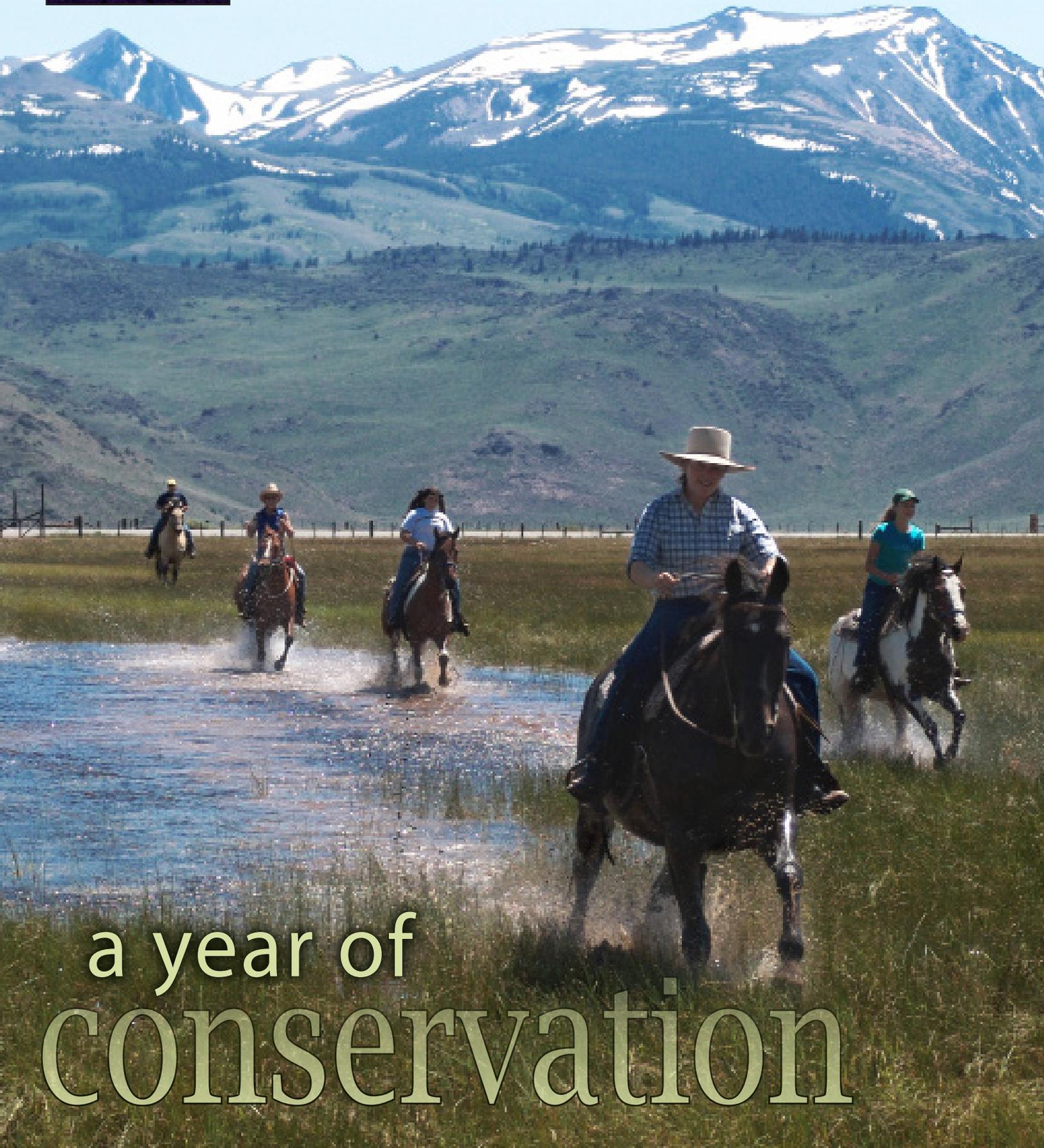


2014

EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST
ANNUAL REPORT



a year of
conservation

Conway Ranch, Sinnamon Meadows, and Black Lake: three spectacular landscapes—all now protected forever.

