



**Eastern Sierra Land Trust**

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Photos Attached. Credit Photographer: **Aaron Johnson**

## **Historic Cattle Ranch Preserved in Bridgeport Valley**

*Local Ranchers Preserve Additional Working Agricultural Lands in Bridgeport Valley*

Bridgeport Valley, in northern Mono County, once known as “Big Meadows”, is one of the largest mountain meadow areas in California. Settled by miners and ranchers 150 years ago, local ranchers in Bridgeport Valley now face rising pressures to develop and subdivide their land. Recently, Centennial Livestock has preserved 718 acres of working agricultural lands with a conservation easement. This important new easement extends conserved private agricultural lands all the way to the northern end of the valley and is an important part of the larger Centennial Ranch holdings, 6,390 acres of which are already under conservation easement thanks to these forward thinking cattlemen. “Conservation easements provide future generations the assurance that scenic open spaces and historical livestock grazing of range and pastureland are maintained for perpetuity,” said Dave Wood, who owns the property along with John Lacey and his son Mark Lacey. “I can think of no other area in California more deserving of protection than the Majestic Bridgeport Valley.”

Preserving working agricultural lands provides multiple benefits to the local economy by ensuring continued agricultural operations and maintaining the natural balance of rangeland. “This means the perpetuation of agriculture,” said Mark Lacey, who owns the property along with his father, John Lacey and partner Dave Wood. “It’s important to preserve and maintain the history of the area and the legacy of the cattle. The only way to protect the land is to not put houses on it.” The conservation easement is a voluntary, permanent, land protection agreement. The landowners retain title and management of their property, while designating how their land may be used now and in the future.

The property that is now under easement was one of the earliest ranches in the valley and has been utilized for livestock production for 150 years. Under previous ownership, the property was also used for raising horses, sheep, and lamb, however in the years since that time the operation has shifted to cattle. “I have a great love for the Bridgeport Valley. I grew up out there as a kid. I always dreamed of owning a piece of it and keeping it in conservation and running livestock in an economic way for future generations,” said owner John Lacey. Visitors travelling Highway 395 enjoy the outstanding vistas of the Sierra Nevada mountains, and the open rangeland of the valley below.

“The ESLT board and staff are thrilled to be partnering with these long-time landowners,” said Karen Ferrell-Ingram, Executive Director of Eastern Sierra Land Trust. “These cattlemen and their families have been working

the land from Olancho to Bridgeport and providing food for people since the early days. Their work helps keep our valleys green and our rural lands productive and beautiful.”

The project was made possible by a number of funding agencies, including the Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program, the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), and the California Department of Transportation’s Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program (EEM). “We’re pleased to have been a part of this project, which will help ensure the viability of the local economy and its western heritage,” said Brian Leahy, head of the Department of Conservation’s Division of Land Resource Protection. “We congratulate the landowners, land trust and our funding partners on the completion of this easement.”

Tom Hallenbeck, District 9 Director for the California Department of Transportation in Bishop said “The Centennial Ranch was a good opportunity for the department to meet the goals of our EEM program, help preserve this beautiful valley, and work in partnership with the other funding partners.”

Eastern Sierra Land Trust works with willing landowners to preserve vital lands in the Eastern Sierra region for their scenic, agricultural, natural, recreational, historical, and watershed values. For more information about this and other conservation easements, visit ESLT’s website at [www.eslt.org](http://www.eslt.org).

**About the Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program:** Begun in 1996, the CFCP has provided \$77.4 million in funding to permanently shield 52,293 acres of the state’s best and most vulnerable agricultural land from development. Landowners and trusts are encouraged to contact the Division of Land Resource Protection for information about the program and potential funding. For details, visit [www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp](http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp).

**About the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP):** The federal FRPP is a voluntary easement program that protects productive agricultural land by providing funds for the purchase of conservation easements to limit conversion of farm and ranch lands to non-agricultural uses. NRCS partners with state, tribal or local governments, and non-governmental organizations to fund the acquisition of conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners. More information is available at [www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov).

**About the California Department of Transportation’s Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation (EEM) Program:** The Transportation Blueprint Legislation of 1989 established the EEM. The EEM allocates ten million dollars annually, to local, state, and federal agencies, and nonprofit organizations for grants to provide additional mitigation for projects beyond what was required. More information is available at <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/EEM/homepage.htm>.

