



the official newsletter of the eastern sierra land trust

fall/winter 2003

THE MISSION OF THE EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST IS TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE VITAL LANDS IN THE EASTERN SIERRA FOR THEIR SCENIC, RECREATIONAL, AGRICULTURAL, HISTORICAL, BOTANIC, AND WILDLIFE VALUES.

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President's Message

As 2003 draws to a close, the Eastern Sierra Land Trust has much to look back on and much to anticipate in 2004. You will find this issue of SierraScapes packed with exciting news and dramatic developments for our land trust.

- In the article below, "Expanding ESLT's Organizational Capacity" you will read about the \$100,000 grant we have received and the exciting steps we are taking as a result.
- Later you will learn of an unusual project we have worked on with Dempsey Construction Corporation and the Town of Mammoth Lakes involving expansion of the Snowcreek Golf Course.
- We have welcomed some new faces to our organization while others have assumed different support roles in the ESLT. We highlight these in "News from the ESLT."
- For ESLT members there is an invitation to celebrate the Winter Solstice with us by enjoying a concert from celtic music ensemble Queen Mab. Interested?

And there is much more. But most important in my comments this month is my desire to express my sincere thanks to you for your interest in and support of our work. Without you, none of this would be happening. From the Board and staff of the ESLT our wishes come your way for a grand holiday season and a prosperous new year.

—Tony Taylor, *ESLT President*

Expanding ESLT's Organizational Capacity

As reported in earlier issues of *SierraScapes*, the Eastern Sierra Land Trust has achieved much through the work of our committed corps of volunteers. At the same time we have noted that to effectively respond to the growing demand for our services here on the Eastside, we must grow the ESLT beyond an all-volunteer organization. Well, someone else has noticed our situation and has responded to our need. We are excited to announce that we have been awarded a two-year "challenge" grant of \$100,000—\$50,000 per year—from the Preserving Wild California program of the Resources Legacy Fund Foundation in Sacramento. This grant represents the funding base for the professional staff we desperately require.

With this great news in hand, it is worthwhile to take a quick look at where we are at this point in our organization's life and then to chart our course for the year ahead.

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scientific name for the willow genus, *Salix*, is thought to come from Gaelic words meaning “near water.” Interested observers will have noticed that willows always occur in moist or wet soil and so are the main component of what is referred to as “riparian habitat.” The Eastern Sierra Land Trust recognizes the importance of riparian habitat in our high desert country and is working through our Wildlife and Plant Communities Program to preserve these critical areas.

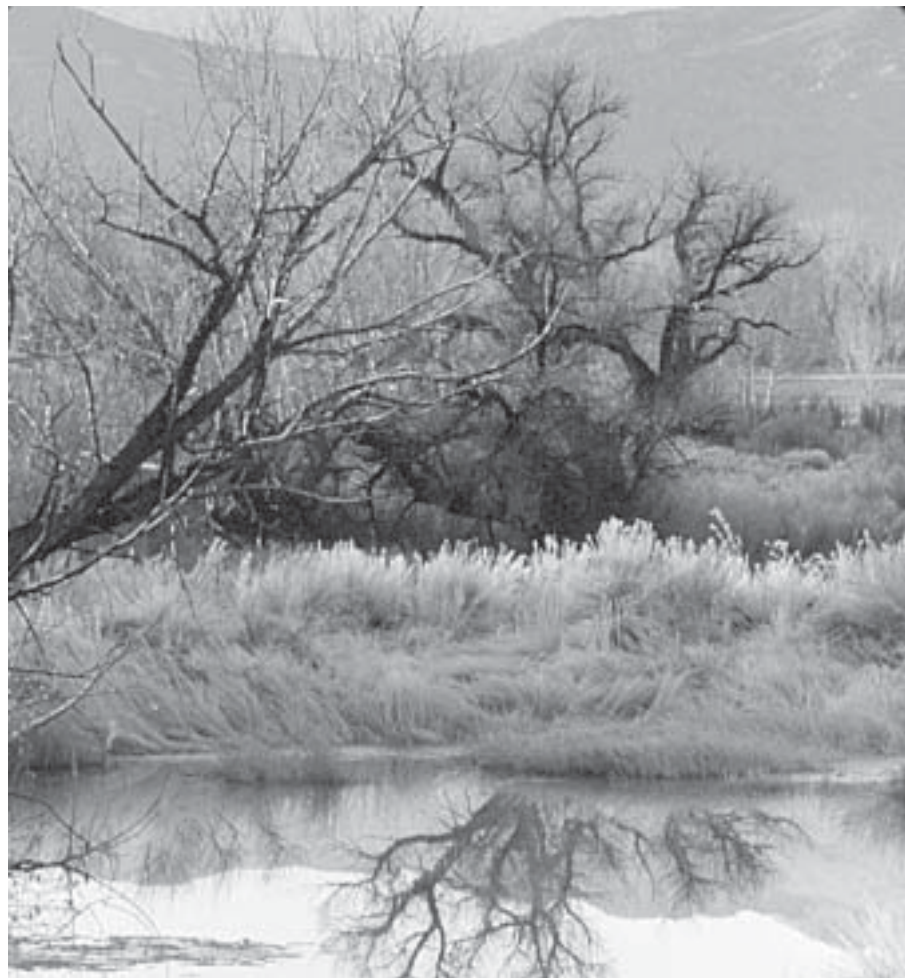
Male and female flowers are produced on separate plants in