What a year we've had! **From start to finish, 2014 has truly been Eastern Sierra Land Trust's Year of Conservation.**

With critical assistance provided by funding and land management partners, concerned landowners, volunteers, and the enduring support of our community, we achieved three major conservation victories this year. Over 2,500 new acres are now safeguarded forever: more than a quarter of our total land protected.

And this accomplishment is so much more than a number. From mule deer to mountain lions, songbirds to sage-grouse, our iconic wildlife now have safe havens here on California's "Wild Side." Native habitat for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators is growing



in gardens and community spaces from Walker to Lone Pine. Open ranchlands and family farms are defended against rising pressures to subdivide, and will continue to foster our rural heritage for generations to come. Young boys and girls are peering through binoculars and



digging in the dirt – and all the while, developing a deep commitment to the land as they grow up to become tomorrow's leaders.

This is conservation, and it will last long beyond our lifetime.

All of these successes have been many years in the making. As ESLT's new Board President, I am deeply grateful for the lasting commitments made by Tony Taylor, Karen Ferrell-Ingram, and the other co-founders of ESLT. For more than a decade, their efforts put ESLT where we are today: in a position to take action on behalf of the lands we love before they are lost. And their impact will withstand the test of time.

As we look ahead at the years to come, we see new

challenges to negotiate, and new opportunities come to us with each passing week. In November, the Board of Directors and ESLT staff participated in a two-day facilitated Strategic Planning Retreat; we refined our vision of ultimate success and planned for the next three years of conservation. Our resultant Strategic Plan is a roadmap that will guide our organization as we move forward to face the obstacles and opportunities that tomorrow will bring.

The Eastern Sierra's history is a tale of stunning vistas and working ranchlands that have persisted since the Gold Rush days. With the support of our dedicated community, we're working to make sure this story continues for many generations to come.



With thanks,

Bob Gardner,
Board President



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ESLT's new Black Lake Preserve:
protected forever in December 2014.

Protecting our wild and working lands.



Working Farms and Ranches

The Eastern Sierra's working lands are scenic, historic, and an integral part of our regional economy. We safeguard these wide-open rangelands and small family farms that embody our rural way of life.



Critical Habitats

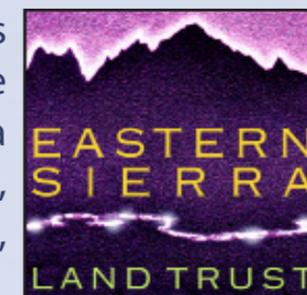
Poorly-planned development chops up wildlife habitat, leaving wild creatures with nowhere to go. We ensure that the Eastern Sierra's rare mammals, fish, and birds always have a place to thrive.



Community Connections

By connecting people of all ages to the land and educating them about native birds, blooms, and the magic of the natural world, we cultivate a deep appreciation for our region and all that it offers.

Eastern Sierra Land Trust works with willing landowners to preserve vital lands in the Eastern Sierra region for their scenic, agricultural, natural, recreational, historical, and watershed values.



Rich in natural beauty and a strong agricultural tradition, the Eastern Sierra is steeped in the legacy of the Old West. Wildlife habitat is abundant and diverse, supporting fisheries, migrating deer herds, and important bird flyways. Our historic working farms and ranches are a vital part of the region's rural character and local economy. Whether you live in the Eastern Sierra, have a second home here, or visit frequently—in person or in spirit—this magnificent land holds a special place in your heart.

Yet today the Eastern Sierra faces a threat that jeopardizes the very values that make the region so unique. Pressures to subdivide and develop rise with each passing year. Much of our working lands and wildlife habitat is at risk of disappearing forever.

Established in 2001, Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) works to permanently safeguard the Eastern Sierra's treasured landscapes for generations to come. Through conservation partnerships with willing landowners, we protect Eastern Sierra lands for their scenic, agricultural, natural, recreational, historic, and watershed values.

In our 13 years of service to our community, ESLT has protected nearly 10,500 acres of critically-important wildlife habitat, scenic marvels, and agricultural resources against the threat of poorly-planned development. And through our community outreach, we offer people of all ages the opportunity to connect with the land, encouraging a spirit of stewardship in residents and visitors alike.

