetings, Open Space Advisory Board meetings, introducing adults and children to the Franklins, voter registration, get out the vote, block walking and calling for candidates, turning her front and back yards and the little bit of land between the curb and the sidewalk across the street into flourishing gardens, nothing was inconsequential for Judy. It all mattered. This list no doubt leaves out several dozen other activities in Judy's life of which I never knew. She spread love and commitment everywhere she went. Just today (Nov. 9, 2022) four members of the Open Space Advisory Board spoke in remembrance of Judy while trying to hold back tears, and the one person who didn't speak was crying. Judy will always be in my heart. I will cry every day for a while but I will always remember Judy's joy in life and the joy she passed on to everyone who knew her.

*Love to you all,  
Maulya*

I'm so sorry to hear of Judy's passing. I loved her fire and passion for Castner and her commitment to the cause. I still have the Castner postcard she gave me, and I'll treasure having the opportunity to meet her.

Thank you for keeping me updated.  
Garrett Beer

**Videos of Judy:**

[https://youtu.be/L2Yud1\\_9aC0](https://youtu.be/L2Yud1_9aC0)

<https://youtu.be/HvaSLEkBJF8>

City of El Paso You Tube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvaSLEkBJF8>

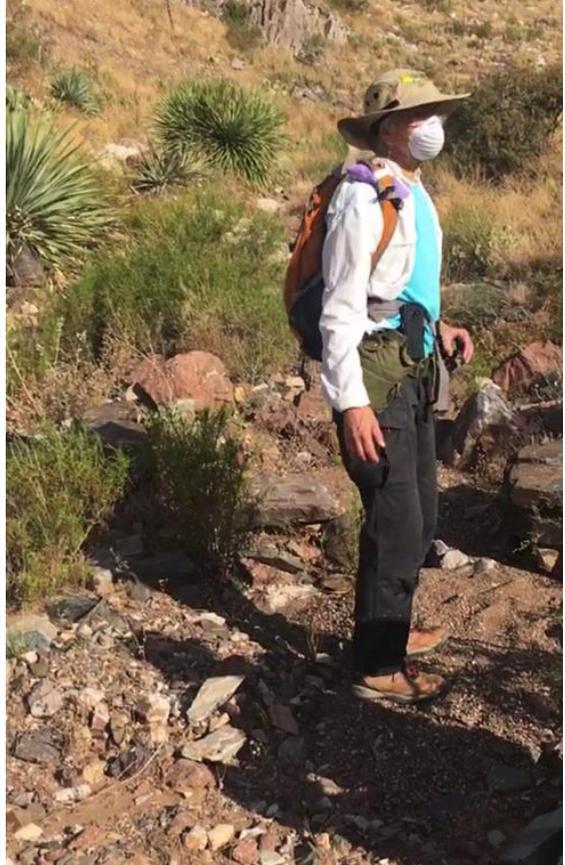
City of El Paso, City Clerk's videos <https://vimeo.com/eptx/videos> I don't know how soon they will post the Oct. 25 video. The Oct. 24 video is already available so it may be soon.























**Julia Aceves**

I'm so sad to hear this. May she rest in peace. ...

Like Reply 1d



Top fan

**Mannys Silva Rodriguez**

🙏 may she rest in paradise

Like Reply 1d



**Sally Andrade**

A gallant and deeply committed shero of the El Paso;/New Mesico region has left us - may we remember her as our role model.

Like Reply 1d



**Carmen Rodriguez**

A gift to El Paso who taught us so many lessons by example. Thank you dear friend. 🙏

Like Reply 1d



**Debbie Torres**

Judy was an excellent example of true community commitment! Her legacy will live on in those she impacted.

Like Reply 1d



**Paulina Lopez**

Rest in peace, dear friend Judy 🙏❤️

Like Reply 1d



**Sylvia Carreon**

Judy was a remarkable lady & a friend to nature! May she Rest In Peace & May the angels guide her into the arms of Our Lord! 🙏❤️

Like Reply 1d





**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**November 8, 2022**  
Media Contact: Marina Monsisvais  
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[marina@barracudapr.com](mailto:marina@barracudapr.com)

## **Media Alert: Local veteran, conservationist and voting rights supporter Judy Ackerman passes away**

EL PASO, Texas — Judy Ackerman — an Army veteran, land conservationist and campaigner for voting and womens rights — passed away at 6 p.m. on Sunday, November 6, 2022. She was 69 years old.

