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## **Spectacular 900 Acre Benton Hot Springs Conservation Easement Grounds for Celebration**

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Excellent photos available.**

Benton Hot Springs, CA — More than one hundred people joined the Eastern Sierra Land Trust this past Saturday (5/10) to celebrate the completion of a spectacular 900 acre conservation easement on the Benton Hot Springs Ranch in northeastern Mono County off SR 120. This easement permanently preserves the open rangeland and meadows on the cattle ranch owned by Bill and Diane Bramlette. The land will forever remain a working landscape—its natural resources, wildlife habitat, and a ranching way of life will be preserved in perpetuity.

The sound of the Idle Hands Bluegrass Band and the smoky aroma of barbeque greeted attendees as they arrived and made their way across the upper meadow to a large white tent. The guests were welcomed with chilled drinks and enjoyed the food as several guest speakers shared their thoughts on the conservation of this unique property.

Larry Freilich, ESLT's Executive Director, introduced the speakers: Biologist Phil Pister spoke to the importance of the property's desert springs and how the ancient path of the Owens River carved the canyon at the far end of the meadow. Mono County's 2nd District Supervisor, Hap Hazard confirmed his support for the project, and the significance of this easement to local agriculture, the environment, and the Bramlette family, who have tended the land for four generations; Dana Brazelton of the CA Resources Agency shared that the people of California made this day possible by approving Proposition 50 bonds that funded this project; Brandon Sanders, from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC), stressed how a "bi-partisan effort", founded his agency, and how this project, in particular, reflects the goals of the SNC; ESLT's Vice President, Orrin Sage and Lands Director, Karen Ferrell-Ingram presented Bill Bramlette with a commemorative plaque. Bill dedicated the easement to his grandfather, "Buster", a colorful character who, on this land, worked cattle and observed the intricate and subtle details of nature. Now permanently preserved by a conservation easement, Busters' land will remain, as it is now, a working ranch and a sublime landscape—forever.

As the sun dipped low, the party guests explored the property. A birding tour, led by biologist, Joy Fatooh, observed International Migratory Bird Day at the northern ponds. At the pond's edge, birders observed ibis', ducks, herons, and other waterfowl, along with a lone White Pelican.

Other guests went for a hike across the meadow on a historic wagon road. This was a rare opportunity for the public to explore this property with its owner. Bill pointed out notable features of his land including natural springs, an alkali meadow, the foundation of one of the oldest cabins in Mono County, a Great Blue Heron oddly perched on a cliff, and an old wagon road that served as a freight route between Benton Hot Springs and the old railroad that once passed through Laws.

Future generations will have the opportunity to continue sustainable ranching on this land and the public can continue to benefit from this prominent open space and the conservation values it affords. Protecting this land through a conservation easement helps maintain the viability of Mono County's agricultural economic base. Land remains in private ownership and on the county tax rolls.