ESLT is the only land trust focused on California's Eastern Sierra. Our specialized skills and knowledge of the land's resources, along with our extensive network of connections to agencies, legal experts, and funding sources, mean that ESLT is perfectly positioned to ensure the Eastern Sierra's wild and working lands remain intact. As an accredited land trust, ESLT is nationally-recognized for meeting the standards of excellence, upholding the public trust, and ensuring that conservation efforts are permanent.

Our goal is to preserve a healthy balance of uses that can be sustained in perpetuity, ensuring a strong local economy and healthy environment for generations to come. A land trust can't solve every problem—but by working side by side today, we can make great strides towards preserving California's "Wild Side" forever.

When the future of one of Mono County's most iconic panoramas was in question, true cross-agency teamwork and innovative thinking produced a major conservation victory: the permanent protection of Conway Ranch.

Looking down on Mono Lake from the viewpoint just below Conway Summit, Eastern Sierra residents and visitors have marveled at the picturesque expanse of Conway Ranch for decades. Comprised of two distinct properties (Conway and Mattly Ranches, which are often referred to collectively as "Conway Ranch"), this 806-acre stretch of land northwest of Mono Lake provides substantial scenic value, and supports the local economy with opportunities for sustainable grazing and commercial fish rearing.

Conway Ranch is of great significance to Eastern Sierra wildlife, as it provides a critical migration corridor for the Mono Lake mule deer herd. Its wetlands, springs, and irrigated meadows offer breeding and nesting grounds for a large variety of waterfowl and shorebirds, as well as the rare Bi-state Greater sage-grouse.



Once an important stop along Native American trade routes, in the 1870s settlers on the property created lush pastures to raise livestock and vegetables to feed hungry miners in Bodie. The Conway family bought the land in 1903; some of the original homestead and ranch buildings still stand to this day.



For over two years, ESLT collaborated with representatives from Mono County, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation to figure out how to best protect the Ranch's natural and cultural values. After a long and complex process, a final Conway Ranch conservation easement and management plan was completed on December 2, 2014.

With this action, we've guaranteed that Conway Ranch will remain wild and scenic, and working to benefit our local economy. This unusual example of cross-agency collaboration ensures that future generations will be able to enjoy the unique and beautiful vistas, wildlife, open spaces, and history of Conway Ranch forever.

The Path to Perpetuity

Conway Ranch was the focus of an approved large-scale housing and resort development in the early 1990s. Recognizing what was at stake, Mono County worked with The Trust for Public Land and several funding agencies to purchase the property from the developer. The County obtained grant funds from Caltrans; California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks); and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

More recently, Caltrans and Mono County began to discuss their visions for current and future uses of Conway Ranch. They partnered with ESLT to create a permanent legal agreement that would maintain the property's resources, while also allowing Mono County the flexibility to realize the economic value of a sustainable fish-rearing facility. ESLT worked with the original grantors to incorporate their land use restrictions into a conservation easement.

Under the Conway Ranch conservation easement and management plan, Mono County continues to own and manage the land, and ESLT will be responsible for monitoring and enforcing the terms of the conservation easement. Wildlife habitat and water resources will be protected forever, and compatible activities such as livestock grazing and fish rearing will continue in a manner that ensures the protection of the surrounding resources.



With the support of our community, assistance from funding partners, and the foresight of concerned landowners, Eastern Sierra Land Trust helped achieve a major conservation victory in 2014: together, we protected Sinnamon Meadows.

Sinnamon Meadows has been a high priority for ESLT and agency partners for several years because of its value as critical summer rangeland and the important habitat it provides to rare wildlife. As of August 2014, this stunning, 1,240-acre expanse of historic, high Sierra ranchland south of Bridgeport Valley is now protected forever.

This success is grounded on the commitment of those who care about their land—not just for their lifetime, but forever. “My children are 4th generation cattle ranchers, and keeping our family and our land in the ranching business is very important to me,” said Bryan Masini, then co-owner of Sinnamon Meadows. In 2012, Mr. Masini and his business partner approached ESLT to learn more about how they could permanently protect their land’s natural qualities, while retaining the ability to use the property for grazing as it has been for more than a century.



Almost entirely surrounded by public lands, this unique property includes mountain meadows, aspen groves, coniferous forest, springs, and significant reaches of two creeks. Its high-elevation pastures provide habitat for many notable wildlife species, including the Bi-State population of Greater sage-grouse. This unusual bird depends on working pastures where irrigation and sustainable grazing provide essential late summer habitat for raising their young.

