



SIERRASCAPES

the newsletter of the eastern sierra land trust

Spring 2005

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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A Fine Balance—Community Growth and Vitality with Conservation

We here at the Eastern Sierra Land Trust believe that the long-term health of our region depends on maintaining a fine balance. It is important to protect vital lands for their scenic, recreational, historical, agricultural, botanical, and wildlife values. Equally important is the need for land to supply the housing and economic growth necessary for our communities to remain vibrant and productive.

In the last few months our work has reached a certain level of urgency as we have witnessed the sale and potential development of lands that would significantly impact this fine balance. These lands are critical to certain wildlife, some offering migration corridors for mule deer and springs and seeps for many users. Most would be extremely expensive and difficult to develop—and to provide essential services for—as they lie miles from established communities. Some of this development would even decrease economic productivity in our region.

Yet we are encouraged by new efforts throughout the Eastern Sierra that seem to promote more thoughtful growth. The Land Tenure program has begun to look at ways to utilize land near com-

munities for housing and economic development. The Mono Watershed program is bringing residents together across Mono County to discuss the vital importance of maintaining healthy watersheds.

These opportunities are mounting from private landowners who wish to strike the fine balance and conserve unique lands while at the same time need to realize some economic benefit. We at the ESLT have the conservation tools to assist these conscientious landowners but lack the financial resources to quickly act on these projects. Establishing an Opportunity Fund has now become vital to our ability to proceed with these projects and we will need your support more now than ever. Having an Opportunity Fund will make the difference between losing these lands to development forever—or conserving them now for future generations.

We will continue to be active participants in meaningful work that strives to protect our natural wonders and builds a stronger economy. This is work that can leave a true legacy.

—Julie Bear, *Executive Director*

The Ecological Value of Springs and Seeps of the Eastern Sierra

Great Basin springs are known to harbor a variety of endemic species including fish (many of which have become extinct or threatened), spring snails, and interesting insect life. Desert springs represent a limited and critical habitat resource often supporting not only diverse aquatic life, but sustaining water supplies to terrestrial wildlife. The eastern Sierra Nevada drains internally to the Great Basin—no water reaches the sea. Besides streams, there are many aquatic environments that are localized to spring and seep water sources. Unlike streams, these habitats are supported by groundwater rather than surface flow and so are isolated, seldom connect to other water bodies, and have mineralized water chemistry.

Springs are often distinct from streams in that flow and temperature are more constant over an annual cycle and have a more integral connection with groundwater. Though usually less diverse than stream ecosystems, the biological communities of springs more frequently harbor isolated and endemic species and serve as habitat refuges during periods of dry climate. The hydrogeological setting of springs is also thought to be an important factor in determining the movements and types of inhabiting fauna. Cavern-forming karst and limestone

formations may be particularly distinctive in providing subterranean habitat for the development of troglobitic forms such as blind amphipods (small shrimp-like crustaceans). Hot springs also have highly specialized and sensitive invertebrate inhabitants adapted for survival in high temperatures.

Human modifications of spring environments in many areas have been extensive and include diversions, excavations, damming, livestock use, stocking with non-native fish and invertebrates, and alterations to create duck ponds. Studies of the biology of Great Basin springs have typically been restricted to areas where concerns have become critical (e. g. Devils Hole in Death Valley National Park), and the life of many springs and seeps have been destroyed or are unknown.

Conservation of intact spring and seep habitats is of critical importance to maintaining the biological diversity of aquatic environments of the Eastern Sierra and Great Basin. The distinctive life forms that depend upon and are restricted to these types of waters live within an ever-lessening



Stephen Ingram

A Cardinal meadowhawk, Sympetrum illotum, perches on a branch at Warm Springs in the Owens Valley.

flow of water on the land. Development of land, destruction of fragile riparian areas that protect springs, and over-use by hot spring bathers have damaged and degraded many of these small and vulnerable habitats. Though their visibility is low, their ecological value is high.

Land conservation programs should place a high priority on protecting the areas where these bright waters emerge. In Spanish, springs are called *ojos* or eyes—weeping out upon the world.

David B. Herbst, Ph.D., is a research biologist on the staff of Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory (SNARL).

ESLT's Wildlife Migration Seminar

Close to one hundred people packed a classroom in Bishop recently to learn about the deer, mountain lions, and other wildlife that migrate through the Eastern Sierra. Sponsored by the Eastern Sierra Land Trust, this wildlife migration seminar brought together a diverse group of speakers who focus on issues relating to the migration corridors in our region.

