

From the Lands Director: Land and Community



As the ESLT permanently preserved another piece of critical wildlife habitat recently, I was again so grateful to be part of the incredibly effective national land trust movement that is saving the “last best places.” Seven years ago when we started the ESLT, some of us were especially frustrated by the contentious, negative, and ultimately heartbreaking land use battles that were raging around us. We thought there had to be a better way to bring local landowners and communities together to preserve what is truly unique about the Eastern Sierra. The ESLT was born...

We are thriving today because of the deep connections between our mission and the values of the communities where we work. This movement empowers the people who know and work the lands that define our identity as the Eastern Sierra—the farmers and ranchers, the families who live on the land, those who have a real stake in the future of our wide open spaces. As director of our land conservation efforts, I see that if we provide tools to local landowners that help them keep their land whole

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The 33-acre site protects ridgeline views between Aspen Springs and the community of Crowley Lake.

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More Wildlife Migration Corridor Safeguarded Above Crowley Lake

Working with the California Wildlife Conservation Board, the ESLT recently purchased a 33-acre parcel near Crowley Lake that was slated for development. The pinyon pine-covered hills are a haven for wildlife, with scattered Jeffrey pines and mountain mahogany thickets creating good nesting and roosting habitat. Bitterbrush for migrating deer is abundant. The lower portion of the property holds a grassy meadow crossed by a small year-round creek.

Migrating mule deer, sleek and elusive mountain lions, and a myriad of birds, butterflies, and dragonflies need safe access to their summer habitats in the high Sierra. These ancestral routes are threatened by development and subdivision, but thanks to the recent grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board, the ESLT has preserved an important section of a local migration corridor. The property’s knobby hilltop is visible from HWY 395 and Crowley Lake so the scenic vista for travelers in beautiful Long Valley or fisherman on the lake will be maintained.

We like to think the wild orchids and tall penstemons on the property are blooming in celebration of their permanent preservation but the reality is probably a little more prosaic; pavement will never cover this ground and migrating wildlife will always find safe passage here. We’re grateful to our supportive members, the California Deer Association, and the California Department of Fish and Game for helping the ESLT secure this important wildlife habitat. ■ *By Karen Ferrell-Ingram*

American Badgers Digging In

While wandering through a rolling sea of sagebrush in the Eastern Sierra, it is not uncommon to stumble upon a dark, elliptical burrow dug deeply into the sand. Several feet beyond this entrance lies the den's engineer—the American badger, *Taxidea taxus*. Badgers are marmot-sized animals covered with grizzled gray fur. Striking down the sides and top of their black heads are white stripes (or badges). These large members of the weasel family are uniquely designed for digging, with their stocky stature and muscular legs that end in long, shovel-like claws.



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An American badger shows off its badges.

Badgers use these tools to excavate dens that delve underground and extend below the surface for up to thirty feet. Despite the difficulties in studying their subterranean social behavior, we do know that their fossorial nature depends on habitats within relatively flat areas of bare ground—as found in much of the Eastern Sierra. Badgers can be found in our region from the Owens Valley up to 12,000 feet, and throughout much of western North America.

Although badgers have been known to feed on plants, they are largely carnivorous and subsist on a variety of small vertebrates. As afternoon temperatures cool and dusk settles in, badgers will leave their dens in search of food, using their digging abilities to uncover prey. They generally pursue small rodents, a dietary preference that can benefit agricultural production by reducing rodent populations.

However, the incredible excavation abilities that allow badgers to be such successful predators have contributed to their demise as humans increasingly view them as pests. The holes they create to find food and shelter become hazards on farms and ranches, and make them the target of eradication efforts. The California Department of Fish and Game now lists the American badger among their “Species of Special Concern.”