willows. The female catkins that carry the seeds are fairly inconspicuous while the pollen-bearing male catkins are more showy, forming the famous silky pussy willows that herald spring. The willows are pollinated by bees and other insects and the short-lived seed ripens quickly. Dispersed by the wind, the seed is only viable for a day or two so it must land on moist soil if it is to germinate. Our most common willow, *Salix exigua* or the coyote willow, is the most adaptable of all willows. This hardy species can tolerate the driest soils along with the hottest temperatures in the lower

Willows ~ Consider the Shrubby Thicket

A willow thicket could be a crowded place if all the creatures who lived there showed up at one time. There might be ruby-crowned kinglets gleaning insects from the upper branches while a long-eared owl sits on eggs deep inside the thicket. A doe with a fawn might spend the hottest part of the day curled up on a grassy bed inside this shrubby thicket as mourning cloak butterflies lay their eggs on the green willow shoots. Completing the menagerie, among the buzzing of countless insects, could be our largest wild mammal, a black bear looking for a safe and sheltered place to nap.

Willows are the work horses of the native plant world, providing something for everyone. The eastern Sierra is blessed with many different species, ranging from the 3-inch tall *Salix arctica* in the high Sierra to the 30-foot tall *Salix goodingii* tree on the floor of the Owens Valley. The



STEPHEN INGRAM PHOTOS

*Above: Arroyo willow, Salix laengata, in Round Valley.
Top left: Flowering narrow-leaved willow, Salix exigua, Swall Meadows.*

elevations of the Eastern Sierra and is known for its very narrow leaves and spreading habit. Coyote willow is also renowned for its straight, flexible shoots which Native Americans used for baskets and other items.

Shrubby thickets like willows provide critical shelter for migrating and nesting birds. Recent interesting research by the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) in the eastern Sierra indicates that willows are the preferred locations for many nesting birds. Sacha Heath of PRBO stated that, "Of the 746 nests we found this year for riparian breeding songbirds, 41% of them were placed in willows. These are for sites in the Mono Basin, Rock Creek and at North Lake." The dense branching patterns of willows

provide great nesting and resting places for our well-traveled migrating songbirds.

Several butterfly species in the Eastern Sierra lay their eggs specifically on willow shoots. The resulting hungry larvae hatch to find succulent leafy greens to devour or perhaps feed only on willow flowers. The Mourning Cloak butterfly, with its wings colored dark brown bordered by yellow, is an amazing species that actually overwinters as an adult, seeking shelter in willows and other shrubs. The Lorquin's Admiral is another common and beautiful butterfly of the eastern Sierra that depends on willows for larval food. This butterfly is described in *California Butterflies*, by John S. Garth and

J.W. Tilden, as "a showy insect, with velvety black ground color, pure white band, and brick red wing tips."

Willows are easy to grow in moist or wet sites. If you have a creek or a ditch or a damp low spot in your yard, you could have a shrubby thicket! Since more than 95 percent of the riparian habitat in the western United States has already been destroyed or degraded, according to Robert Askins, a biologist at Connecticut College and the author of *Restoring North America's Birds*, every bit of added habitat can benefit migrating birds and other wildlife. Willows grow easily from 10-inch pencil-thick cuttings stuck halfway into moist, cultivated soil. Give them room to grow, stand back, and enjoy!

