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# Ted Turner Opens the Gates

The billionaire mogul invites you over to play inside his big, big backyard retreat

BY TODD WILKINSON

WITH A PORTFOLIO that includes a barrier island off South Carolina, a quail-hunting plantation in Florida, and more than a dozen sprawling ranches across the American West, Ted Turner may be feeling a little down about the real estate market, right? Not really. In fact, the 70-year-old billionaire and the nation's largest private landowner is playing Willy Wonka this spring and opening his biggest property, the spectacular 590,000-acre Vermejo Park Ranch in northern New Mexico, to small-group ecotours led by outfitter Off the Beaten Path. It's time to nab your golden ticket.

**ADVENTURE: Why open up Vermejo now?**

**TT:** I've always believed that taking care of the ecology of a place can pay economic dividends. I want people to see what we're doing here, to inspire them to do the same.

**A: What's special about Vermejo?**

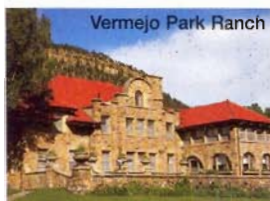
**TT:** Its beauty and diversity. You can stand alone on 13,000-foot summits in the Sangre de Cristos and look down all the way to the prairie. You might run into bison, elk, bears, mountain lions, or prairie dogs. The federal government is considering it for national park status.

**A: How'd this ranch become synonymous with bison?**

**TT:** The property came with a small population of bison, called the Castle Rock herd, descendants of animals transplanted from Yellowstone in the 1950s. When we had them DNA tested, they turned out to be one of only three genetically pure bison herds left that survived the slaughter of 40 million in the 1800s. We now have a herd of 50,000—the world's largest.

**A: The ecotours will pass through an area on the ranch being aggressively developed for coal bed methane gas. How did that happen?**

**TT:** I didn't own the drilling rights when I bought the ranch, so I couldn't stop energy development even if I wanted to. But when the El Paso Corp. came forward and said they wanted to extract the gas, they knew I



was an environmentalist. So we worked together on an agreement that has been held up as a model for how to sensitively develop coal seam deposits along the Rocky Mountain Front. Most visitors can't tell there's a major gas field being tapped underfoot.

**A: Will guests ever see you on the ranch?**

**TT:** When I'm there I like to get out and horse-back ride or hike and fish. I enjoy meeting other people on the trail.

**A: Has environmentalism diminished your passion for hunting?**

**TT:** In summer I like to fish with a fly rod, and in winter I enjoy hunting quail with a shotgun. I don't hunt large animals anymore, not because

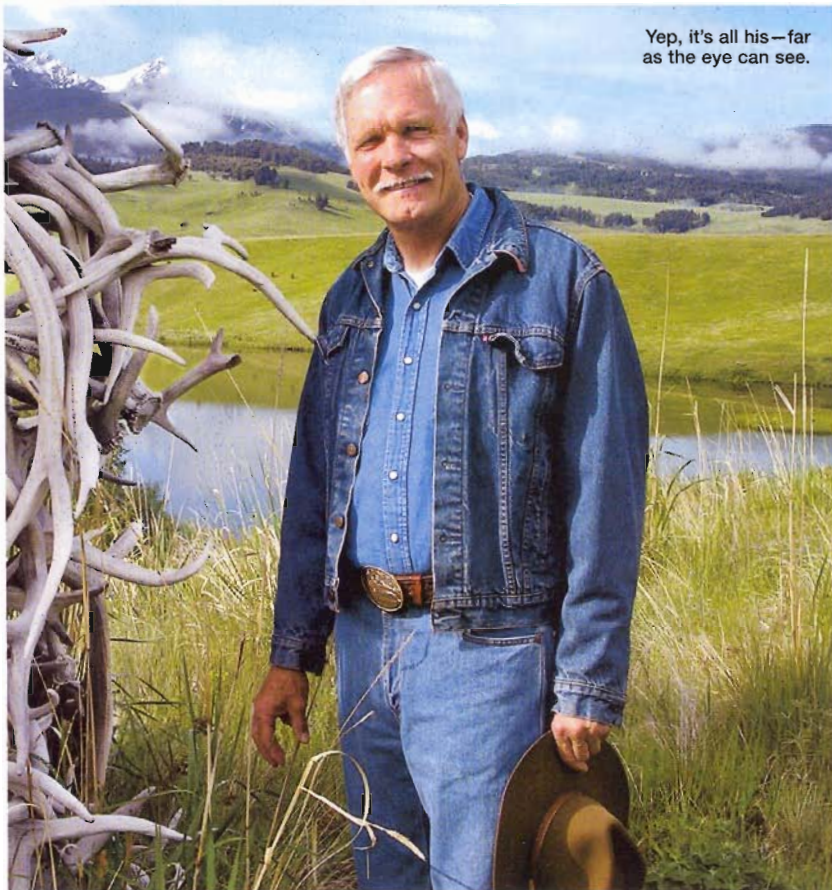
I don't believe in it, but I've done enough. I prefer watching big game roam live. But let me tell you, we do have plenty of trophy bull elk at Vermejo.

**A: If you were in your 20s again and aiming to earn your first billion, what would you focus on?**

**TT:** I'd be investing in clean, renewable energy. The big new fortunes of the future are going to be made by those who develop alternatives to burning fossil fuels.

**A: What's a richer experience: having \$1 billion in your pocket, or enjoying views of the mountains that you've helped protect?**

**TT:** I'd say they're equal. But you can't afford to take care of those priceless views if you don't have any money. ▲



Yep, it's all his—far as the eye can see.