Tim Taylor, California Department of Fish & Game (DFG) Mono County Biologist, described the arduous trek taken by the Round Valley mule deer herd—nearly 3,000 animals—to their high Sierra summer range from Round Valley and back again each year. Dr. Becky Pierce, DFG Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Recovery Program biologist, has studied the resident mountain lions of the Round Valley area for many years, and she illustrated her presentation with incredible photos and video of these beautiful big cats.

Tom Dayak and Craig Olafson, wildlife biologists with Caltrans, related their efforts to make Highway 395 more wildlife friendly. They are at work on the initial stages of a wildlife underpass to be installed near Sonora Junction. Julie Bear, ESLT Executive Director, ended the first half of the evening with a presentation on the ESLT's projects that protect

the viability of our local migration corridors.

The second portion of the event featured discussion relating to living with wildlife. Larry Johnston, Senior Planner for Mono County, discussed development issues in Mono County. Karen Ferrell-Ingram, native plant propagator for the California Native Plant Society, talked about creating a habitat garden. [Note: the next issue of *SierraScapes* will feature an article on starting your own wildlife habitat garden.] Denyse Racine, DFG Habitat Conservation Supervisor, spoke on the importance of not feeding wildlife.

The high level of energy and interest displayed at this seminar shows us once again that maintaining healthy wildlife populations is a very important goal for the people of the Eastern Sierra. It is also clear that migration of large mammals is a dwindling phenomenon in our crowded world as critical corridors become fragmented and lost. The Eastern Sierra Land Trust continues to work on projects that protect migration corridors and benefit the deer, mountain lions, and all wildlife that need open spaces to survive.



Stephen Ingram

Please Don't Feed the Wild Animals

Deer, other mammals, birds and insects all rely on native plants for food and cover—minimize clearing of native vegetation beyond the fire-safe distance from your house. Avoid use of pesticides and herbicides in your garden or on native vegetation. Minimize outdoor lighting to preserve the natural night sky. Keep pets from chasing deer or harassing other wildlife; this will cause stress and can lead to injury. Avoid feeding deer, which can draw predators to their habitual feeding sites. Replant cleared areas with native plants. The mule deer's favored food is Antelope bitterbrush, *Purshia tridentata*, available at the California Native Plant Society's annual plant sale.

Congressional Committee Proposes Slashing Conservation Incentives

On January 27, 2005, a report by the Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation shocked the land trust community by proposing major decreases in the federal tax incentives for conservation easements and bargain sales. The proposal, if adopted, would dramatically curtail the work of land trusts in the United States. The current tax incentives, in place for more than 25 years, have led to voluntary conservation of more than 34 million acres of working agricultural lands, working forests, wildlife habitats, historic landscapes, and park lands.

Currently, landowners who care about conservation and are willing to protect important resources on their property have several options:

- Landowners can donate a conservation easement, which protects these resources forever, but allows families to continue to live on and farm the land—and to pass the property on to their heirs. Now, they receive a tax deduction for the value of the development rights they give up.

The Joint Committee proposes:

(1) forbidding any deduction for donating an easement if the landowner continues to live on the land; and

(2) in all other cases, allowing the donor to deduct only one third the value of their donation. This would effectively eliminate

the tax incentives for donations of conservation easements.

- Landowners can also choose to donate their land, or sell it for less than its value—a “bargain sale.” Landowners who do so qualify for a tax deduction.

The Joint Committee would slash this incentive by limiting deductions to the price the landowner originally paid for the property—their “basis.” This would make it extremely difficult for farmers, ranchers, and other residents who have owned their lands for decades to be able to afford to donate.

Today, as development and sprawl threaten much of what makes our communities livable—clean air and water, open space, parks, and wildlife habitat—private landowners and non-profit land trusts have a critical role to play in conservation. With state and federal budget deficits limiting government purchase of conservation lands, one of the best ways to conserve America’s natural legacy is through incentives to private landowners. This approach is working because it encourages voluntary charitable gifts, respects private property rights, and keeps land on the tax rolls.

Working with many others in the U. S. land trust community, the Eastern Sierra Land Trust is engaged in a vigorous response to this draconian proposal. But to succeed, we need the help of every

friend and member. You can find out more about this critical matter and what you can do to assist us by reviewing the Action Alert at our website:

www.easternsierralandtrust.org

And please contact us if you have questions or suggestions.

P

The ESLT continues to represent the eastside in formation of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

During final drafting stages of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy legislation, ESLT Board President Tony Taylor made critical recommendations to the conservancy working group of the Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council (SCLTC). These recommendations were eventually adopted by state legislators and resulted in important adjustments to the conservancy’s eastern boundaries in Inyo, Mono, and Alpine Counties. With these adjustments, the new conservancy now includes all of the Owens Valley and the western slopes of the White Mountains.

