

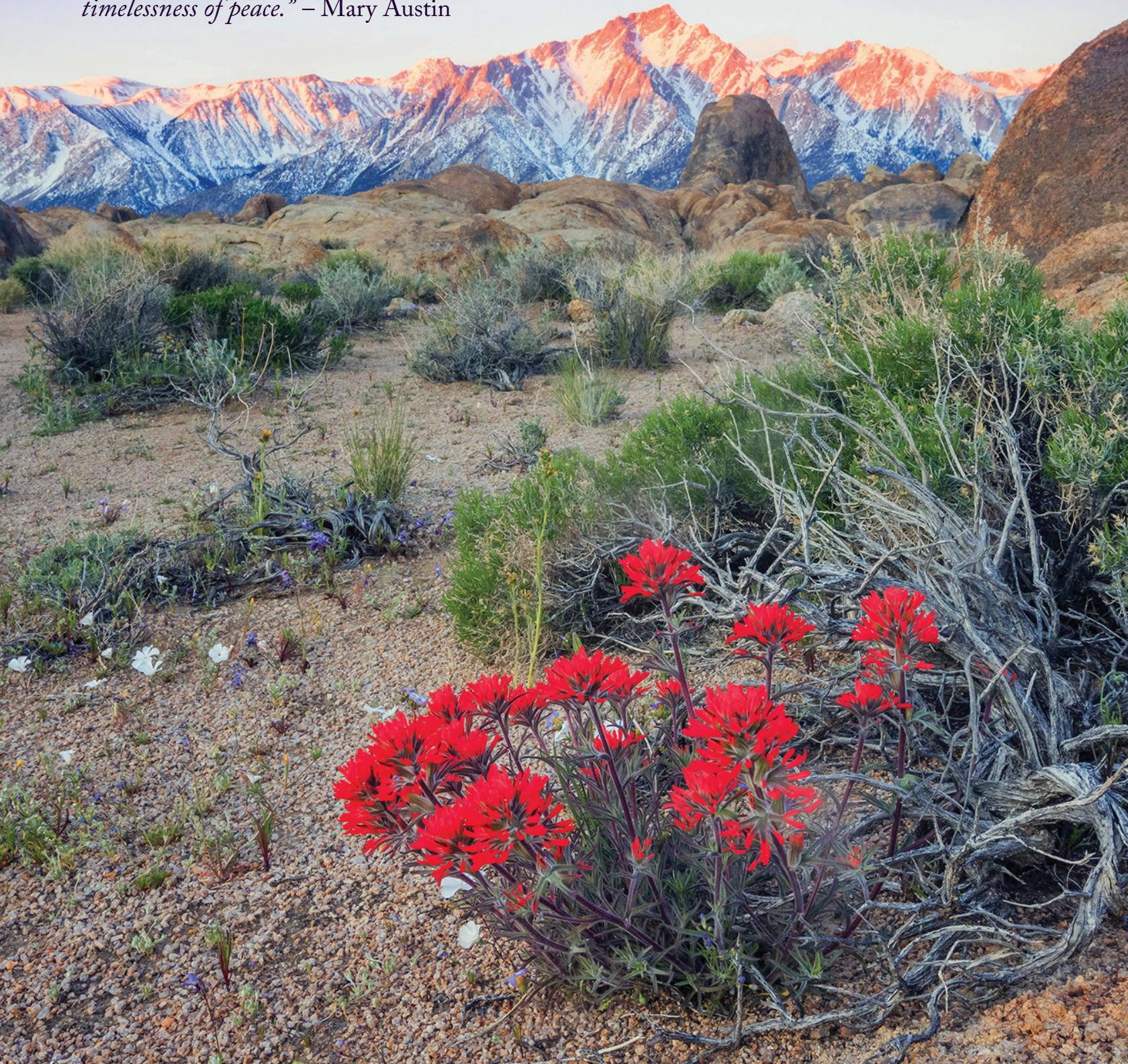
SIERRA SCAPES

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust Newsletter

www.eslt.org

Spring 2020

*"Everywhere peace, impenetrable
timelessness of peace." – Mary Austin*



It's Here Forever

A letter from the Board Chair

Spring has sprung in the Eastern Sierra. Migrating birds fly in formation overhead, and flowers bloom on the hillsides. As we navigate uncertain times together, nature still minds her seasons.