The ESLT works with willing landowners to protect remaining badger habitat through conservation easements. These efforts will help sustain local badger populations, and ensure that future visitors to the Eastern Sierra can peer into badger dens with wonder. ■ *By Katie Nelson*

ESLT Gains Five New Advisors

Five talented Eastern Sierra residents have recently agreed to act as advisors to the ESLT, and help us expand our knowledge base. Our newest advisors include Rusty Gregory, Chairman and CEO of Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, Sandy Hogan, retired Special Operations Coordinator for the Inyo National Forest, Peter Pumphrey, a lawyer who practices environmental law, Doug Ross, a CPA, and Terry Gooch Ross, an organization and leadership development consultant. We'd like to thank them and our other Advisory Board members for their continued support and the sharing of their expertise. ■

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust works with willing landowners to protect vital lands in Inyo, Mono, and Alpine Counties for their scenic, recreational, historical, agricultural, botanic, watershed and wildlife values.

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Benton Hot Springs Ranch Conservation Easement Celebration

More than one hundred people joined the ESLT in late spring to celebrate the completion of a spectacular 900-acre conservation easement on the Benton Hot Springs Ranch. This easement permanently preserves the open rangeland and meadows on the cattle ranch owned by Bill and Diane Bramlette.

The sound of the Idle Hands Bluegrass Band and the smoky aroma of barbeque greeted attendees as they arrived and made their way across the upper meadow to a large white tent. Larry Freilich, ESLT's Executive Director, introduced the speakers: Biologist Phil Pister spoke to the importance of the property's desert springs and how the ancient path of the Owens River carved the canyon at the far end of the meadow. Mono County Supervisor Hap Hazard, confirmed his support for the project, and the significance of this easement



Field trip participants enjoy the stories and the view at Benton Hot Springs Ranch.

to local agriculture, the environment, and the Bramlette family. Dana Brazelton of the CA Resources Agency shared that the people of California made this day possible by approving Proposition 50 bonds that funded this project. Brandon Sanders, from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC), stressed how this project in particular reflects the goals of the SNC. ESLT Board Vice President Orrin Sage, and Lands Director Karen Ferrell-Ingram presented Bill Bramlette with a commemorative plaque. Bill dedicated the easement to his grandfather, "Buster," a colorful character who worked cattle and observed the intricate and subtle details of nature on this land.

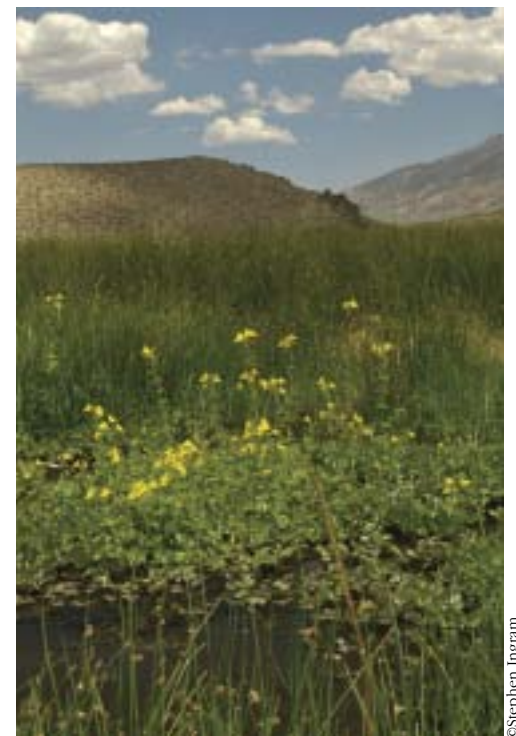
As the sun dipped low, the party guests explored the property. A birding tour, led by biologist Joy Fatooh, observed International Migratory Bird Day at the northern ponds. Other guests went for a hike with Bill Bramlette, a rare opportunity for the public to explore this property with its owner. Bill pointed out notable features of his land including springs, an alkali meadow, the foundation of one of the oldest cabins in Mono County, and an old wagon road that served as a freight route between Benton Hot Springs and

the old railroad that once passed through Laws.

Future generations will have the opportunity to continue sustainable ranching on this land, and the public can continue to benefit from this prominent open space and the conservation values it affords. ■



Landowner Bill Bramlette tells stories about his family's 80-year history on the ranch.



Large monkeyflower blooming in one of several springs on Benton Hot Springs Ranch.

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Upcoming Events



ESLT member Sarah Steck fills out a survey for Katie Nelson.