ESLT's organizational capacity, continued from first page

- We are thrilled with the financial support of nearly 300 members of our organization. Thank you!
- We are achieving success in our work of preserving vital lands and expect to complete two conservation easement projects in the immediate future.
- Our work is powered by the energy of several dozen volunteers: our Board of Directors, our Advisors, and committee and project workers donate hundreds of hours each month.
- We took our first step in building a professional staff with the October hiring of Mark Schlenz as our half-time Director of Outreach and Development.

So where does the ESLT go from here? How do we increase our capacity to respond to the needs of private and public property owners here on the Eastside?

First, we need to increase the number of active volunteers that work on our behalf. We will do this with an eye to building our expertise and skills in areas that include legal and tax issues, estate planning and planned giving, real estate, farming and ranching, and land planning to mention a few.

Secondly, we will move aggressively toward hiring a fulltime Executive Director for the Eastern Sierra Land Trust. While our current and growing group of committed volunteers will remain the heart of our efforts, we must have a top-quality professional executive to maximize our efforts and insure our success.

An important, related matter as we establish a professional staff will be the need for an ESLT office. We are currently looking at creative and economical ways to address this requirement.

To support our expanding organization, we will need to increase our

financial resources. The "challenge" grant mentioned above requires that we secure substantial, additional funding—approximately \$2 for each dollar of grant funding. Mark Schlenz and our Development Committee have begun planning for this effort. In addition to expanding our membership support, this committee will be running a Major Gifts Campaign and seeking additional grant funding.

Finally, we must stay focused on the fact that all the efforts described above mean nothing unless we succeed in our land protection and preservation work as described in our mission statement. With additional volunteer and professional resources, we expect to achieve increasing numbers of successful projects in the year ahead.

We look forward to reporting our achievements in all these areas in future communications, and we thank you for your interest and support of the Eastern Sierra Land Trust.

Winter Tales Solstice Concert with Queen Mab

Throughout history people the world over have gathered together on the night of the winter solstice to share tales of renewal and to pass the dark hours with story and song. This December 21, you can share a cheerful fire, warm drink, dessert refreshments, and music with Queen Mab and fellow ESLT members and friends on the longest night of the year. Come celebrate our mutual accomplishments, our renewed commitments to our community, and our connection to the natural cycles of the world as we enter a new solar calendar together.

Queen Mab—an accomplished Celtic music ensemble featuring harp, violin, and other traditional instruments—has performed Winter Tales concerts on the night of the winter solstice to devoted audiences for the last thirteen years at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History as a benefit event for environmental education programs. This year, having recently relocated to our area, the Queen will dedicate her annual performance to recognize and appreciate Eastern Sierra Land Trust members and friends whose generous contributions during our initial development have built such a firm foundation for future conservation work.

Please let us share our appreciation for your membership and support, our aspirations for the coming season, and the joy of your company on this



very special evening. Our program begins at 7:00 P.M. on Sunday, December 21 at 4825 Alison Lane in Paradise Estates. Dessert refreshments will be graciously donated by Chef Ian of Skadi restaurant. Please make your reservations by phoning the ESLT at our new phone number: (760) 873-4554!

NEWS from the ESLT

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust bids an appreciative farewell to our very first staffer. ESLT Membership Coordinator **Lynnette Royce** built a lasting foundation for our organization. Lynnette maintained the database for our fledgling membership, coordinated membership mailings and correspondence, and helped produce *SierraScapes*. Lynnette's considerable competence made important contributions to the initial growth and stability of our young land trust. We look forward to her continued participation with ESLT as a committed volunteer as we enter our next stages of organizational development.

Our new Director of Outreach and Development, **Dr. Mark Schlenz**, brings decades of experience as an environmental writer, editor, and educator to ESLT's first half-time staff position. A recently retired lecturer in

Environmental Studies from the University of California, Mark says, "Now I have the fortunate opportunity to actually do the important work I prepared my students to do." The Director of Outreach and Development must generate funding to expand the Eastern Sierra Land Trust's organizational capacity and programs. In coming years, annual operating costs will grow in proportion to ESLT's abilities to meet mounting threats to healthy landscapes, habitats, and traditional economies in the Eastern Sierra. As our dedicated fund-raiser, Mark states that "ESLT's fiscal objectives represent material resources required for concrete land protection goals." With just a hint of irony, he adds, "My commitment to securing these very real resources is anything but academic!"

