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## Conservation Takes Flight: Keeping Sage-Grouse Aloft on Eastern Sierra Ranchlands

*Eastern Sierra Land Trust to Host a Volunteer Workday to Create Safer Habitat for the Rare Bi-State Sage-Grouse*

Maintaining safe habitat for the rare Bi-State Greater sage-grouse is no small task. This unusual ground-nesting bird is often found on ranchland, where good range management and sustainable grazing provide an ideal environment for sage-grouse to forage, perform their renowned courtship dances, and raise their chicks. New rangeland science has led to modified fence designs that reduce sage-grouse mortality, but old fencing left on the range still poses serious risks and barbed wire has been known to snare birds in flight.

Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) is taking action to ensure that one such ranch – Sinnamon Meadows – becomes a safer home for sage-grouse. With the support of the landowner, ESLT is now gathering volunteers for a day of land stewardship, to be held on Wednesday, October 14. During this all-day event, staff and supporters will team up to flag, remove, and replace fences that pose hazards to these low-flying birds.

A historic decision was recently made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) not to list Greater sage-grouse populations existing throughout the American West under the Endangered Species Act. USFWS will monitor continuing conservation efforts and sage-grouse population trends, and will re-evaluate the status of the species in five years. This national decision was preceded by one made in April, when the USFWS determined that our local, Bi-state population would not be listed. This decision was made largely in response to a comprehensive conservation plan created by the Bi-State Local Area Working Group, a dynamic partnership of ranchers, conservationists, agency and county representatives, and concerned citizens. Their Bi-State Action Plan lays the groundwork to help local sage-grouse populations rebound without enacting land use restrictions that an endangered species listing would impose.

One critical component of the Action Plan involves modifying and replacing existing fences to make them safer for sage-grouse. This is particularly important for properties like Sinnamon Meadows where sage-grouse are known to frequent, year after year.

A stunning private landscape tucked in the mountains south of Bridgeport Valley, Sinnamon Meadows has historically been used as summer pastureland since it was originally claimed under the Homestead Act in the late 1850s. Its extensive wetlands and sagebrush scrub provide essential wildlife habitat, as well as remarkable scenic value – particularly at this time of year, when the property's aspen

stands are in full color. In September 2014, ESLT succeeded in permanently protecting the historic, agricultural, scenic, and natural values of Sinnamon Meadows with a conservation easement.

ESLT began efforts to create safer sage-grouse habitat at Sinnamon Meadows last fall; this October, they hope to make great strides towards completing this important work. Anyone interested in volunteering with ESLT on October 14 at Sinnamon Meadows is encouraged to contact Sara Kokkelenberg, Stewardship Coordinator, at [sara@eslt.org](mailto:sara@eslt.org) or (760) 873-4554.

“The Bi-State sage-grouse is one of those iconic species that represents how unique – and fragile – our Eastern Sierra landscape truly is,” commented Kay Ogden, ESLT Executive Director. “ESLT is committed to working hand in hand with landowners to ensure that these unusual birds continue to have a home here long into the future.”

*ESLT works with willing landowners to preserve vital lands in the Eastern Sierra for their scenic, agricultural, natural, recreational, historical, and watershed values. ESLT's goal is to preserve a healthy balance of land uses that can be sustained forever, ensuring both a strong local economy and environment. To learn more about ESLT's ongoing efforts to permanently protect the Eastern Sierra's wild and working lands, please visit [www.eslt.org](http://www.eslt.org).*

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*Sample low-resolution pictures are shown below; high-resolution versions are attached to email. For additional images, please contact Marguerite Merritt at [marguerite@eslt.org](mailto:marguerite@eslt.org).*



*Eastern Sierra Land Trust is looking for volunteers to join them at Sinnamon Meadows on October 14 to help create safer habitat for the rare Greater sage-grouse.*



*The Bi-State Greater sage-grouse is often seen in irrigated pastures, co-existing with well-managed grazing operations; however, these working ranchlands can pose serious threats to the birds' safety. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.*