The ESLT will continue to influence the conservancy’s formation through Tony’s participation on the SCLTC committee working to identify local representatives to the conservancy’s board.

A Guide to the Alphabet Soup of the Land Trust World

One of our members recently asked the ESLT if we should partner with the SBC, SCLTC, and CCLT in seeking project funds from the SCGP, SNC, and WCB. We replied that partnerships are a common way of pursuing land conservation and our land trust anticipates many such partnerships. We also saw a need to describe some of the abbreviations of the many organizations, agencies, and programs that the Eastern Sierra Land Trust is involved with. The following is a list of a few of those abbreviations:

A L C

AMERICAN LAND CONSERVANCY

A land trust operating in the western states that has participated in many large-scale land conservation deals, including a 6,800-acre agricultural conservation easement in the Bridgeport Valley.

A L I M A R

ANDREA LAWRENCE INSTITUTE FOR MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS

An organization dedicated to integrating natural and economic values in the Eastern Sierra by enhancing land-use planning and public education about natural resource issues.

D F G

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

State agency responsible for fisheries, wildlife, and natural habitat. The Department owns important habitat lands in Swall Meadows and northern Mono County.

C C L T

CALIFORNIA COUNCIL OF LAND TRUSTS

A brand new umbrella group of land trusts within California that will build

capacity of member land trusts and support the work of land trusts at the State Capitol.

E S L T

EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST

Our favorite land trust, dedicated to protecting and enhancing vital lands in the Eastern Sierra for their scenic, recreational, agricultural, historical, botanic, and wildlife values.

I R S

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

Federal tax policy influences almost every land conservation arrangement.

L A D W P

LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF WATER AND POWER

An agency of the City of Los Angeles that has maintained 320,000 acres of open space in Inyo and Mono Counties for more than 90 years. A conservation easement on most of the LADWP land could ensure that arrangement continues.

L T A

LAND TRUST ALLIANCE

Umbrella group of land trusts throughout the United States that provides training resources to member land trusts and lobbies Congress on behalf of the land trust movement.

S B C

SIERRA BUSINESS COUNCIL

An organization composed largely of businesses within the Sierra Nevada that supports the concept that environmental sustainability contributes to economic wealth. The Council provides educational resources and expertise to businesses, agencies, and conservation groups to find creative solutions to local environmental issues and was very helpful to the ESLT in its formative stages.

S C G P

SIERRA CASCADE GRANT PROGRAM

A California program that disperses state bond funds to local agencies and

organizations for projects involving parks, trails, and stream conservation within the Sierra Nevada. The program is threatened with loss of funding in the current state budget.

S C L T C

SIERRA CASCADE LAND TRUST COUNCIL

An umbrella group of nearly twenty land trusts throughout the Sierra Nevada that provides logistical and training assistance to its member land trusts. The members of the Council were of tremendous help to the ESLT as we were starting out.

S N A

SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

An umbrella group of environmental organizations throughout the Sierra Nevada that seeks to improve the capacity of its member groups.

S N C

SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY

A newly formed California agency that will administer state funding for land conservation within the Sierra Nevada.

T N C

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

The nation's largest land conservation organization that directly acquires property and conservation easements.

T P L

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

A national land conservation organization that focuses on acquiring land to be conveyed into the public domain. The organization also assists local land trusts with expertise, training, and loans.

W C B

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION BOARD

An independent board of California's government that administers funding for the protection and restoration of wildlife habitat and land and waters suitable for recreation.

LADWP Lands Update

Many of you who have been following the LADWP proposal might be wondering what is happening and why not much is being said about it lately. Rest assured, we at the Eastern Sierra Land Trust are still working with proponents from around the state and within the region to establish protection from development on *most* of the lands owned by LADWP in the Eastern Sierra.

I stress the word *most* because we do believe some development for housing and other economic interests is desirable and needed in some of our communities. Much of the land adjacent to our towns is owned by the LADWP so there is logic in exempting some of those lands from this conservation plan. With the cooperation of LADWP and other public land agencies, well-planned development can take place that would enhance our communities' economic health while still protecting our wondrous natural surroundings.

As the mayoral campaign season in Los Angeles started heating up in January 2005, this project was set aside by the Mayor's office and other interested City Council members. In a recent article which appeared in the Sunday, April 17th edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, a Los Angeles official stated that she "...is not expecting movement on major policy matters between now and election day." With the final general election slated to occur in May, we are planning on elevating

this proposal back onto the policymakers' table in early summer.

