



# SIERRASCAPES

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust Newsletter

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

Spring 2019

*“Each stream, each meadow, each season, even each day will be unique, for that is the nature of wild things.”*

– Genny Smith



# Soak in the Magic

## Letter from the Executive Director



The sun is shining and birds are chirping. Bees hum in my fruit trees that are bursting with blooms. Beneath the snow-topped mountains to the east and west, there is a gentle hue of green in the trees and desert.

As I embrace this season, I realize it's been six years since you welcomed me into the ESLT family. Your generosity, kindness, and support has helped more than you know. And together, we have doubled the amount of permanently protected land in this magical place - land that will remain as it is now: open, wild or working. Always.

And we haven't stopped.

We work every day to protect thousands of additional acres. It's a hard job and there are no guarantees. But with you at our side, we'll have more good news to share.

Protecting these special places is critically important. As our world gets faster, crazier, and noisier, we each need places where we can immerse ourselves in the peace of nature. More and more studies are proving what we intuitively know: that we feel better when we spend time outside.

I want to invite you to join us out on the land that you have protected. Let's walk into the beauty of nature and let that magic fill our souls.

Thank you for everything you do. Side by side, we will protect this incredible place.

May spring bring new blooms to your life, too.

With gratitude,

Kay Ogden, Executive Director

[kay@eslt.org](mailto:kay@eslt.org)

### FRONT COVER:

The Alabama Hills, located just west of Lone Pine, was designated a National Scenic Area on March 12th.

Photo by Bill Dunlap, Board of Directors.

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# How Genny Smith Shaped Mountains

*She wrote some of the first major Eastern Sierra guidebooks.*

*She raised funds for Mono Lake's legal defense, prompting a landmark ruling limiting water diversions.*

*She led conversations that created the BLM Desert Plan and the Mojave National Preserve.*

*She stopped a highway that would have run from Mammoth Lakes to Fresno, through the Sierra.*

If you had asked Genny Smith about her achievements, she would have humbly told you that she had simply helped people work together.

The truth is, Genny influenced the Eastern Sierra tremendously.

One morning soon after moving to Mammoth Lakes, Genny helped a lost hiker who appeared in front of her home. But she always looked to the future, so she didn't stop there. That day, she drew maps and pamphlets to help all future hikers.

Genny went on to publish major Eastern Sierra guidebooks. She had fallen in love with these mountains and open vistas, and she knew education was key to ensuring their future.

From the start, Genny identified another key to ensuring the future of this region: ESLT. As she became deeply involved in local politics and environmental issues, she also took part in ESLT's early success.

Throughout her efforts to protect this region, Genny was a unifying force. According to Greg Newbry, one of Genny's closest friends, "She could listen to people no matter her personal standpoint. She

brought people together. And when she did talk, people listened."

She valued the profound promise that ESLT makes for the future of the land she loved - that we will care for this region forever. So before she passed, Genny cemented her impact by planning a gift to ESLT in her estate.

We have already put parts of her gift to use in ways that honor her love for land. We are hiring more stewardship staff, and we invested in a truck for this growing team. Now, we can reach remote areas more safely as we check on the health and status of our protected special places.

And with Genny's support, a valuable parcel in the spectacular Lundy Canyon is now permanently protected.

Genny's mark on this landscape will not fade even though she is no longer with us. Her gift will continue to help us protect the Eastern Sierra for everyone, forever.



*Genny Smith hand-colored hundreds of maps during her effort to stop construction of a highway that would have run from Fresno to Mammoth, through Devils Postpile National Monument.*



*© Susan Morning*

*Would you like a confidential conversation about how Planned Giving might fit in your family goals? Give Kay a call at (760) 873-4554.*



*Mule deer migrate through the Swall Meadows Wildlife Area twice every year.*

## Helping the Herd

*A treacherous corridor. A missing puzzle piece. A shared solution.*

Imagine that the year is 1999, and you just moved to a new home in Swall Meadows. Every day out your window, you begin to see the same thing. Mule deer! A lot of mule deer.