Judy was first diagnosed with cancer in 2015. She was serving in the U.S. Army in 1995 when she was first stationed at Fort Bliss. Initially she was not all that excited about living in the desert, but the minute she saw the Franklin Mountains she fell in love with El Paso. Since then, she immersed herself in outdoor excursions and learned all about the flora and fauna that make the seventeen-mile Franklin range so special and unique.

She is well known for her work to protect El Paso's natural spaces, including Knapp Canyon (a part of the Franklins), the Rio Bosque Wetlands Park in the Lower Valley, and especially the 7,081-acre Castner Range in northeast El Paso, many of whose 7,081 acres—still owned by Fort Bliss—constitute twenty-five percent of the Franklin Mountains themselves. Judy was well known as a leader in the Castner Range Coalition's decades-long campaign to conserve the Range as a national monument. Judy also spoke out against the Texas Department of Transportation's plans to widen Interstate 10 in Downtown El Paso. And about ten years ago, Judy was arrested after handcuffing herself to a bulldozer while protesting the building of the border wall at the Rio Bosque Park. She was also a staunch supporter of voting rights and fair elections and, as a deputized voter registrar, registered thousands of voters in El Paso County. In addition, she founded the Viejitas for Choice network to work for reproductive health rights.

Many friends and community leaders issued statements honoring Judy's work and legacy. Among them are these:

*"For the past 25 years Judy Ackerman has given back to her community with considerable support and endless involvement. She has taken part in many initiatives, often those that centered around land conservation. One that quickly comes to mind is the Knapp Land Nature Preserve. Judy has continuously and deeply supported the preservation of our Chihuahuan Desert and — specifically — the mountains and the foothills of the Franklins. Thanks to Judy's endless involvement (which ranged from often asking just the right questions to educating others and motivating them to take action), we saw change happen. The best way to honor Judy's convictions is for us to stay involved and speak up for what is right. I will deeply miss my dear friend and steadfast partner in land conservation.*

— Janaé Reneaud Field, Executive Director of The Frontera Land Alliance, El Paso's only nationally-accredited 501(c)3 land-conservation organization

*Judy Ackerman is and always will be my hero and heroine. We share many of the same common interests in social and environmental justice. We want to preserve our region's beautiful land, historic buildings and the people who live and work therein. We want representatives who put people first, especially people who have long been neglected by all levels of government. All in all, Judy Ackerman is a true hero. She does not merely "talk the talk," but she "walks the walk." El Paso needs so many more Judys in our midst! As co-moderator of the Community First Coalition, I can speak for our broad-based coalition in appreciation for all that Judy has done for El Pasoans and its natural resources.*

— Kathleen Staudt, Ph.D., UTEP Professor Emerita of Political Science

*Judy was one of my life heroes. Her fierce commitment to conservation and reproductive justice have been an example of what it looks like to care so deeply that you never leave the fight. My favorite memory of Judy is when we went on a hike together to see the vastness and beauty of the Knapp Land she helped designate as protected open space. We arrived and began our hike up to the hilltop (to also get a view of Caster Range). Near the end of our hike, we started talking about how important it is to raise kids in the dirt with the bugs. Not surprisingly, that conversation led to discussing parenthood and eventually, we were discussing reproductive health care in a broken world. She always knew how to weave things together: our responsibilities to the land, each other, ourselves and all. Only the most beautiful, powerful people can turn such simple moments into profound opportunities to remember what is important; to learn along a shared path. There was no one on Earth like Judy Ackerman.*

— Xóchitl Rodríguez

*"Her presence is all over our League (of Women Voters of El Paso). She was our star for voter registration, redistricting, voting rights. My heart is breaking, but we need to honor her for all the work she has done for us."*

— Carol S. Wallace, President of the League of Women Voters of El Paso

*We have all benefited from Judy's relentless work and advocacy throughout our community. I've been inspired by her work firsthand as an Open Space Advisory Board and League of Women Voters of El Paso member, though I fondly recall seeing her enjoying El Paso and expressing her passion for all that it offers in numerous local organizations throughout the years. There is one day with Judy that I particularly hold dear. Over Thanksgiving break one year, Judy invited my son and me to explore the Franklins together. On the hike, she taught my son about local plants, animals that we saw along the way, and helped him to appreciate the beauty of our natural environment. It was one of the best days that I've ever spent with my son. My son still brings up facts that he learned out there on the range with Judy. He is a teen now, but I know he still sees our Franklins through eyes of wonder and appreciation; a perspective and lens that I know Judy had so much to do with.*