In October, the ESLT Board lost one member, but gained another. **Craig Roecker** had served on our Board for nearly two years, contributed a thoughtful perspective to our meetings, and worked with our Mono Basin Program. Craig has become increasingly busy and resigned from the board to pursue new professional challenges in planning consultation. Thank you and good luck, Craig.

Alisa Elsworth joined the Board in October. Alisa works as Inyo County Wildlife Biologist for the Department of Fish and Game, and has been volunteering her time and expertise working on easement projects in our Wildlife and Plant Communities Program. Before moving to Bishop with her husband, Todd, two and a half years ago Alisa worked with the Sierra Foothill Conservancy in Prather. Welcome, Alisa!

SnowCreek Covenant

Participation in the development of a golf course in Mammoth Lakes would seem an unlikely project for the ESLT to be involved in, but recently just such an opportunity presented itself to our organization. Local developer Dempsey Construction Company has long desired to expand its existing 9-hole Snowcreek Golf Course to a full 18 holes. Over the years several proposals have been made as to how the required land could be acquired by the Dempsey Company. Each time the proposal was opposed by various individuals and groups.

Recently a plan has been worked out between Dempsey and the Forest Service. This plan involves the developer acquiring nearly 2,000 acres of land in the Sierra Nevada region that the Forest Service would like to have. These parcels will now be traded to the Forest Service for the 95 acres adjacent to the existing golf course where the course expansion will take place.

As this arrangement was coming together, the local Range of Light Chapter of the Sierra Club raised concerns that the land be used only for a golf course and related structures and not be developed with condominiums, hotels, etc. To satisfy this concern Dempsey and the Town of Mammoth Lakes proposed a Covenant that would restrict the future use of the land to the recreational and cultural activities that all parties agreed with.

Local Sierra Club members again expressed concern that the terms of the Covenant could be modified in the future at the request of Dempsey

(or any future owner of the property) and with the agreement of the Mammoth Town Council. To address this concern, the three parties requested that the ESLT act as a third party to the Covenant with the right of approval over any material modification or ultimate termination of the agreement.

Tony Taylor, ESLT President, worked hard along with other Board members, Dempsey, and the involved attorneys to come up with an acceptable agreement. Speaking of the agreement and the ESLT's role Taylor said, "This agreement is consistent with our interest in protecting and enhancing Eastern Sierra lands for the many productive uses we support. The Eastern Sierra Land Trust Board was pleased to be able to play a role in resolving the differences of opinion and allowing the Snow-creek Golf Course expansion to proceed."

Land Trust Alliance Rally

Seven ESLT Board Members, volunteers, and staff attended four days of instructional seminars, inspirational programs, and professional exchange with over 1,600 land trust colleagues from around the nation and the world at the 2003 Land Trust Alliance Rally in Sacramento, California. From October 16 through 19, these seven gathered invaluable perspective on property and tax law, conservation easements, fiscal stewardship responsibilities, resource management and restoration, fundraising, and ethics as they relate directly to ongoing conservation efforts of nearly 1300 land trusts operating in the United States today. Information, inspiration, and contacts gathered at the 2003 LTA Rally will greatly strengthen our efforts to expand ESLT's organizational capacity and operational successes in the coming year.



ESLT board members, volunteers, and staff at the October Land Trust Alliance Rally in Sacramento, from left: Tony Taylor, Stephen Ingram, Karen Farrell-Ingram, Rick Kattelmann, Mark Schlenz, Randy Keller, and Tim Sanford.



STEPHEN INGRAM PHOTO

ESLT's Working Landscapes Program

Ranches and farms of the Eastern Sierra represent a historic chapter of the settlement of the Eastern Sierra and are still a vital part of our economy and rural character. The Eastern Sierra Land Trust's Working Landscapes Program helps ranchers and farmers to sustain financially viable agricultural operations on their land and helps to preserve those lands for agriculture in the future. Basically, the program works by assisting ranchers and farmers to permanently extinguish future development rights to their land through donation or purchase of conservation easements. This benefits our community by ensuring that the protected lands will be available for agriculture. A wise rancher once told us that, for agricultural lands, housing developments are

the "terminal crop." By ensuring that these large ranches or farms remain as integral units without housing or commercial developments on them, we ensure that the land will always be available for agriculture.