This experience led community members to the discovery that homes lay in the middle of the Round Valley mule deer herd's narrow biannual migration corridor. They felt invested in the future of their local wildlife. So they took action.

They talked to neighbors: Was there a way to protect land without stifling growth? They learned about land trusts' unique ability to work with both private and public landowners, and their commitment to caring for protected land forever. They decided to found Eastern Sierra Land Trust.

These first conservation leaders included Karl and Laura Hinrichs, Ralph and Lyn Haber, Stephen Ingram

and Karen Ferrell-Ingram, and Rick Kattelmann. Their community initiative launched our vital conservation work.

Today, ESLT works with landowners to preserve diverse types of land throughout the Eastern Sierra, from mountain meadows and fishing spots to ranches and farms. And we always stay true to our beginnings: protecting habitat for wildlife.

Right now, the Round Valley mule deer herd is on its way through a migration corridor bottleneck. It is only one mile wide, with Wheeler Crest rising dramatically on one side, Owens River Gorge dropping off on the other, and the busy Highway 395 running in between.

Thanks to ESLT's visionary founders, early donors, and residents of Swall Meadows who donated the first conservation easements, much of

this migration corridor has been kept open and healthy for the deer.

Our work in caring for this herd continues. In 2011, ESLT acquired the 59-acre Swall Wildlife Preserve in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). We planned to transfer ownership to the agency from the start, as they own the surrounding Swall Meadows Wildlife Area. That transfer will be fulfilled soon.

This no-cost transfer will connect CDFW lands to one another like a missing puzzle piece, bringing the Swall Meadows Wildlife Area under unified ownership and consistent, coordinated care that greatly benefits our deer.

Over the years, we have worked closely with CDFW to preserve native plants and improve habitat conditions in the Swall Meadows Wildlife Area.

We have returned again and again alongside CDFW and dedicated volunteers to remove weeds, trash, and barbed wire. Our watchful efforts helped restore habitat health after 2015's Round Fire.

Our supporters have also enabled us to cultivate and plant bitterbrush, and reduce destructive trespassing. And they have enabled us to install a wildlife camera that records the location and movement of the deer.

All this work has been possible thanks to CDFW, CAL FIRE, and California Deer Association.

We are pleased to be passing Swall Wildlife Preserve on to one of these trusted partners. The folks at CDFW will continue to care for this land, just as they have been doing throughout the last decade spent working alongside ESLT.

We continue to protect wildlife and habitat in Swall Meadows, the place where it all started. Thanks to your ongoing support, the Round Valley mule deer herd remains in good hands.

## *John Donnelly answers your questions.*

### **Will wildfire risks be managed?**

2015's Round Fire destroyed native plants, making space for fire-prone invasives. CDFW will continue to remove invasive plants and reduce destructive trespassing in order to lower threat of wildfire and to protect the health of mule deer habitat.

### **Will there be public access?**

Access rules do not change with this transfer. The purpose of the acquisition is primarily to preserve wildlife habitat, and the public can access the land on foot or by horse from neighboring public lands.

### **Where can we find more information?**

We will create a draft land management plan to guide the future uses of the property, as is CDFW's policy. The public can review and comment on the proposed plan. Those interested in reviewing may contact the CDFW Bishop Field Office.

*John Donnelly is Executive Director of the Wildlife Conservation Board, an independent Board within California Department of Fish and Wildlife committed to enhancing natural resources for wildlife and public enjoyment.*

## **"When You Retire, Can I Take Over?"**

Seven-year-old Sage stood listening, rapt, as CDFW biologist Timothy Taylor answered questions from guests at our Mule Deer Migration Corridor Field Trip last year. As soon as he finished, she ran up to him. "When you retire, can I take over caring for the deer?"

Her family returned for this year's field trip, where Sage busied herself between helping her sister with her binoculars and enthusiastically explaining to us what she was learning from Timothy.