This pause from political activity has given us time to review the issues and redirect our energies towards a more strategic and inclusive process. We continue to communicate and plan with the Watershed Open Space Planning

Group here on the east side, and as stated many times, this momentous project will take time to complete and deserves thoughtful consideration each step of the way. Your continued interest in—and support of—this incredible opportunity provides the financial and emotional foundation of our efforts, and we can't thank you enough.



Sierra Nevada License Plate

California Residents—Show your support for the Sierra Nevada by reserving your Sierra Nevada License Plate...today! Why reserve your own Sierra Nevada License Plate?

- ⌘ Participate in the historic effort to protect and restore the Sierra Nevada
- ⌘ Create millions of dollars in new funds that advance both environmental protection and economic well-being of the Sierra
- ⌘ Show your commitment to—and love of—the Sierra Nevada

California requires that 7,500 vehicle owners must request a specialized environmental license plate before the specialty plate can be issued by the State Department of Motor Vehicles. With your license plate reservation, the Sierra will be one step closer to being acknowledged for its beauty and importance.

Help us reach that goal by being one of those who register now! Please log on to www.sierrafund.org, or send an e-mail to info@sierraconservancy.org. You can also contact The Sierra Fund at (530) 265-8454.

Welcome New ESLT Staff Members!

Just as masses of new seedlings are appearing across our landscape with the coming of Spring, new opportunities and challenges are cropping up here at the Eastern Sierra Land Trust. With the departure of our Director of Outreach and Development, Mark Schlenz, we have taken the opportunity to review our organizational needs and make some exciting changes. Mark and his wife Jane, publisher of Companion Press, will continue to work with us on our publications. To fill our vacancies and meet growing needs, three new part-time positions were created and just recently filled. We welcome back Lynnette Royce to the ESLT as our Administrative Assistant and Membership Coordinator. Lynnette was ESLT's first staff person and her knowledge of our early days is invaluable. Joining us as our Development and Outreach Coordinator is Michelle Pettit, a new resident to the Eastern Sierra. Michelle has an extensive background in public relations, marketing, and communications. Our new Projects Coordinator is certainly not new to the ESLT. Karen Ferrell-Ingram is a founding member of the land trust, former Board member, and along with several other board members is responsible for completing most of the Eastern Sierra Land Trust's first three conservation easements.



*ESLT staff,
from left,
Lynnette Royce,
Michelle Pettit,
and Karen
Ferrell-Ingram.*

Similar to the abundance of flora with which this wetter than usual winter has gifted us, we too have been experiencing an abundance of conservation opportunities that demand many more resources than we currently have available. We believe this new structure better positions the ESLT to meet the diverse and growing conservation opportunities and challenges in the Eastern Sierra.

–Julie Bear, *Executive Director*

Financial Report of the Eastern Sierra Land Trust

As of June 30, 2004:

Banking accounts	\$60,289.69
Investment account	\$32,287.66
Total Assets	\$92,568.35
Total Liabilities	\$0

Fiscal year 2004 was a successful one for the Eastern Sierra Land Trust, as donations and grant funding bolstered the assets from \$42,396.78 on June 30, 2003 to \$92,568.35 by June 30, 2004.

Membership dues and individual donations to the ESLT remain an important part of our sustaining support. Your donations may be tax-deductible. Feel free to contact us to learn about the many ways in which one can contribute to our local land trust and its vital work for our community.

–Brian Stange, *Treasurer*



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Working to Preserve Rural Landscapes

TAKE THE SIERRA CENTURY CHALLENGE!!!

In 1906, the City of Los Angeles acquired rights to Eastern Sierra watersheds. Almost 100 years later, our challenge is to protect open-space for agriculture, wildlife, and recreation in those watersheds forever.

Take the SIERRA CENTURY CHALLENGE and become a SIERRA CENTURY SUPPORTER today!!!

Your \$100 tax-deductible donation strengthens the Eastern Sierra Land Trust's efforts to protect open space in the Eastern Sierra for all generations.

Yes, Enroll me in the Sierra Century Supporters!!

I have enclosed my \$100 donation in support of the Eastern Sierra Land Trust's efforts to secure a conservation easement for over 300,000 acres of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power holdings in Inyo and Mono Counties.

Name _____

Address _____

I prefer to receive LADWP Easement updates via e-mail at _____

I wish to be listed as a Sierra Century Supporter Please do not list my name

Make check payable to Eastern Sierra Land Trust, or use your credit card:

Visa Master Card Card # _____ Exp Date _____ Zip Code _____