A conservation easement changes only a portion of a landowner's property rights and may be tailored to achieve the goals of the individual landowner. Easement terms are negotiated between the land trust and the landowner, who remains the owner of the land, with the ability to use it as he or she sees fit and to do what is necessary to operate a viable agricultural enterprise. The property may be sold or divided and need not be open to the public. The Eastern Sierra Land Trust remains involved to monitor and enforce the negotiated terms of the easement through annual tours of the property.

There are financial benefits to the landowner who creates a conservation easement on a farm or ranch. There are state and federal agencies that will provide grants to the Eastern Sierra Land Trust to purchase easements on agricultural lands. A recent conservation easement on a large ranch in Mono County was appraised at 45% of the total property value. The easement will protect the property from subdivision and development forever, and provide the owner with funds to help maintain the land in agriculture. Furthermore, there may be income and inheritance tax benefits resulting from creating a conservation easement.

We would be pleased to discuss this program with any landowner or group of landowners that might be interested in protecting their agricultural lands.

Estate Planning: Bequests

Cash gifts are generally the most direct means of making donations to one's favorite organizations. However, to obtain a greater tax benefit people may consider donating stock or mutual funds directly or through a conduit second account such as a charitable remainder trust. Charitable remainder trusts were discussed in the last newsletter.

Another popular and easy method of expressing one's philanthropic wishes is through wills and bequests. Besides the tax benefits of foregoing or drastically lowering inheritance taxes, a bequest of funds to the Eastern Sierra Land Trust enables you to clearly express your wishes to family and friends while allowing for full use of your asset now. Your bequesting wishes are fully revocable, allowing for flexibility in removing bequests altogether, changing recipient organizations, or changing bequest amounts. While making sure your personal and family obligations are first met, the following steps should be taken:

- Contact your attorney for advice about establishing or amending your will to include the bequest.
- Name the Eastern Sierra Land Trust as the recipient of your bequest.
- Indicate the dollar value or the total percentage of your estate for your gift, as well as specifying assets or real estate to be distributed to the Eastern Sierra Land Trust.
- Consult with your tax and financial advisors.

-Brian Stange, *ESLT Treasurer*

Annual Report

July 1, 2002 through June 30, 2003

Each year, the Eastern Sierra Land Trust, like other non-profit corporations, must prepare an annual report of its finances. The annual report was formally presented and approved at the ESLT's annual meeting on October 21, 2003. Membership dues and contributions made up 80 percent of ESLT's income last year. We appreciate all your support.

ASSETS AND LIABILITIES AS OF JUNE 30, 2003

ASSETS	Cash	\$32,753
	Receivables	10,000
	Total	42,753

LIABILITIES	None	0
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REVENUE		
	Dues and Contributions	24,768
	Grants and Gifts	970
	Restricted (Hall Natural Area)	5,000
	Other	583
	Total	31,321

EXPENSES		
	Personnel (salary, taxes, & insurance)	4,545
	Professional Services (legal & appraisal)	5,779
	Printing	6,400
	Insurance	1,250
	Operating Expenses	4,888
	Project Expenses	4,792
	Total	27,654

CHANGE IN ASSETS DURING FISCAL YEAR		
	Increase in cash	\$ 3,667

-Rick Kattleman, *ESLT Vice President*



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Working to Preserve Rural Landscapes

MARK YOUR CALENDAR



December 21, 2003
Winter Solstice Event
7:00 P.M.

Winter Tales Concert & Membership Celebration

For Reservations, call (760) 873-4554

UPDATE YOUR PHONEBOOK

(760) 873-4554

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust has a new official phone number and voice mail service. Use it to make your reservations for the Winter Tales Concert, or to contact us throughout the year.



~ GIFT LIST IDEA ~

Let the Eastern Sierra Land Trust help with your holiday shopping again this year. An ESLT gift membership is a great way to share the Sierra for the season.

Please send a gift membership to:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

with the following message:

(use the membership form and envelope enclosed)