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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 18, 2014

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Senate Praised for Approving Farm Bill Funding to Help Save Working Farm and Ranch Lands in California's Eastern Sierra

Waiver Provision Will Allow More Local Landowners to Participate in Conservation Program

Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) praised the U.S. Senate today for approving a Farm Bill conference report that will provide more than \$1 billion for a new consolidated conservation program to save working farm and ranch lands in the Eastern Sierra - and throughout the United States - over the next ten years. The U.S. House of Representatives approved the bill on Jan. 29, and on Feb. 7 President Obama signed it into law.

“This funding is a great investment for future generations of farmers and ranchers on the Eastside, our local residents, and all Americans. It will enable the purchase of perpetual conservation easements from landowners who are willing to restrict their land development and help secure food and fiber, clean water, wildlife habitat, and our rural heritage,” said ESLT Executive Director, Kay Ogden. “Eastern Sierra Land Trust’s conservation projects have brought in over \$10 million dollars through grants and land donations to Eastern Sierra communities, and have preserved nearly 8,000 acres of working and wild landscapes to date. We have several projects we hope to close in 2014 which would bring additional funds and acres of lands protected.”

The \$1 billion in funding will go the new Agricultural Lands Easement (ALE) program, which consolidates the former [Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program](#) (FRPP) and [Grassland Reserve Program](#) (GRP) into a single program. FRPP and GRP have conserved more than one million acres of economically and environmentally important agricultural lands, but applications for FRPP and GRP have far exceeded the available funding.

Each year, an estimated two million acres of America's farms, ranches, forests, wildlife habitat, and other open spaces are fragmented into smaller parcels or lost to development, according to the [President's 2013 Annual Economic Report to Congress](#).

The Land Trust Alliance - which represents ESLT and 1,700 other nonprofit land trusts nationwide that collectively protect 47 million acres of farms, ranches, forests, wildlife habitat, and other open spaces - worked with Senate and House leaders to secure a provision in the Farm Bill that allows the Agriculture Secretary to waive a local cash-match requirement of 25 percent.

“Many areas across the country don’t have any reliable sources of matching funds, and rural counties may not have the tax base to create one,” said Russ Shay, director of policy for the Land Trust Alliance. “Allowing the Agriculture Secretary to waive the cash match requirement in special circumstances will provide the Secretary flexibility to target easements in important places where they are needed, but would not happen without the waiver.”

“Funding provided through the Farm Bill allows the Eastern Sierra’s working lands to continue to benefit our local communities,” commented ESLT Lands Director, Aaron Johnson. “It will help us ensure that the next generation of farmers and ranchers can inherit their family lands and maintain our region’s long, proud agricultural tradition.”

About Eastern Sierra Land Trust

ESLT works with willing landowners to preserve vital lands in the Eastern Sierra for their scenic, agricultural, natural, recreational, historical, and watershed values. ESLT’s goal is to preserve a healthy balance of land uses that can be sustained forever, ensuring both a strong local economy



and environment. For more information about ESLT's mission and preserved lands, visit our website at: www.eslt.org.

About the Land Trust Alliance

The Land Trust Alliance is a national conservation group that works on behalf of the nation's 1,700 land trusts to save the places people love by strengthening conservation nationwide. The Alliance works to increase the pace and quality of conservation by advocating favorable tax policies and training land trusts in best practices, and working to ensure the permanence of conservation in the face of continuing threats. Details at: www.lta.org/policy.

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Ranching in the iconic Bridgeport Valley. Photo © J.Etchegoyhen

