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Photo Attached. Credit Photographer: Lee Naylor

Land and Legacy: Preserving the Heart of Swall Meadows

(Bishop, California) – When Bob Naylor traveled to the Eastern Sierra in the 1980’s, he was looking for a large open piece of land to call home. “I found this piece of Swall Meadows and it was beautiful,” Bob says, “and I bought it.” Over time, Bob and his wife Lee began to think about options to keep their property from development. “I have always been interested in land conservation, and it finally came to where we wanted to do something to protect our land.” Today, their land has been preserved with a conservation easement, a voluntary binding land protection agreement between the landowner and Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT). Bob and Lee Naylor retain ownership and management responsibilities for their land while designating how the land will be used now and in the future. Bob goes on to explain, “the thing I like about ESLT is that I believe in private property rights, and working with them allows me to still own my property while working towards protecting and preserving it.”

Considered the heart of Swall Meadows, their 104 acre ranch gives residents of Swall Meadows and visitors to nearby public lands dramatic views of the Wheeler Ridge. “The incredible part about this project is that we are not only preserving important wildlife habitat, we are also preserving the unique history of our area,” said ESLT Lands Program Coordinator, Aaron Johnson. “Originally homesteaded by James C. Sherwin, the property was granted to Sherwin under the Homestead Act on August 20, 1881.” He goes on to explain that up to 1000 acres of land in the area was slowly purchased over time by Joseph Swall, which is where the name Swall Meadows originates.

Joseph Swall planted extensive fruit orchards in the early 1900’s, and operated a successful fruit business. Located at 6500 feet elevation, the fruit orchard was the highest orchard around. Today, five acres of the historic orchard remains productive. “The trees still produce fruit, about every other year,” Robert said. “Ranching is a great way to protect and keep open country. Deer make good use of the apples from our orchard as a food source when they travel through our property.”

The conservation easement on their 104 acre ranch preserves critical winter range habitat as well as a portion of the narrow migration corridor for the Round Valley mule deer herd. Critical

habitat for the Round Valley mule deer herd is increasingly threatened, and this property is key in keeping the migration corridor open and winter forage available for the deer. As noted by Alisa Ellsworth, California Department of Fish and Game Associate Wildlife Biologist for the Lands North program, "The preservation of the Naylon property demonstrates a high level of environmental stewardship by the Naylons and their conservation partners by promoting responsible use and protection of a highly sensitive migration corridor. Not only will the Round Valley mule deer herd benefit, but many other wildlife species as well."

ESLT partnered with the California Deer Association (CDA), who provided a portion of the funding for the easement purchase. Doug Brown, of the Eastern Sierra CDA Project Committee, said, "the California Deer Association is committed to protecting critical deer habitat. Because the Naylon conservation easement is part of the deer migration corridor, it is very important to the Round Valley mule deer herd." Additionally, ESLT would like to thank the California State Wildlife Conservation Board for easement funding and to give a special mention to Jim Lidberg, Projects Chairman from the CDA, who before he passed away was instrumental in the beginning stages of this project. ESLT 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.

Caption: The 104 acres conservation easement in Swall Meadows not only preserves important deer habitat along the migration corridor, it also preserves important area history, as seen in this picture of the original orchard planted by Joseph Swall in the early 1900's. Photo by Lee Naylon.