— Alyssa Cervantes Benavides, Board Member, Open Space Advisory Board and League of Women Voters of El Paso

## **ABOUT CASTNER RANGE FOREVER**

*Castner Range is home to 7,081 acres of West Texas beauty and has historical significance that dates back thousands of years. It tells the complete story of how our region became home to the world's largest bilingual, binational workforce in the Western Hemisphere. Visit our website [CastnerRangeNationalMonument.org](http://CastnerRangeNationalMonument.org).*

###

Thank you for sharing this very sad information about Judy. Please let me know about services and how the League can honor her.  
Carol Wallace

I'm so sorry to hear this news! Please accept my condolences.  
Judy was such an amazing ambassador for the desert and for Castner Range. Maybe someday there will be something in the (hopefully soon to be announced) National Monument dedicated to her.  
Sending all good thoughts your way,  
Brandon Hayes, Bold Bison

Oh no. This is such sad news. Let me know if there is anything I can do for you.  
Sending my best wishes and condolences over to you, the rest of the coalition, and her loved ones.  
Romir

Thank for letting us know, Janae. Our deepest sympathies for all those who knew and loved Judy. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to meet her in person at the fly-in.  
Respectfully,  
Janessa

Washington D.C. in July. I'm really proud to be working with all of you and her passing really puts into perspective the many people who have dedicated so much of themselves to this important work.  
James

She's so dearly missed already. Thanks for letting us know and any follow up info would be great as well. Sending her much light on her new journey.

Big hug  
**Gbaccia Moreno**

So sad. Such a beautiful person. I will miss her so much. I am so, so thankful for all the happy memories I have with her. I love you Judy.  
Chrisiti Debates

Thank you for letting us know. May Ms. Ackerman rest in peace.  
Sincerely,  
Stephanie Ruiz-Alba

# Bobby Byrd

It's a good time to be a poet, I think, although the pay is shitty.

12.18.2008

## JUDY ACKERMAN & THE STANDOFF AL RIO BOSQUE



"The river is life, the wall is death."

*"I am going to stay here until they leave me alone or they arrest me because I believe that the construction of this wall should stop completely." --Judy Ackerman as she is arrested by the Texas Rangers. This quote and the photograph is from an article from [El Diario El Paso](#) which ran a front page feature on the protest. (El Diario's website has more [photographs and commentary in Spanish here](#)). [The El Paso Times](#) stuck a small article on page six of the morning edition.*

Yesterday (12/17/08) I got a call from my daughter [Susie Byrd](#). The construction of the infamous border fence was approaching El Paso's [Rio Bosque Wetlands Park](#), 372 acres of reclaimed natural habitat that sits downriver from El Paso in Socorro. Judy Ackerman, a member of Friends of Rio Bosque and the Sierra Club, decided to put a stop to the construction. A 20-year veteran of the U.S. Army, Judy knew how to prepare for the occasion. She wore a hard hat and a reflecting jacket, she packed in food and water, she parked at the park's visitor center and walked through the bosque and crossed the irrigation ditch to find the construction site. She arrived at the site in the early morning darkness before the workers and she sat down in the path of the day's construction. She wasn't going to move. The workers scratched their heads and called the authorities. But who were the appropriate authorities? It didn't seem anybody knew for sure. The construction is following the Rio Grande along the levee, and that land belongs to the Water Commission. So the Texas Rangers came, the Border Patrol came, the Sheriff's Department came, the El Paso police came, the El

Paso Fire Department came. But what were they going to do? Who was going to arrest her? Surely they called the mayor, surely they called the governor's office, surely they called somebody in DC.

My friend Ben Saenz and I arrived about noon. Judy had been in front of the equipment for five hours. She seemed to be enjoying herself, chatting with the suits and uniforms, sometimes laughing. But she was not budging. She was on the levee that runs between the Rio Grande and the irrigation ditch that borders the Rio Bosque Park. About 15 people were gathered there in on the park side of the ditch in support of Judy and her action. More were to come later, including City Council representative Eddie Holguin. El Diario El Paso had a photographer stationed there for the event, and the Associated Press had a writer. No other media. About an equal number of federal, state and city police officials were there. Likewise a group of hardhatted workers (KIWI Construction out of red-state Nebraska of all places) twiddling their thumbs and making jokes among themselves.