It's hard to stay put when we're used to traveling, fishing, and camping at this time of year. On behalf of our small communities, thank you. By staying home, we're coming together to keep everyone safe.

I hope you find peace in knowing that the Eastern Sierra thrives because of your ongoing support. You're still protecting critical homes and migration pathways for mule deer, pronghorn, and sage-grouse, and you're still educating conservation leaders of the future.

So enjoy these pages of inspiration and news, and remember: by supporting ESLT, you ensure that our wide open mountainscapes and valley views are here forever. You're the reason they'll still be here when it's safe to travel and explore again. I can't wait.

Take care, 

Bob Gardner, Chair, ESLT Board of Directors



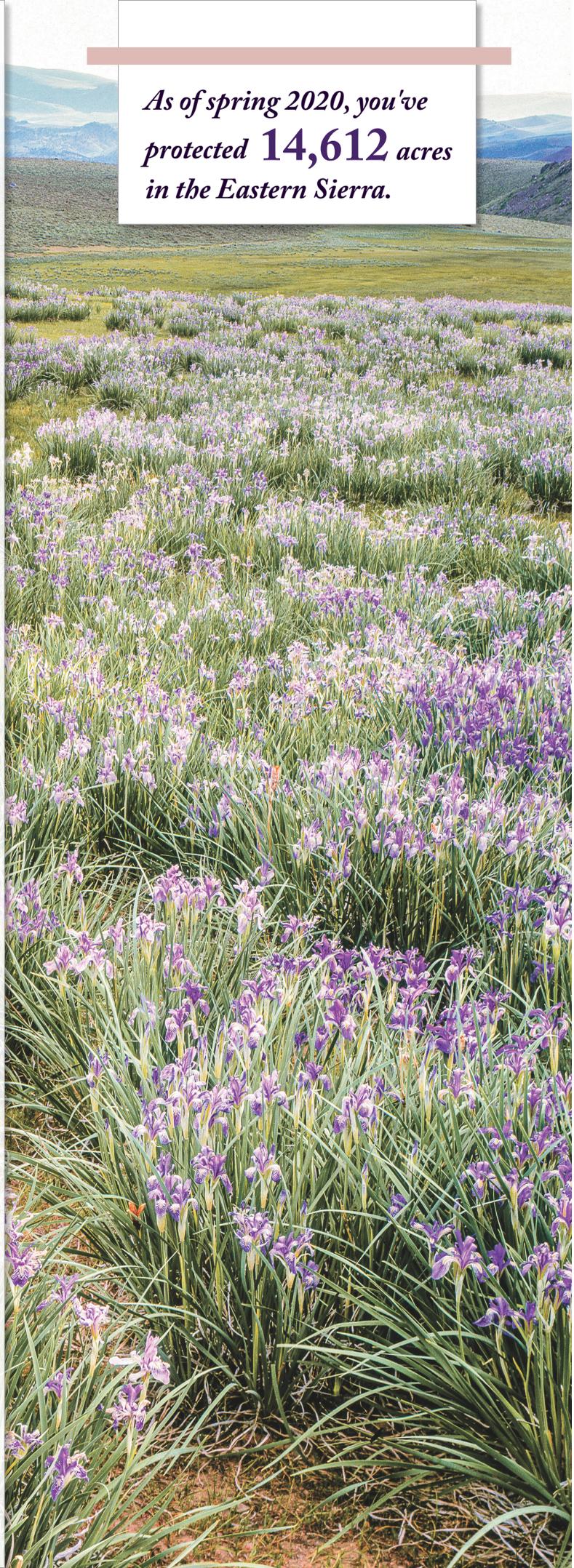
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*As of spring 2020, you've protected **14,612** acres in the Eastern Sierra.*



A Longtime Friendship, A New Partnership

Strengthening our environment and economy is a family focus at Sinnamon Meadows

The success of business owners like Barb Bartlett (pictured below) show that conservation benefits our economy and community in addition to land and wildlife.