Saturday, September 27th • 9 am LIVING WITH WILDLIFE FESTIVAL

Join us for our 2nd Annual Living with Wildlife Festival! Wildlife agencies and organizations from across the region will gather in Mammoth Creek Park to teach you and your family about the wildlife living in your community. It is a great opportunity to learn some measures that you can take to protect vital habitat around your home and prevent bothersome interactions. There will be hands-on displays, interactive games, and informative presentations—something for everyone! Head to Mammoth Creek Park on Saturday, September 27th, from 9 am to Noon. Directions: Take HWY 395 N from Bishop to HWY 203/Main Street. Turn Left on Old Mammoth Road. Mammoth Creek Park is on the right just beyond the Stove Restaurant, approximately 0.8 miles from Main Street.

Wednesday, October 1st • 7:30-9:00 pm STARGAZING NIGHT

By preserving lands, preventing subdivision, and discouraging bright lights on our conservation easements, the ESLT protects the region’s dark skies that allow for the Eastern Sierra’s spectacular view of the cosmos. Join us on October 1st as we explore the starry scenery that darkness brings to the Ingram Conservation Easement. This is an opportunity for folks of all ages and backgrounds to learn more about and share what they already know of the constellations in the late summer sky. We’ll meet at 7:30 pm on Wednesday, October 1st at the Swall Meadows firehouse, 129 Willow Rd. From the firehouse we’ll take a short walk to a viewpoint on our Ingram Easement. Bring layers, a folding chair/blanket, and binoculars or a telescope (if you have them). Be careful not to block the firehouse garage entrance in case of an emergency!

Tuesday, October 28th • 9 am FALL HIGHWAY CLEANUP

Help beautify the scenery around our Adopt-A-Highway section of Highway 395 halfway up the Sherwin grade from Bishop. With such a large and motivated group of volunteers this past spring, we thoroughly cleaned up our section of the highway in only two hours! We’re looking forward to getting another fun group out for our cleanup this fall. Bring water and sunscreen. We’ll provide bags, vests, gloves, and “trash-pickers-uppers.” Tuesday, October 28th at 9 am. Directions: Meet on the north-bound side of the highway at the pull off just before our sign (about 15 miles north of Bishop on the Inyo-Mono County Line).

For more information on any of these events, contact Katie Nelson by calling 760-873-4554 or by emailing k.nelson@eslt.org.

ESLT’s Tradition of Volunteerism

As the sky grew dark after a delightful sunset hike in Benton Hot Springs Valley, participants at our “Celebrating Conservation” event returned to the tent area to gather their belongings and head home. But a contented few stayed on. Bill Bramlette suggested that we save the cleanup for him and his ranch hands, but it soon became a collective decision that helping clean up would be a fitting thank you to all who put this wonderful event together. Staff, volunteers, and participants playfully worked together to take down the tent, load up the trucks, and drink a last cold beer.

Working together. That is how the Eastern Sierra Land Trust was conceived and why it has been so successful. Our spring events brought together a diverse, enthusiastic, and skilled group of volunteers to help the work of the ESLT. Volunteers help us by putting on (and cleaning up after) events, offering biological expertise, digging up weeds, writing articles, helping with mailings, and much more. We are particularly interested in recruiting dedicated interns and volunteers to work with our staff on behind-the-scenes conservation efforts. In order to protect and steward our growing number of easements, we need volunteers in the office to help plan innovative fundraising opportunities and exciting educational events.

Whether you’re able to help occasionally or regularly, from home or in the field, the variety of volunteer positions and our ability to accommodate schedules, makes us confident you’ll find a role that suits you. For more information on these and other volunteer opportunities, please visit our website, www.easternsierralandtrust.org, and click on “Volunteer.” We look forward to your ideas and energy. ■



Food Guru Kay Hunter shows off a delicious salad.

TELL THE WORLD ABOUT OUR WORK!

Many of you have been with the Eastern Sierra Land Trust since we began protecting land seven years ago. Who could have envisioned how successful we have become, how much land we have preserved, and how we have grown to be respected both as a community institution and a nationally recognized land trust organization? And the future we see is as bright as the sunshine reflecting off high peaks.