Among the people you'll see on the video are Maria Saldana, the woman in white and a good friend of Judy, who happily busied herself heckling the gaggle of uniforms. The first person interviewed in my video is Billy Addington of the Sierra Club. Billy is a veteran of local and regional environmental activism. He was one of the leaders of the successful effort to stop the creation of a nuclear waste dump in his hometown of Sierra Blanca, Texas. The second interviewee is John Sproul, the director of the Rio Bosque Park. John is an acclaimed environmentalist and naturalist for our region. Years ago I went to the bosque with the Audubon Association and John had us crawling on hands and knees in search of the yellow-breasted chat. Sure enough we found the chat! A great occasion.

Ben and I both had appointments to make. We waited as long as we could to see what would happen, but we left about 130. On our way out the gate into the park had been locked. Luckily Miguel, a young man who works with John Sproul, was right behind us with a key. It had to be KIWI Construction who had locked the gates (only them and park personnel have keys), denying entry or exit to a public park. Surely an arrogant, in not illegal, act. But our little bit of inconvenience was minor to what happened to others.

At 2pm the Texas Rangers handcuffed and arrested Judy Ackerman. She sat handcuffed in the back of a car for an hour while the uniforms tried to figure out what to do. Eventually they took her downtown where she was released at about 5pm. Her supporters were leaving in John Sproul's truck after her arrest. On the way back to the Visitor's Center they met the Texas Ranger (the man in the suit and cowboy hat in the photograph) in charge. They stopped to talk, but in the discussion he recognized Maria Saldana, the woman who had been heckling him. He handcuffed her for questioning, but she refused to be moved. Billy Addington has a cell phone video of this scene which I hope makes it to youtube soon.

Other places to refer to this ongoing saga is [newspapertree.com](http://newspapertree.com) and Jim Tolbert's blog. Jim, an El Paso environmental activist, is starting a new blog entitled "[El Paso Naturally](#)" which he describes as "Ecological, environmental, food, farm and community-building for a sustainable El Paso Southwest." In his first entry Jim talks about the ecological damage that the fence is doing to our way of life here, and he was wise enough to link to a flickr site which gives [some wonderful archival photographs](#) of the fauna and flora of the Rio Bosque Park.



# El Paso remembers Judy Ackerman, community advocate, champion of Franklin Mountains



**Martha Pskowski**

El Paso Times

Hear this story

[View Comments](#)

AD

0:18



El Paso resident Judy Ackerman left her mark on campaigns for environmental conservation and social justice in the Borderland.

Family, friends and co-conspirators are remembering Ackerman's love of the outdoors and dedication to speaking up for her convictions since her death on Nov. 6. Local memorials are planned over the next two months.

Ackerman and her husband Jamie first moved to El Paso in 1995 when she was stationed at Fort Bliss. The couple returned to El Paso for good in 2005. Ackerman, originally from Pennsylvania, was a 27-year veteran of the U.S. Army, retiring with the rank of Sergeant Major.

Ackerman threw herself into social and environmental causes in El Paso. She was a perennial presence at public meetings and relentlessly collected petition signatures for the causes she cared about, including the permanent protection of the Castner Range of the Franklin Mountains in northeast El Paso.

"She wouldn't want people to be sad that she's gone. She would want people to continue on," said Janae' Reneaud Field, executive director of the Frontera Land Alliance. "'Things happen,' she would say."

Ackerman was first diagnosed with cancer in 2015. The cancer was in remission before returning this year. Messages of love and support poured in while Ackerman spent the last month of her life in hospice care.



**More:** [Interior Secretary Deb Haaland visits El Paso's Castner Range; meets with conservation groups](#)

## **El Paso was Ackerman's adopted home**

Jamie Ackerman said it was love at first sight when he met Judy at a party in Pennsylvania's Poconos Mountains. They married in 1974. The couple were avid hikers from the start.

"For our honeymoon we went to Grand Teton National Park," he said.

He said they quickly felt at home in El Paso when she was stationed at Fort Bliss in 1995. Subsequent assignments sent the Ackermans to Germany and then Virginia, but they chose to retire in El Paso. They continued their love of hiking in the Franklin Mountains, though in recent years, Jamie said he couldn't always keep up with his wife's pace.

"The Franklin Mountains and Castner Range welcomed me when I arrived in El Paso. And nearly 30 years later, they remain part of why I proudly call El Paso home," Ackerman wrote in a March 2022 opinion piece in the El Paso Times.

