



# SIERRASCAPES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST

FALL/WINTER 2005

## President's Message by Tony Taylor



News of land trust activity, both good and bad, appears regularly in the media these days. This isn't surprising when you look at the amazing growth of

this movement over recent decades. A few measures of this growth are:

—Between 1980 and 2003 the number of local and regional land trusts operating in the US has grown from about 400 to 1,526. In the 5 years since 1998 over 300 new land trusts have been established (The ESLT is one of those having been established in 2001). In California alone there are more than

170 land trusts in operation.

—In that same period from 1998 to 2003, the number of conservation easements held by land trusts increased from 7,400 to nearly 18,000 and the land area covered by these easements increased from 1.4 million acres to more than 5 million acres.

While this growth reflects the hard work of many people and very positive land protection, the media tends to focus most of its attention on the problems that arise in this fast growing field. Most recently you may have read and heard about one or more of the following situations:

—In San Diego County the

apparently successful Environmental Trust, Inc. filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection saying that it intends to cease operation.

—In San Luis Obispo County a conservation easement to be held by a local land trust was established between the county and a ranch owner for the purpose of preserving the ranch from residential development and transferring that development activity into urban areas of the county. Numerous distortions and inaccuracies in the media reports cast conservation easements in a negative light.

—Because of the growth of the land trust movement and the

See **PRESIDENT**, page 3

## Greetings and Gratitude



Where does the time go? Our crisp golden mornings were suddenly

replaced by icy blue and white dawns and our appointed day of thankfulness has passed into warm memories. It still seems entirely appropriate to share a few of the items on my Gratitude List:

--Our ESLT member from Lone Pine who took the time and interest to call and inquire about our processes related to controversial land transactions. He learned that,

as a rule we don't advocate for or against specific projects but avail our resources and services directly to the landowner.

--All of you, our committed members who make all of our conservation work in the Eastern Sierra possible.

--Board members, volunteers and staff who work tirelessly to make our resources stretch as far as possible.

--Our other current funding partners: US Dept. of Agriculture, CA. Dept. of Conservation, Wildlands, Trust for Public Lands, Mammoth Mountain, Resources Legacy Fund Foundation & Mono Co. Watershed Project

--The many landowners who

have contacted us this year with requests for information and projects.

We cannot begin to thank each of you enough for the contributions you make to the lasting work of the Eastern Sierra Land Trust, but we will certainly keep trying to.

Happy holidays and warm wishes,  
**Julie Bear, Executive Director**

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# A Purring Predator

by **Karen Ferrell-Ingram**

Living among predators, as we do here in the Eastern Sierra, the sight of disembodied prey such as a pile of downy feathers, an unlucky rabbit's foot, or a shiny rodent skull is common. But during fall, winter and spring months in the wildlife migration corridors, predation occurs on a larger scale: discarded bony legs and tough lifeless hides of mule deer appear stashed behind sagebrush and in willow thickets. Responsibility for these body parts lies with *Puma concolor*, the powerful but rarely seen mountain lion of the Eastern Sierra.

We are fortunate to have healthy populations of both mule deer and mountain lions inhabiting our rocky shrublands. In this region, mule deer account for 60-80% of a lion's diet, which is augmented with rabbits, hares, rodents, birds and other prey species. Human-lion encounters are rare here where lions have plenty of open space to hunt, breed and raise young.

Below are some interesting facts about this amazingly athletic and awesome feline:

—Mountain lions have roamed North America over the last 300,000 years and the species once ranged from British Columbia to Southern Chile and Argentina, and from coast to coast. Currently, they inhabit about 1/3 of their original range.

—In search of territory and prey, lions can disperse over 300 miles from where they were born.

—Lions are active at dawn and

dusk, though adult lions spend the majority of time resting. One cat was discovered napping in a willow thicket on an ESLT easement last spring by an equally surprised landowner!

—Lions are the largest feline to purr. They also vocalize with chirps, whistles and caterwauls.

—While normally solitary, lions will have "mating associations" that last 2-5 days where pairs will copulate up to 70 times a day.

—If necessary, lions can jump over 10 feet vertically.

Dr. Becky Pierce, biologist with the Bishop office of the Department of Fish and Game, has spent her career studying mountain lions, especially the lions that are associated with the deer that migrate throughout the Eastern Sierra. She has found that our lions follow their prey in varied and flexible patterns. Some lions may follow a migrating deer herd throughout the year, while others will spend the winter months with one deer herd, such as in Round Valley, and move to a completely different area in the summer, such as the top of the White Mountains.

One thing known with certainty about this secretive animal is that mountain lions require large, unfragmented, wild places. The ESLT is focused on preserving these viable connections between habitats that lions and many other species depend upon.



THE MISSION OF THE EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST IS TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE VITAL LANDS IN THE EASTERN SIERRA FOR THEIR SCENIC, RECREATIONAL, AGRICULTURAL, HISTORICAL, BOTANIC, AND WILDLIFE VALUES.