Surrounded by Sierra peaks, on some of ESLT's most scenic and historic protected private land, cattle roam through mountain fields.

At Sinnamon Meadows, ranchers have supplied important resources to wildlife and our community for over a century. Today, landowners Rod and Maria Dowers make sure their business continues to benefit land and wildlife as it always has.

On their unique property near Bridgeport Valley, long creeks meander through mountain meadows, aspen groves, and coniferous forest. Its wide open fields provide homes for iconic wildlife like Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep and Bi-State sage-grouse.

The previous owners protected this land with a conservation easement, ensuring that its migration pathways and scenic views remain open forever. The Dowers now take many extra steps to keep their ranch and landscape sustainable and thriving. For example, they plan the movement of their cows

across the land in a way that mimics nature and keeps meadows healthy. In alfalfa fields on another property, they rotate in different plants periodically.

"It's great for the soil, to give it a little change and allow it to adapt to different things," says landowner Rod.

Rod and Maria ensure that native plants and wildlife can thrive at Sinnamon Meadows forever. And they're helping something else thrive too — their local economy.

An Eastside Startup Story

When Barb Bartlett first worked with animals alongside her old friend Nick Dowers, Rod and Maria's son and an expert stockman, she admired the family's approach to low stress animal handling and their care for land.

She had worked with local ranchers in the Eastern Sierra's Owens Valley when she was a student at Bishop High School, and later with ranchers in Eastern Montana. She learned about techniques in ranching that benefit sensitive landscapes like those high mountain meadows. The very techniques, in fact, that she knew the Dowers had been using for decades.

Last year, Barb founded Barbwire Beef, both a wholesale and direct-to-consumer local beef company. And who did she partner with of course? Her longtime friends and mentors Rod, Maria, and Nick Dowers.

"I feel great about our shared vision for the way cattle are raised, and they are excellent land managers," says Barb.

Ranches like Sinnamon Meadows show that sustainable ranching in the Eastern Sierra not only keeps migration pathways open and scenic views intact, but also does so much more. It benefits the health of meadows, boosts our economy, and bolsters a vibrant community by supporting local businesses.



A History of Protecting Peace

People and nature live in harmony in Bridgeport Valley

Imagine driving north along Scenic Highway 395. Past Mono Lake, up and over Conway Summit, the rugged terrain suddenly opens before you. There lies a vast green valley surrounded by snowy Sierra peaks.

Welcome to Bridgeport Valley, one of the largest mountain meadow areas in all of California.

People here have lived in unity with nature for millenia. Its farms and

ranches ensure these meadows remain wide open today, keeping its history alive and its wildlife thriving.

From homes for bobcat and Bi-State sage-grouse to migration pathways for shorebirds and mule deer, Bridgeport Valley provides the best in the West.

We're living in uncertain times today. And they come at a critical juncture in our work, with some big, high-stakes projects in Bridgeport Valley.

That's why the ESLT team is working hard, remotely, alongside dedicated local families. We're determined to protect this special place where history and habitat come together in harmony.

We respect landowner confidentiality and can't share details of the acres in our protection queue. But we can tell you this: your support today can save these meadows forever.

1000 A.D.

The Southern Paiute moved into what is now the southwestern U.S. Their descendents settled in Bridgeport Valley near hot springs.

1859-1865

European settlers began making homes in Bridgeport Valley (then called "Big Meadows"). A ranch and sawmill at Hunewill Ranch and a ranch at present-day Centennial Ranch, among others, were established to supply nearby mines.

Source: Mono County Historical Society

1827



Jedediah Smith became the first person of European descent to cross the Sierra Nevada. He traveled east into the Topaz area 30 miles north of Bridgeport.

1892

One of the earliest hydroelectric power plants in the world was built at what is now ESLT's Green Creek Powerhouse Preserve. It generated the first electricity in Bodie. In 2013, The Sinai Foundation donated this historic place to ESLT, ensuring its protection forever.



“ Sometimes we're lulled into a false sense of security that these ranches, along with all their beauty, history, and wildlife, will be here in the future. ”
- Jeff Hunewill, fifth generation rancher

2005

ESLT helped landowners protect **Big Hot Springs Ranch**. It borders an iconic section of Highway 395 and protects a critical area of the Mono Lake mule deer herd's migration path.