Our success at Sinnamon Meadows protects the beauty of this extraordinary place, its ranching legacy, and its habitat for rare wildlife. It means that this special landscape will continue to inspire and support our community long into the future. And it proves that, working together, we can keep our Eastern Sierra lands both productive and wild for generations to come.

Sinnamon Meadows: Relic of a Past Era



- Used on Native American trade routes, the area nearby became the location of the historic Dunderberg Mill and town of Munckton.
- Sinnamon Meadows has served as summer pasture since it was originally claimed under the Homestead Act by early prospectors in the late 1850's.
- Numerous historic Basque carvings dating back 100 years or more can still be found on the property.
- Sinnamon Meadows was even the setting of a western film, “Belle Starr’s Daughter,” made in the late 1940's!

Funding for this project has been provided by the California Wildlife Conservation Board and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife; the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC), an agency of the State of California; and the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This material is based upon work supported by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under #73-9104-3-031. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR BLACK LAKE

When Michelle Browner first visited the Eastern Sierra, she found a landscape that spoke to her soul.

To her the Eastern Sierra seemed a living, breathing relic of the American West. In particular, it was the area around Benton that truly captivated her: with its charming, quiet character, spectacular ridges crowned with pinion pine, and the smell of the high desert abloom with sage.

Stretching northwest of Benton along Highway 120, Adobe Valley is a rare wetland in the midst of the California desert. For decades, portions of the valley have been a critical resource for seasonal livestock grazing, a use that continues to this day. At the valley's eastern edge sits Black Lake, rimmed by moist alkali meadows; this lake sees few human visitors, but attracts wildlife from miles around. It serves as an important breeding outpost for dozens of migrating bird species, and provides a vital water source for pronghorn antelope, mule deer, golden eagles, and more.

As Michelle drove towards Benton on one of her frequent visits to the area, she noticed a "For Sale" sign along the highway not far from Black Lake. Then a dark burst of movement not far off captured her gaze, and she watched in awe as a herd of wild mustangs galloped across the valley. In that moment a decision was made, and soon after, that "For Sale" sign was removed.

"From the beginning, I felt very deeply that this was a unique and special place. When I first saw Adobe Valley, I already had the idea in my mind that I wanted to do whatever I could to conserve it."

—Michelle Browner

Nearly twenty years later, Michelle decided it was time to ensure that the land she loved would remain wild.



"I could not, and would not ever want to have the land around Black Lake developed," Michelle remembers. "So I decided that I wanted to make an outright land donation to Eastern Sierra

Land Trust, to ensure that the property would remain protected forever." At the end of 2014, ESLT accepted ownership of the 482-acre parcel in Adobe Valley – now named the Black Lake Preserve.

Thanks to the foresight and incredible generosity of Michelle Browner, the future of this unique landscape and its resources is assured. Its agricultural value will be maintained for limited seasonal grazing; wildlife will always find a safe haven along the lake's shoreline; and future generations of residents and visitors will be able to find inspiration in the remote, wild beauty that makes this place so special.



An Eye to the Sky

Eastern Sierra Land Trust's new Black Lake Preserve offers excellent birdwatching opportunities. As part of the Adobe Valley Important Bird Area (IBA), it is considered critical to supporting bird populations. From raptors to waterfowl, owls to songbirds, a wealth of species can be glimpsed at Black Lake – including Wilson's Phalarope, Willet, Golden Eagle, and Yellowheaded Blackbird, and many more.

Out and About with ESLT

Exploring mule deer habitat during our Migration Corridor Field Trip



Getting our hands dirty for our Sunflower Garden Project



Glimpsing rare wildlife during our "Birds in the Classroom" outing



From wildflowers to working farms, much of our region's natural treasures rely on bees, butterflies, and other pollinators in order to live and thrive.

But their numbers are in decline: impacted by pathogens, parasites, pesticides, and the loss of open spaces, pollinators are disappearing from our landscape. And their disappearance can be felt everywhere—from our backyards to our dinner plates.