She explained the word "migration": "The deer go away from here and come back. They do that every year!"

Over and over she would find the deer with her binoculars, put them down, and then try again. And she says that she sees deer all the time, even when she isn't looking very hard. "We see deer crossing the street when we're eating lunch at school. But we stay far away because that is better for the deer."

Thanks to you, kids like Sage learn what's special about the Eastern Sierra and the wildlife who live here. Teaching future Eastern Sierra protectors is key to ensuring a healthy tomorrow for this region. By supporting and attending our educational programs, you make sure our land and wildlife are cared for forever.



# Oasis In The Desert

*Michelle saved critical habitat from development. Now it's yours to visit.*

She stood on a ridge near Benton, gazing up at a weathered pinyon pine then out at a sea of blooming, fragrant sage. Each time Michelle Browner visited, this landscape completely absorbed her. She would spend days exploring in the sun and nights staring at the brightest stars she had ever seen.

Like many of us, Michelle had a hard time keeping her eyes on the road when she first drove through the Eastern Sierra. She fell particularly in love with Adobe Valley, along with Black Lake and its alkali meadows.

Then one day, she noticed a "for sale" sign posted not far from Black Lake. Suddenly, she imagined buildings and sprawl scattered in the meadows and by the lake, disrupting the fragile

ecosystem that was so critical for migrating birds and deer. So she purchased the land.

In 2014, Michelle approached ESLT to consider options for conserving Black Lake beyond her lifetime. She chose to make an outright donation of this special place to ESLT.

Thanks to Michelle's vision and generosity, Black Lake Preserve is protected for you and for future generations to visit and enjoy.

Michelle knew that this magical rare wetland in the middle of the arid Adobe Valley would be the perfect place to bring young visitors. She was right - you can see Black Lake's sparkle in kids' eyes long after their visit. Thanks to you, local students visit the Preserve as a part of

"Birds in the Classroom." They fall in love with the shimmering lake and its meadows while spotting the birds they learn about in school.

While Michelle Browner's foresight created this Preserve, our visitors and volunteers keep this beautiful place healthy as they learn about and care for its crucial wildlife habitat. Thanks to you, the pine, the sage, the birds, the moist alkali meadows... they aren't going anywhere.

*Kids of all ages will also enjoy Migratory Bird Day at the Preserve on May 11th of this year - we hope you can come!*

*Black Lake Preserve is an important breeding outpost for migrating birds and a critical water source for wildlife. It's open to the public and located along Highway 120 East. For more information, visit [eslt.org](http://eslt.org).*

“When I first saw Adobe Valley, I already had the idea in my mind that I wanted to do whatever I could to conserve it.”

- Michelle Browner



# Mud, Dirt, & Fun

*It's spring - come play outside!*

May 11

## Migratory Bird Day

**Black Lake Preserve, 8-10:30AM**

Bring the whole family to spot birds with our local friends from Eastern Sierra Audubon Society.

May 21

## Land Stewardship Day

**Black Lake Preserve**

Get your hands dirty caring for wildlife habitat at this unique and gorgeous wetland.

June 8

## Garden Inspiration Tour

**Meet at ESLT office, 9AM**

See lush local gardens that are abuzz with pollinators.



Do you have friends and family who love the Eastern Sierra? Bring them along!  
Learn more at [eslt.org/events](http://eslt.org/events).



*Volunteers tag fences at Black Lake Preserve, making them more visible for Bi-State sage-grouse.*



*Meet fellow gardeners and get inspiration for your yard at this year's Garden Tour.*





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**SAVE THE DATE:**  
**LANDS & LEGACY  
CELEBRATION,**  
**AUGUST 30 - SEPTEMBER 1, 2019**

Join us for dinner on Friday as we admire the spectacular view from Mammoth Mountain's Parallax dining room, then stay for an inspiring Labor Day weekend. We'll soak in the magic of these wide-open Eastern Sierra lands you've protected forever.