Of course, with success comes opportunity and challenge. The list of potential projects on which we are compelled to act grows exponentially. Our ability to take advantage of these opportunities and to protect valuable Eastern Sierra land is limited only by our ability to raise funds to support these projects and build our capacity. And our ability to raise funds is limited only by the number of people who know about our work.

You love the Eastern Sierra and know of our many wonderful accomplishments. Support from individual members in California and 30 other states have made this work possible. Much of this support was generated by enthusiastic supporters introducing us to their families, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and business partners.

Simple conversations save special places. So keep talking...

- Tell the world about our work. The Eastern Sierra is a world-class landscape that needs worldwide support!
- Supporting the ESLT is good business. Ask your company to give. Do your co-workers talk about the fantastic vacation they had in the Sierra? Gain their appreciation and lead them to support an organization that is working to keep their Eastern Sierra fantastic. Is there an Employee Giving Program at your place of work? Is ESLT on the list? Small payroll deductions really add up and will help keep our vital efforts going.
- Are you shy? Tongue-tied? Create an opportunity for us to present to a group of your friends. Set up a dinner or lunch and we will supply facts, figures, and a slide show of some of the most beautiful photos your guests have ever seen!
- Do you need conversation starters? Give us a call. We love to talk about the Eastern Sierra Land Trust—760-873-4554.



You are the ESLT's most valuable asset when you tell the world about our work.

Thank you! ■

Can you think of a location to display an ESLT poster, brochure or sticker? Call us and place an order.



Conservation Easement Workshop in Bishop

A diverse crowd of thirty people attended the workshop "Preserving Land with a Conservation Easement" hosted by the ESLT at the Inyo-Mono Title Company. The May 1 workshop, sponsored by the California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP), targeted area professionals, landowners, and anyone interested in finding out more about tax treatments of conservation easements and how easements are created.

After a brief introduction about the ESLT and our programs, Ann Taylor Schwing, an attorney with McDonough Holland & Allen (MHA) in Sacramento, presented a thorough look at how conservation easements are created and implemented. Ann is past president of the Napa County Land Trust, and currently serves as an Accreditation Commissioner for the Land Trust Alliance (LTA).

Jim Leet, also an attorney with MHA, followed Ann with a look at the tax treatments of conservation easements. In a clear presentation, Jim was able to guide the participants through the often confusing information surrounding taxes and easements. Both Jim and Ann have offered their services to professional CPAs and attorneys, and landowners who would like more information. There are copies of the handouts from both Jim and Ann's presentations (great resources!) available for loan at the ESLT office.

There have been several requests for a similar presentation to various groups, and the workshop has generated several leads for future land conservation in Inyo and Mono Counties. All in all it was a great success, and we look forward to providing more education workshops in the near future. ■

Lands Director - *continued from page 1*

and productive, it benefits the community, the people who love this place, and the plants and animals who live here too.

The ESLT has helped bring state and federal attention to the preservation of the unique qualities of the Eastern Sierra. We've received significant funding and we know now that these lands are important not only to our supporters but to the entire citizenry of our state and country. Through our partnerships we've made a lasting difference in the future of our beloved Eastern Sierra, but there is still much at risk. It will take the passion, skills, and support of everyone who has been touched by the awesome beauty of the Eastern Sierra to ensure its continued survival. The staff at the ESLT are working vigorously every day toward that goal and your support is making it possible.

■ *By Karen Ferrell-Ingram*

Feedback from YOU!

After seven years of preserving lands in the Eastern Sierra, our success and growth has brought us several new staff members, a new office in Bishop and over 6,000 acres of critical lands under protection. With all these changes, we feel it is an important time to get some feedback from you, our members. After all, YOUR involvement and feedback contribute to the overall success of the ESLT's conservation programs.

Please take a few moments to fill out the member survey located on our website: www.easternsierralandtrust.org. As always, if you have questions, comments, or suggestions for the ESLT, don't hesitate to contact our staff by calling 760-873-4554 or emailing info@eslt.org.

We look forward to hearing from you! ■



Kids celebrating conservation at Benton Hot Springs Ranch.

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