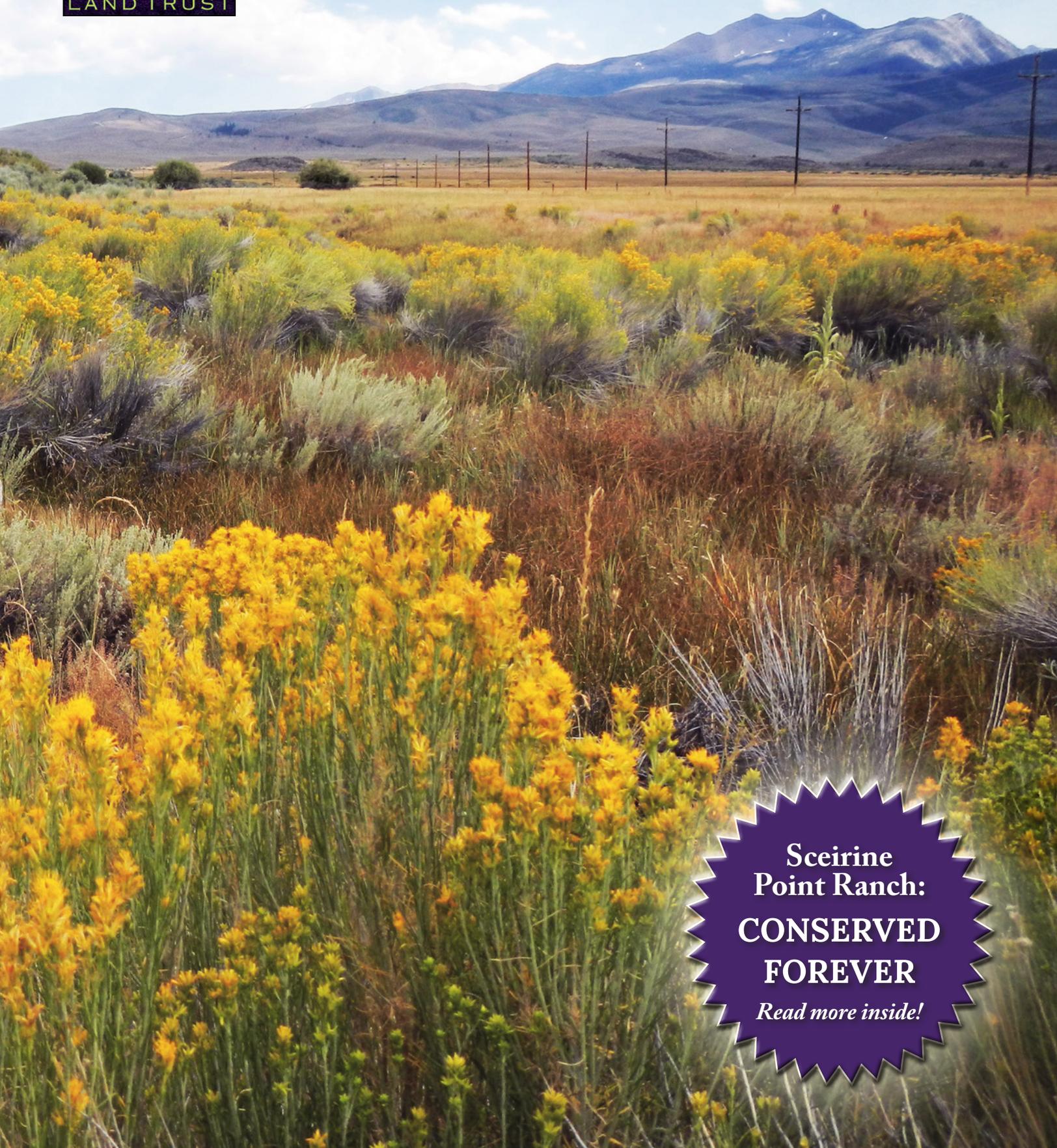


# SIERRA SCAPES

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust Newsletter

[www.eslt.org](http://www.eslt.org)

Spring 2018



Sceirine  
Point Ranch:  
**CONSERVED  
FOREVER**

*Read more inside!*

# When Opportunity Knocks...

## Letter from the Executive Director

When opportunity knocks, are you ready to open the door? I remember back in 2014 when one opportunity in particular came knocking – or rather, it rang me on the telephone. Today, years later, I am so glad I was there to answer that call.

