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California Ranchers Safeguard Agriculture and Sage-Grouse Habitat
Conservation Easement Protects Sceirine Point Ranch in Bridgeport Valley

MARCH 12, 2018 – BISHOP, CA –The Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) announces the completion of their largest conservation easement to date on Sceirine Point Ranch, showcasing how conservation and sustainable agriculture effectively work together. Owners Joe and David Sceirine have sold an agricultural conservation easement of 2,375 acres that will protect native grassland, the greater sage-grouse and mule deer, while allowing the property to be used for livestock grazing.

For three generations, the Sceirine family has owned and operated a successful beef cattle ranching business in Bridgeport Valley, an emerald valley crowned by the peaks of Yosemite National Park located between the ghost town of Bodie and Yosemite National Park. This high mountain meadow is laced with creeks and wetlands, providing a haven for diverse wildlife such as mule deer, waterfowl, migratory songbirds, and some of the best habitat in California for the greater sage-grouse.

“We wanted to maintain our identity and preserve our lifestyle as cowboys and ranchers,” said David Sceirine. “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.”

Conservation easements protect land for future generations while ensuring owners retain certain property rights. Through an easement, landowners transfer only those rights necessary to protect specific conservation values, such as wildlife habitat. Easements are individually tailored to meet a landowner's goals and the conservation values of the land. Because the land remains in private ownership, with the remainder of the rights intact, an agricultural easement property continues to provide economic benefits for the region in the form of jobs, productivity, and property taxes.

Much of the funding for this project was provided by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS provides financial and technical resources that help landowners and partners protect the nation's most productive grasslands, wetlands, and agricultural lands by providing funding to purchase easements on private working lands. NRCS’ Agricultural Conservation Easement Program that protects grasslands of special significance was an ideal funding vehicle for Sceirine Point Ranch because of the habitat the ranch provides for Bi-State greater sage-grouse. It is the first of several pending projects using NRCS funds, which come from the 2014 Farm Bill.

Additional funding was secured from the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program. The SALC Program is part of California Climate Investments (CCI), a statewide program that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving



public health and the environment—particularly in disadvantaged communities. The Cap-and-Trade program also creates a financial incentive for industries to invest in clean technologies and develop innovative ways to reduce pollution.

“The Bridgeport Valley is one of California's hidden gems, and I congratulate all the parties who had a role in creating an agricultural conservation easement on the Sceirine Point Ranch,” said David Bunn, Director of the California Department of Conservation. “Our department is pleased to be part of the SALC program, which achieves the important benefits of both conserving agricultural land and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This easement also has the added effect of protecting wildlife habitat, wetland areas, and riparian corridors, which I find very gratifying.”

In addition to helping conserve important grasslands and supporting the local ranching community, this agricultural conservation easement prevents Sceirine Point Ranch from conversion to residential or commercial development or crops. Preventing these 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. The project also received a grant from California Deer Association, a privately funded sportsmen’s group that improves habitat for California deer herds and other wildlife through direct financial support for habitat improvement and research projects.

“It is such an incredible victory to secure the protection of Sceirine Point Ranch for economic sustainability and the breathtakingly scenic Bridgeport Valley,” said Kay Ogden, Executive Director of ESLT. “We are extremely grateful to the Sceirine family’s long-term vision and all our partners for their dedication to preserve this historic working ranch and important home for wildlife for generations to come.”

ABOUT EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST

Eastern Sierra Land Trust works with willing landowners to protect vital lands in the Eastern Sierra region for their scenic, agricultural, natural, recreational, historical, and watershed values. To learn more about ESLT’s work and how to get involved, visit www.eslt.org.

ABOUT OUR FUNDING PARTNERS

The USDA’s National Resource Conservation Service helps America’s farmers, ranchers and forest landowners conserve the nation’s soil, water, air and other natural resources. All programs are voluntary and offer science-based solutions that benefit both the landowner and the environment. www.nrcs.usda.gov.

California Climate Investments projects include affordable housing, renewable energy, public transportation, zero-emission vehicles, environmental restoration, more sustainable agriculture, recycling, and much more. At least 35 percent of these investments are located within and benefit residents of disadvantaged communities, low-income communities, and low-income households across California.

www.caclimateinvestments.ca.gov.

California Deer Association is a non, profit, tax exempt wildlife conservation organization whose principle goal is to improve California deer herds and other wildlife through direct financial support for habitat improvement and research projects. <https://caldeer.org>.

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Suggested low-resolution pictures with captions provided below; high-resolution versions are attached to email. For additional images, please contact Jamie Della at jamie@eslt.org



Image 1 Caption: The Sceirine family has run a successful ranching business for three generations



Image 2 Caption: This conservation easement rests in an emerald valley crowned by the peaks of Yosemite National Park



Image 3 Caption: *Grazing cattle on Sceirine Point Ranch*