2011

ESLT helped protect part of **historic Centennial Ranch**, whose fields comprised one of Bridgeport's first ranches.

2018-2020



ESLT helped protect **Sceirine Point Ranch**, our largest protected area to date. This scenic, historic working ranch provides a haven for mule deer, waterfowl, sage-grouse, and more.

These land protection projects boost our economy and preserve our history. We're gearing up today alongside landowners, members, and partners to protect more of the Bridgeport Valley forever.

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The sage-grouse is a key indicator species. That means if they're thriving, other sagebrush species likely are too.

An Endorsement of Local, Targeted Conservation

A diverse coalition has rallied to save Bi-State sage-grouse. Its efforts are working.

Our conservation community has something to celebrate!

That's because the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) says it will withdraw a proposed rule to list the Bi-State sage-grouse as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

This is good news for all the Eastside experts and community members who have unified to form the Bi-State Local Area Working Group (LAWG). LAWG is a diverse group of stakeholders comprised of state and local officials, public

and tribal land managers, ranchers, private landowners, scientists, and conservationists including ESLT. Together, we bring the power of local land protection to care for sagebrush.

The Endangered Species Act often helps species recover. In the case of the Bi-State sage-grouse, our local and collaborative approach is working so far without the need for the Act.

In fact, ESLT's and LAWG's efforts are even being heralded nationwide as a model for science-based, local, collaborative conservation.

You've helped permanently safeguard thousands of acres of sagebrush against threats of future development. Thanks to you and the landowners we work with, homes for wildlife are being protected forever.

Along with Bi-State sage-grouse, our mule deer, pronghorn, songbirds, lizards, rabbits and more also depend on sagebrush for homes and food.

This outcome is an endorsement; it says if we continue to work together, we'll continue to help iconic species like the Bi-State sage-grouse thrive.



Staying Healthy and Hopeful

A letter from the Executive Director

Dear ESLT family and friends,

Our world feels different every day. It seems just as I start to get equilibrium, the ground moves again. Like you, I'm trying to find center so I can be present for my loved ones and work. And your support grounds me — thanks to you, ESLT's dedicated team is still working, remotely, to move important projects toward completion.

When I visited Bishop for the first time since California's stay-at-home guidelines were put in place, it was to sign documents for one of our land projects at our local title and escrow company. I was inspired and saddened by the empty sidewalks and the handwritten signs on windows of closed businesses saying, "Be Strong, Bishop!"

Concerns for my community hit me hard, but it helped to press forward. With gloves, masks, and safe physical distancing, the escrow office staff and I notarized documents on the hood of my car. We smiled through our masks and asked each other how we were doing. We connected, and I returned home feeling more hopeful.

Let's keep connecting. It's more important now than ever to remember that we're a community with shared values and goals. Together, we're saving special places forever — places where we can feel peace, and find center.



Please reach out anytime! Very gratefully,

Kay Ogden

Kay Ogden, Executive Director • kay@eslt.org



ESLT Online: Your New Virtual Happy Place

Join the Buzz! To keep everyone safe, we're replacing our gardening workshops, festivals, and events with new, fun virtual versions. You can follow along from anywhere! Tune in to ESLT.org to connect with our staff and community — it's what everyone is buzzing about.

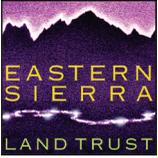
Virtual "Victory Garden" Workshop Series. Are you ready to relish that hands-on connection with spring, while growing your dream garden? Join us along with local chapters of California Native Plant Society, Master Gardeners, and Audubon Society for our virtual pollinator garden workshops! We'll learn about native plants, vegetables, and the key to a great garden: pollinators.

The "Happy Place" ESLT Book Club. As we practice physical distancing, we can still collect in a powerful place — the magical landscape of literature. Join our online community as we indulge in impactful tales from the natural world. The first book we'll read is Robin Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

Learn more about these virtual events and others at ESLT.org/events.

You can also reach out to marie@eslt.org to sign up for our Eastside Pollinator Garden Project. We'll help get your garden going, remotely!





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