At Eastern Sierra Land Trust, we frequently hear from local landowners who have learned about our conservation work, and are wondering how they too can protect their land for the future. We're delighted to offer them guidance; but as a small, grassroots organization, our limited resources mean that we can only take on a small number of these conservation projects ourselves.

So when Joe and David Sceirine called about protecting their expansive Bridgeport Valley ranch, I knew it was a long shot. But with its rich history, rare wildlife habitat, and scenic value, their Sceirine Point Ranch is a special place – and with development pressure on the rise, conserving open agricultural land in the area is a top priority.

So we opened the door to that opportunity. On a frozen February morning, we took a drive up to Bridgeport to visit with a family that has been ranching in these high mountain meadows for generations.

Bathed in snow and sparkling in the morning sunlight, the landscape took my breath away. The Sceirine family shared with us the history of the ranch and their dreams for the future of their property. We shared with them the tools that Eastern Sierra Land Trust could provide to help preserve their land for the future.

Now, after four years of persistence and with your continued support, we've permanently protected the 2,375-acre Sceirine Point Ranch – the largest conservation easement in ESLT's history.

Successes like this are years in the making, so when they come about we just can't help but celebrate. With our 10<sup>th</sup> annual Lands & Legacy on the horizon (save the date for June 8-10!), we're looking forward to an extra-special event to commemorate the conservation victories you make possible. I hope you'll join us.

And in the meantime, thanks again. It's you who makes all this possible by supporting our on-the-ground conservation work, and I'm so grateful for your continued help.

Happy trails,

Kay Ogden, Executive Director  
kay@eslt.org

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## Carrying a Torch for Rare Desert Fish

*With your help, we've made great progress towards returning the Owens speckled dace to its historic home*

On a sunny morning, a plume of smoke could be seen rising up from the high desert near Benton, CA. Where there's smoke, there's fire – and typically flames like these spell trouble. But in this case, that smoke was cause for celebration.

Since 2010, Eastern Sierra Land Trust has been partnering with volunteers and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to restore wildlife habitat at the ponds on Benton Hot Springs Ranch.

Now we're excited to share some "red-hot" news with you! Following a prescribed burn that CalFire helped us complete this past winter, we've taken great strides towards eradicating aggressive plants and creating a sustainable home for the rare Owens speckled dace.

### CREATING A SAFE PLACE FOR DACE

Bill Bramlette is the fourth generation in his family to own Benton Hot Springs Ranch. In 2008, Bill partnered with ESLT to create a conservation easement that permanently preserves his ranch and the important habitat it provides, including spring-fed ponds that were historically documented to contain the Owens speckled dace.

Over the past several decades, this rare desert fish has been in steep decline throughout the Owens Basin due to habitat loss and encroachment by non-native fish.

So when Steve Parmenter, CDFW's lead biologist on this project, began searching for a location to reintroduce the Owens speckled dace, the Benton ponds provided a natural fit.

But before we return the vulnerable dace to its historic home, aggressive plants like hardstem bulrush must be removed. If left unchecked, they would eventually choke out all fish habitat on the water.

We turned to CalFire for its assistance – and a plan for a prescribed burn was set in motion.

### WHAT'S NEXT AT THE BENTON PONDS

Once aggressive vegetation and non-native predators have been removed from the ponds, the sensitive Owens speckled dace will



*Along with our conservation partner Steve Parmenter, CDFW (second from left), our team celebrates a successful prescribed burn at the Benton ponds.*

be safely returned to its historic home. Your support will help see this groundbreaking restoration project across the finish line.

What's more, by helping improve pond habitat, you're creating a healthier place for other wildlife, too – including ducks, grebes, and herons. We're looking forward to witnessing the positive impact these changes will bring, and can't wait to get you out there on the land to see it for yourself.

*Funding for this project has been provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Desert Fish Habitat Partnership. In addition, a huge thanks goes to CalFire for donating its time and services.*

# Conservation Wins at Sceirine Point Ranch

*Thanks to your support, more of Bridgeport Valley is now protected forever*

**W**hen Joe and David Sceirine's grandparents began their ranching business in Bridgeport Valley over a century ago, they probably never imagined that those remote mountain meadows would ever be threatened by development.