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## MORE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### ***PRESIDENT, from page 1***

investment of public money, — conservation easements generally result in the private landowner receiving public (and private) compensation and/or tax benefits in exchange for extinguishing development rights—Congress, the IRS and several state governments are focusing critical attention on this work in general as well as on specific land trust organizations and transactions in particular.

I want you to know that the Board and staff of the ESLT are very concerned about these matters.

Here is what we and others are doing to assure that our work continues to make positive and sustainable contributions to land conservation for the public's benefit.

First, as we have studied the various news reports and documents relating to these matters, it has been

reassuring that under the direction of our Board of Directors we have been doing our work in the right, legal and sustainable way that will assure our immediate and long-term success. This is no accident. The founders of the ESLT, the current directors and the staff have taken every opportunity to educate ourselves and then have put solid policies and practices into play every day in the work that we do.

Secondly, at the local, state and national level, leaders of the land trust community are taking positive, proactive action to address the problems that do exist. Probably the most notable of these actions is the work of the national Land Trust Alliance to establish a land trust accreditation program. Training for and implementation of this program will begin in early 2006. Our Board and staff have already begun preparations in order that we can be

early participants in this program. As supporters of our work, you should expect no less.

Finally, and most important of all, we will continue to invest our energy in preserving the inspirational beauty of the Eastern Sierra which is the purpose for which we are here and the reason you support our work. There is no time of the year when this is more apparent than right now when the aspen trees are painting the canyons and hillsides or our region with brilliant fields of orange, yellow and green.

We will keep you informed of future developments in these matters. If you have questions or concerns about any of this, please call me or Julie Bear, our Executive Director.

And, as always, thank you for your support of the Eastern Sierra Land Trust.



### ~ GIFT LIST IDEA ~

Let the Eastern Sierra Land Trust help with your holiday shopping again this year. An ESLT gift membership is a great way to share the Sierra for the season.

*Please send a gift membership to:*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

*with the following message:*

\_\_\_\_\_

*(Use the membership form and envelope enclosed in this newsletter.)*

# *What Happens...*

by ***Karen Farrell-Ingram***

After the easement document is signed and the champagne glasses are washed and put away, how do we know that the special qualities that qualified a piece of land for a conservation easement are being preserved?

An understanding of the basics of conservation easements will help answer this question. A conservation easement is a voluntary land protection agreement between a landowner and a land trust that preserves specific qualities found on a piece of land. The land remains private property but the landowner extinguishes certain rights, typically development rights, by placing an easement on the deed of the property.

The land trust's job is to ensure that the special qualities are not being diminished or destroyed. For example, if the purpose of an easement is to protect wildlife habitat, such as a migration corridor, activities such as subdivision, road construction, and vegetation removal, are specifically restricted in the easement document. If the purpose of an easement is to preserve a farm or ranch, restrictions are written into the easement document that protect soil quality, farm land area, and water resources. Each easement is tailored to the specific conser-

vation values of the land and to the needs of the landowner.

An important tool for protecting the conservation values of the land is the Baseline Document. This report is completed when the easement is finalized and it documents, with photos, maps and written descriptions, the current condition of the land. The landowner can hire experts to do this work, or more commonly, land trust staff will complete the document.

The Baseline Document is the basis for the annual monitoring of each easement. Responsible land trusts, such as the ESLT, have Stewardship Programs that conduct an annual visit to each

property under easement. Using the photo record and other records, the ESLT documents the status of the special conservation values found on the land. Digital and written records are maintained for each property under easement.

The most important component of a successful Stewardship Program is maintaining good communication with landowners so that easement violations never occur. If the easement terms are violated, usually the situation can be remedied by making sure the landowner understands the restrictions and remedies the problem. If an understanding cannot be reached, the land trust



*Guests celebrating the Lowery/Cashner project*

## *...After the Celebration?*

must be prepared to defend the easement, and the special features it protects, through legal means.

The ESLT takes our role of land steward very seriously. Completing land protection agreements and enjoying the subsequent easement signing celebrations are satisfying and fun, but the job of ensuring the continued vitality and productivity of our easement lands is critical to living up to our mission statement. The members and supporters of the ESLT also play an important continuing role by helping us to stay fiscally able to defend and protect our easement lands. Please inquire about contributing to our Stewardship Program and our Opportunity Fund.