**More: The Franklin Mountains changed my mind about El Paso: Judy Ackerman**

Jamie Ackerman said they will be starting a scholarship fund in Judy's memory at the University of Texas, El Paso for students studying environmental science. He also hopes to have a memorial event next year at the Tom Mays section of the Franklin Mountains State Park. The Frontera Land Alliance will honor Ackerman's contributions to conservation in El Paso at its holiday open house on Dec. 11.

This week the El Paso County Commissioners adopted a resolution honoring Ackerman's life and work and naming Nov. 14 Judy Ackerman day in El Paso. El Paso City Council also recognized Ackerman's contributions to the community on Oct. 25.

"El Paso lost a force for good today," U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar, D-El Paso, tweeted after her death. "Judy Ackerman was one of the hardest-working, devoted, and inspiring individuals I've ever met."



**Ackerman was a force behind several conservation campaigns in El Paso**

Ackerman was well-loved for leading hikes in the Franklin Mountains – as recently as this year – and was instrumental in the effort to protect the Knapp Canyon in Northeast El Paso, which is now public land. She had a deep knowledge of the flora and fauna of the mountains that she enjoyed sharing with friends and visitors.

Ackerman was also involved with the League of Women Voters in El Paso and registered thousands of voters in El Paso County as a deputized voter registrar. She also supported Planned Parenthood of El Paso and founded Viejitas for Choice.



Alyssa Cervantes Benavides, board member of the Open Space Advisory Board and League of Women Voters of El Paso, remembered Ackerman leading her and her son on a hike in the Franklin Mountains one Thanksgiving break.

"My son still brings up facts that he learned out there on the range with Judy," Cervantes Benavides said in a statement. "He is a teen now, but I know he still sees our Franklins through eyes of wonder and appreciation; a perspective and lens that I know Judy had so much to do with."

Ackerman also volunteered with Friends of Rio Bosque, which supports ecological restoration at the Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, owned by the city of El Paso and managed by UTEP. When border wall construction began in Rio Bosque in 2008, local

environmentalists spoke out against the impact on wildlife connectivity and wetlands restoration.

Ackerman went one step further and handcuffed herself to a bulldozer to block construction on Dec. 17, 2008. She was arrested after an hours-long standoff.

Ackerman told the Associated Press at the time, "They have this wonderful park here, and the wall is messing it up. This is life. The river is life. But not the wall; the wall is death."



Janae' Reneaud Field said Ackerman was always willing to help organize public events. She collected signatures and wrote op-eds in support of the campaign to protect Caster Range as a national monument.

"She always had a petition with her," Reneaud Field remembered.

The Castner Range Coalition calls on President Joe Biden to declare Castner Range a national monument. Biden has announced the first new national monuments of his administration this year. Fort Bliss used Castner Range for weapons training and testing, and unexploded ordnances must be cleared before it can be opened to the public.

In July, Ackerman traveled to Washington DC with the Castner Range Coalition for a series of meetings organized by Escobar. The delegation met with senior officials to move forward the campaign to protect Castner Range.



"I'm very sorry the 50-year effort (for Castner Range) wasn't completed (before she died)," Reneaud Field said. "It's very sad and frustrating that she didn't get to see the final product of her work."

Reneaud Field said Ackerman inspired many in El Paso to speak up for what they believe in and make a difference in the community.

"When national monument happens, we will all go on a hike in Judy's memory," she said.

*Staff writer Martha Pskowski may be reached at [mpskowski@elpasotimes.com](mailto:mpskowski@elpasotimes.com) and [@psskow](https://twitter.com/psskow) on Twitter.*

# **The LORAX Award**

Presented to

**Judy Ackerman**

In appreciation for

**“Caring a Whole Awful Lot  
About a Whole Awful Lot of Things in El Paso”**

The Image of El Paso

The Franklin Mountains

Franklin Mountain State Park

Castner Range Preservation

Frontera Land Alliance

The Knapp Land Preservation

Lost Dog Canyon Preservation

Open Space in El Paso

Holding Elected Officials and People in Appointed Positions Accountable

Voter’s Rights and League of Women’s Voters

Toastmasters Club

The Flora and Fauna of the Franklin Mountains

The Art and Skill of Hiking

For being the voice for the nature and beauty of our natural habitat, its plants and creatures.

You have truly left your mark on El Paso.

Your presence and fearlessness shall live on in what you have saved for the generations to come  
and for the passion you have instilled in others.

You are one of a kind.

**THANK YOU FOR BEING THE VOICE OF THE LORAX**



# *Unless*

*someone like you cares a whole awful lot,  
nothing is going to get better. It's not.*

*— The Lorax —*