Yet a few years ago, Joe and David started noticing that subdivision in Bridgeport Valley was on the rise. They saw the writing on the wall, and knew they needed to take action to protect their ranch for the future.

The Sceirine brothers approached Eastern Sierra Land Trust to learn how they could keep their land wide-open and productive for generations to come.

We partnered with the Sceirine family to establish a conservation easement on their land. This teamwork demonstrated how conservation and sustainable agriculture can work hand-in-hand. And the result is a big win for our entire Eastern Sierra region.

At 2,375 acres, Sceirine Point Ranch is the largest conservation easement ESLT has ever completed. By restricting certain future

uses and limiting subdivision, it permanently protects important habitat for wildlife, while allowing the land to continue to be used for livestock grazing. Plus, because the ranch remains privately-owned, it will continue to provide economic benefits for our region.

## A HOME FOR RARE WILDLIFE

Laced with creeks and wetlands, Sceirine Point Ranch offers a haven

for mule deer, waterfowl, and other wildlife. It also provides some of the best habitat in our region for the rare Bi-state greater sage-grouse.

Sage-grouse numbers are in decline, so protecting places where this unusual bird can safely raise its chicks is a top conservation priority across the West. Safeguarding these irrigated meadows keeps local sage-grouse populations healthy and helps meet conservation goals for our region.

## FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE BY SAVING LAND

Our agricultural conservation easement at Sceirine Point Ranch protects wildlife habitat and our

agricultural heritage by preventing future development. And studies show that this has an added benefit: it can also help prevent increases in greenhouse gas emissions.

Using California Climate Investments assets, the state's Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation (SALC) Program helped fund the purchase of this easement to prevent emissions increases that result from developing farmland. Preventing drastic changes and maintaining the native grassland will avoid greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 45,637 metric tons of carbon, according to an analysis by the SALC Program.

## SUCCESS YOU MAKE POSSIBLE

Thanks to the foresight of the Sceirine family, our state and federal funding partners, and the dedicated support of community members like you, this breathtaking landscape is now conserved for generations to come.

Victories like this don't come around very often – and we're so grateful for your help in protecting this special place forever.

*Funding for this conservation easement was provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, California Deer Association, and the California Climate Investments Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation Program.*

**"We wanted to maintain our identity and preserve our lifestyle as cowboys and ranchers. It is my dream that, three generations from now, Sceirine descendants not even born yet will be able to own and work this land to continue with our family legacy."**

*- David Sceirine, landowner of Sceirine Point Ranch*

## Wondering How Conservation Easements Work?

**W**ith your help, we partner with forward-thinking landowners like Joe and David Sceirine to develop sustainable conservation solutions for their land. And the main tool we use to accomplish this goal? **The conservation easement.**

### WHAT IS A CONSERVATION EASEMENT?

It's a voluntary land protection agreement between a private landowner and a land trust. It permanently protects a property's unique conservation values, such as wildlife habitat and agricultural uses.

**WHO OWNS THE LAND?** The landowner continues to own and manage their property, while the easement designates how the land will be used now and in the future.

**WHAT DO EASEMENTS DO?** Every conservation easement is different, customized to the specific needs of the landowner and funders. Most easements restrict certain land developments, such as subdivision, industrial uses, and mining.

**CAN THE LAND BE SOLD?** Yes. And the easement runs with the land, guaranteeing that its conservation values will be protected forever – even with a change in ownership.

**WHAT IS ESLT'S ROLE?** ESLT does not own conserved properties like Sceirine Point Ranch. As the easement steward, ESLT is legally obligated to monitor the property by making annual inspections to ensure that the terms of the easement are upheld.

*Want to learn more about conservation easements and other tools we use to protect land in the Eastern Sierra? Visit us at [www.eslt.org](http://www.eslt.org)! There's a wealth of information waiting for you.*

## Proposition 68: Investing In Our Future

*Your "Yes" vote will bring unprecedented funds to our region*

This June, California residents will vote on a game-changing initiative in local conservation. Proposition 68, the Clean Water and Safe Parks Act, will put \$4 billion to work to address our state's most critical water, park, and natural resource needs.

This is the largest proposed investment in natural resources and underserved communities in California's history. It is the first natural resources bond passed by the California state legislature in fifteen years, and it did so with bipartisan support.