*Mollie Lowery displays gift presented to her by the ESLT. She donated a conservation easement on her property in Swall Meadows, which more than doubled the acreage permanently protected for wildlife in this vital habitat.*



*Dr. Tom McAfee, CE landowner and sister Cheyenne celebrating with neighbors and friends*

# A NEW BEGINNING

by *Julie Bear*

As a new chapter unfolds in the century old story of Los Angeles and the Eastern Sierra, we at ESLT are once again hopeful and optimistic about the possibility of permanent protection for most of the lands owned by the LADWP in the region. As you may recall, this idea was initially introduced in 2001 by a former LADWP official and then resurfaced again in 2004, reintroduced by a host of supporters from around the State. The concept is still being discussed by some of the original proponents, with additional interest from new stakeholders in the dream. The last chapter closed with the Mono Board of Supervisors passing a resolution in support of the concept for the City-owned lands in Mono County. This new

chapter opened with the election of a new Mayor, the Honorable Antonio

Villaraigosa and the appointment of an entirely new Water and Power Board of Commissioners, lead by Mary Nichols, former Secretary of Resources for the State of California. Both leaders are known for bringing civility, respect and collaboration into the projects they have undertaken.

We fully expect to see and participate in a much more open and public process in this iteration of a proposal. As always, we will communicate with our members



*photo by Stephen Ingram*

about our involvement, opportunities and milestones along the way. Special thanks to those of you who have lent your support to this effort.

We at ESLT have and will continue to work diligently to see this dream realized. The permanent protection of this land could mean a safe, clean watershed; open space for recreation, rejuvenation and renewal; continuation of our rural character; and historic land uses – a lasting gift to enrich the lives of generations to come.

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## VOLUNTEER THANKS

by *Stephen Ingram*

The multi-faceted work of our land trust is dependent on the expertise of many different volunteers. We have numerous people to thank for their time and services, but here are a few that deserve extra recognition. After one of our new Board members, **Mary Pipersky**, kindly donated her iMac computer, local Mac guru, **Todd Lassich**, offered to replace the previous hard drive with a new, larger one. Todd also added more computer memory free of charge.

**Jo Bacon**, our webmaster, is

creating a customized membership database, making it better suited to our particular needs, and much more user-friendly. Local surveyor **Jeff Thompson** has enthusiastically provided several key surveys for current projects and parcels we hold easements on.

**Nate Greenburg**, GIS technician and partner with Talon Associates, has donated his significant talent generating excellent maps for various uses. Thank you all!



*Volunteer surveyor Jeff Thompson*

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust has received gifts from a wide variety of individuals and groups employing different strategies best suited for their individual financial circumstances. For example, ESLT was the recent recipient of a stock donation, and another individual has named the ESLT the recipient of funds from their employer's charitable payroll deduction.

While your professional advisor can help determine which method of giving is best for you, the following chart can help you get started. When you're ready, contact the ESLT at 760.873.4554 to begin implementing your wishes.

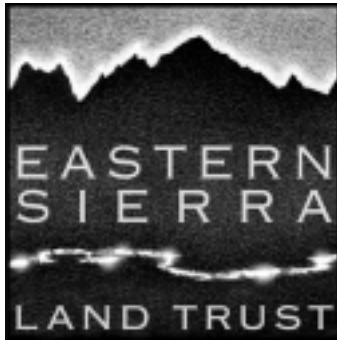
<b>YOUR GOAL</b>	<b>YOUR GIFT</b>	<b>YOUR BENEFITS</b>
Make a quick and easy gift	Outright gift of cash, securities or personal property	Income tax deduction; avoid capital gains tax
Make a revocable gift during your lifetime	Name ESLT as a beneficiary of assets in a living trust	Lifetime control of trust; possible estate tax savings
Defer a gift until after your lifetime	Name ESLT in your will	A donation exempt from federal estate taxes
Make a large gift with little cost to you	Life insurance gift with ESLT as owner and beneficiary	Current income tax deduction; possible future deductions
Avoid capital gains tax on sale of home or other real estate	Donate the property to the ESLT	Immediate income tax deduction and avoidance of capital gains tax

## *Sierra Nevada License Plate*

The Sierra Nevada License Plate is still under consideration by the California legislature and needs 7,500 pre-registrants to qualify. The intent is for proceeds from license plate sales to directly fund the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

Please register at [www.sierralicenseplate.org](http://www.sierralicenseplate.org) today and help fund a statewide effort to protect our beautiful Sierra!

By registering, you are not committed to purchase a plate, but will be notified when they become available. License plates will be made available for all vehicles registered in California.



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*Preserving Rural Landscapes*

# ***SAVE THE DATE!***



The Eastern Sierra Land Trust will celebrate its 5th year as our region's first and only land trust. We were incorporated on January 29, 2001. In the past five years we have safeguarded parts of the Round Valley mule deer winter range, hired hard-working and competent staff, assembled a diverse Board of Directors, raised funds crucial to our success, and are actively working on several large and exciting projects. We are also proud and grateful to have garnered the support of people like you.

We will not be holding a Winter Solstice Celebration this year, but will make up for that with a 5-year Birthday Celebration on Sunday, January 29, 2006, from 4 to 7 PM at the Mountain Light Gallery in Bishop. Music, food, drink, art, and more! Watch for your special invitation and save the date!

***Sunday, January 29, 2006!***