Hawks Take Flight at Desert Peak Conservation Property

SouthWestern Power Group and Liberty Wildlife partnership celebrates habitat restoration and the return of Sonoran wildlife to their natural habitat near Arizona's Picacho Peak.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARIZONA — Four orphaned Cooper's hawks returned to the wild Oct. 8 at the Desert Peak Conservation property near Picacho Peak. Their return to the wild is through a partnership between SouthWestern Power Group (SWPG), the RioSol Transmission Project, and Liberty Wildlife, an Arizona nonprofit that provides wildlife rehabilitation, environmental education and conservation services. The release follows a six-month effort by SWPG and the RioSol Transmission Project to restore a failed water catchment at the property, helping support local wildlife and its habitat.

The hawk release brought together representatives and guests from the Arizona Governor's Office, including Jason Chavez (Director of Tribal Affairs) and Jennifer Diffley (Land Policy Advisor), to help release the birds and tour the conservation property.

The four nestling hawks arrived at Liberty Wildlife suffering from heat exhaustion and dehydration, but no physical injuries, highlighting the dangers Arizona's intense summer heat poses to young birds before they can fly. Following treatment and several months of care to allow their flight feathers to develop and harden, the hawks passed a health exam and were cleared to return to the wild.

"Watching these hawks return to the wild brings the opportunities presented by this project into focus," said Jennifer Gordon, Cultural Resource Manager for SouthWestern Power Group. "The Desert Peak property is about SouthWestern Power Group caring for the landscape and the resources that sustain it. Working with Liberty Wildlife connects our commitment to long-term stewardship of the property with the immediate opportunity to give wildlife a place to be wild."

The Desert Peak property restoration was completed by SWPG and RioSol Transmission to improve habitat resources in the Arizona desert. Work at the site focused on improving wildlife habitat, repairing aging water tanks, catchments and spillways; establishing a long-term conservation strategy of managing water in the desert. RioSol Transmission restored the water tank to collect runoff utilizing the land's natural drainage patterns, allowing the surrounding terrain to channel water into the catchment. Wildlife in the area were immediately drawn to the restored water source, which attracted a variety of species.

During construction, wildlife cameras installed by SWPG helped project partners better understand the site and document its conservation story. "We thought it would be a really good-faith effort to restore this before we put a conservation easement on it because then it'll be protected in perpetuity and will be a great reservoir for local wildlife to access water in the area", said Alexiss Adams, Environmental Assistant Manager for SouthWestern Power Group.

“The release was a meaningful opportunity to reflect on the connections among wildlife, the landscape and the people who care for it,” Chavez said. “Seeing partners come together at Desert Peak underscores the value of working collaboratively to care for Arizona’s natural resources.”

With restoration complete, Desert Peak provides a setting where habitat stewardship and wildlife rehabilitation come together.

“It is not very often that you have an opportunity to return animals back to their natural world, and now we’re in a position to release them back to the wild”, said Robert Mestas, Director of the non-eagle feather repository at Liberty Wildlife. After today, there’s going to be four more Hawks in our world than there were yesterday, and that’s pretty special when you have an opportunity to do something like this.”

The October hawk release marked a tangible step in the organizations’ shared commitment to support Arizona wildlife.

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MEDIA NOTE: Interviews and video of the Desert Peak project and the Cooper’s Hawks release are available here.

About SouthWestern Power Group
SouthWestern Power Group is an independent developer of utility-scale generation and transmission assets focused on the Desert Southwest. The company is developing the RioSol Transmission Project, a planned high-voltage alternating-current transmission line connecting New Mexico and Arizona.

About the RioSol Transmission Project
RioSol is a planned 500-kilovolt high-voltage alternating-current transmission line connecting central New Mexico with south-central Arizona. Developed by SouthWestern Power Group, the approximately 550-mile project is designed to deliver up to 1,600 megawatts of energy, strengthen the electric grid and expand access to renewable energy for communities and utilities in New Mexico, Arizona and western power markets. For more information, visit RioSol.energy.

About Liberty Wildlife
Liberty Wildlife is an Arizona nonprofit organization whose mission is to nurture the nature of Arizona through wildlife rehabilitation, natural history education and conservation services to the community.