**Proposition 68 invests \$142 million in conservation and natural resource protection in our Sierra/Cascade region alone: more than any previous legislative bond measure.**

### THE SIERRA CONSORTIUM

The Sierra Nevada region has suffered from a lack of long-term, stable funding to manage our critical natural resources and ensure the health and sustainability of our communities. In 2016, ESLT began a partnership with six Sierra-based land trusts and the Sierra Business Council to come together to create a regional voice.

Together we founded The Sierra Consortium with the goal of bringing greater investment to our region and to increase our region's presence on statewide issues and policies. As a direct result of the Sierra Consortium's

work, Proposition 68 will bring unprecedented funding to support conservation here in the Sierra.

### GOOD FOR THE ENTIRE STATE

If passed, this \$4 billion bond will have far-reaching impacts on all Californians by helping safeguard against climate change impacts, making cities more livable, and protecting our natural resources for future generations.

It will provide parks for disadvantaged neighborhoods and investments in the state's wildlife, water resources, and urban areas. The measure will also increase drought and flood protection, supply clean water, and reduce the risk of large, damaging wildfire.

### THE TIME IS NOW: #YESON68

California faces a changing climate, frequent and severe droughts, wildfires, and reduced federal support for our land, coast, and water. Now more than ever, we need to come together to protect our environment and preserve our natural resources for the future. ESLT endorses Prop. 68, and we hope that you will too.

### PROPOSITION 68 IN ACTION:

- Clean drinking water, including drought preparedness, groundwater cleanup, local water capture, and recycling.
- Creating neighborhood parks in underserved areas.
- Wildfire and flood protection.
- Improving resilience to climate change, including funds for forest restoration, fire protection, and farming practices.
- Protection of natural areas, including funding for state conservancies, protection of rivers, lakes, and streams, and funds for fish and wildlife habitat.
- Protection and increased access to our coast.

**Proposition 68 will be a game-changer for conservation efforts statewide.** To learn more about the bond and how it will benefit our California lands and communities, please visit: [www.Yes68ca.com](http://www.Yes68ca.com).

## Join Our Volunteer Team

Get involved in a conservation effort that lasts for generations! As an ESLT volunteer, you'll meet new friends while having a hands-on impact on the future of the lands, water, and wildlife you love. Here are two of many volunteer opportunities we have coming up – visit [www.eslt.org](http://www.eslt.org) for more!

### Sunflower Garden Project

Weekday mornings 5/2 – 6/7 @ ESLT  
*Show local schoolkids the magic of nature*

### Swall Restoration Day

June 21 @ Swall Meadows  
*Help improve habitat for wildlife*



## Bring Your Garden to Life

It's time to get your garden growing – and we're here to help. At our upcoming spring-themed events, you'll meet local gardeners, trade tips and tricks, and find out how you can make your yard a happy home for butterflies, hummingbirds, and the other pollinators that keep the Eastern Sierra abloom.

### Pollinator Garden Workshop

Saturday, April 14 from 10am - 12pm  
White Mountain Research Center

### GardenFest Celebration

Saturday, May 5 from 11am - 2pm  
ESLT's office backyard

## Explore With John Muir Laws

Join ESLT and acclaimed naturalist John Muir Laws for a family-friendly outing in the Bay Area. As we explore the Coyote Hills, we'll hear from John about his experiences in nature, and why it's so important that we conserve these special places for the future. Get your tickets at [www.eslt.org](http://www.eslt.org)!

### Finding Connection in Nature with John Muir Laws

Sunday, May 6 from 11am - 2pm  
Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont, CA



## You Spring Conservation Forward

**Your annual membership is the driving force behind local conservation, safeguarding more places like Sceirine Point Ranch for future generations. As spring brings new growth to the Eastern Sierra, you can help local conservation grow, too.**

Do you have friends or family who love the Eastern Sierra? Please pass this newsletter along to them when you're finished. By spreading the news of our work, you keep more of our Eastside lands wild and productive. Also, renew your membership between now and May 31, and you'll have a chance to win a beautiful photograph of an iconic Eastern Sierra vista! Look for a letter from us soon for more on how you can help conservation thrive.



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SAVE THE DATE:  
**LANDS & LEGACY  
CELEBRATION**  
June 8-10, 2018

At our 10<sup>th</sup> annual "Party of the Year," join your friends and fellow conservation supporters as we raise a glass to the Eastern Sierra lands that you've helped protect forever. Mark your calendars and keep an eye out for your invitation in the mail!

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