Eastern Sierra Land Trust is taking action to build safe havens for pollinators and educate our community about the important role they play. Led by our two 2013/2014 Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership (SNAP) Members & Education Coordinators, Ali Amberg and Sara Kokkelenberg, and with the assistance of a team of advisors and funding provided by Metabolic Studio, ESLT launched our new Eastside Pollinator Garden Project in April of 2014.



Ali and Sara developed certification criteria to help participants make their gardens pollinator-friendly. They then took our project on the road, making presentations in partnership with organizations across the Eastern Sierra. They connected our community to resources and workshops, and taught how we can all help keep bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies thriving.

In ESLT's backyard, the Eastside Pollinator Garden Project was a focal point at our annual spring celebration, GardenFest – held in our very own Certified Pollinator Garden. And in conjunction with our annual Sunflower Garden Project, Ali and Sara helped educate local elementary school students about how pollinators contribute to the magic of the natural world.



By the end of 2014, ESLT had certified 27 individual gardens and 7 community spaces—and that's just the beginning. With Sara's decision to return to ESLT for a second AmeriCorps term in 2015, we look forward to continuing our efforts to keep our pollinators healthy, and busy at their work keeping the Eastern Sierra abloom.

YOU MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Eastern Sierra Land Trust is incredibly fortunate to be part of such a dedicated community of donors, advisors, volunteers, and friends.

Numbering more than 700 strong, ESLT's member base is the heart and soul of our success. Every one of our conservation victories to-date was made possible by the commitment of our loyal members, and their support throughout the year enables our work to continue.

We are grateful for those members who choose to take a leadership role in guiding our conservation work by participating on our Advisory Board and Committees. Advisors and committee members bring their unique expertise to our team; some, such as our Lands Committee members, help navigate the complex legal and conservation concerns ESLT faces in our efforts to protect wild and working lands in the Eastern Sierra.

Other members are instrumental in helping to orchestrate our community events. For example, our Art Committee helped put on a fantastic Art for Conservation Show and Sale at Mono Council for the Arts Gallery throughout the summer of 2014. 27 acclaimed artists, all members of ESLT, contributed original paintings, pastels, photographs, and more, and proceeds from their sales benefitted ESLT's land conservation work.

ESLT supporters have a major impact on the future of the Eastern Sierra, and we would be remiss if we did not also highlight the outstanding contributions of ESLT's Board of Directors. In addition to their generous financial assistance, these committed individuals give countless hours of their time to help steer our organization into the future.

Do you count yourself as a member of our ESLT family? If so, we are deeply grateful for your devotion to the future of our region. With your generosity and foresight, you are protecting the Eastern Sierra's cherished landscapes forever.



Our Lands, Our Legacy

Bringing together ESLT supporters from across the state and beyond, our 6th annual Lands & Legacy Weekend on August 22-24 was our party of the year! This sold-out success celebrated our conservation triumphs and raised over \$30,000 to keep our boots on the ground protecting the lands we treasure. It was a high point of 2014, and it meant the world to us to have so much of our extended ESLT family together.

ESLT Volunteers at Work

From restoring native habitat on our conserved lands to stuffing envelopes in the ESLT office, over 80 volunteers went to work in 2014—dedicating nearly 400 total hours to help protect the Eastern Sierra they love.



Volunteers helped ESLT staff remove invasive plants and restore habitat.



We teamed up to keep our scenic roads and waterways clean.

Alongside several partner agencies and with the support of the landowner, ESLT staff, board, and volunteers came together in October 2014 to create safer sage-grouse habitat at Sinnamon Meadows by flagging fences to make them more visible to these low-flying birds.



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Calfox, Inc.
Fenton Family Charitable Fund
Land Trust Alliance
*Mammoth Mountain Ski Area
Sierra Nevada Conservancy
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Under \$2,500:

Adobe Valley, LLC
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Whitney and Clarkia Wilson



Farewell to a True Eastside Champion

Eastern Sierra Land Trust is saddened by the loss of one of our dearest friends and supporters, Sid Tyler. Advocating for ESLT's work as a member and volunteer since 2005 and serving on the ESLT Board of Directors since 2009, Sid was instrumental in shaping our early efforts to protect his beloved Eastside. His leadership, wisdom, and wit are deeply missed. With Sid's passing in March, we lost a true friend of the Eastern Sierra.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

members (continued):

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Unrestricted Revenue

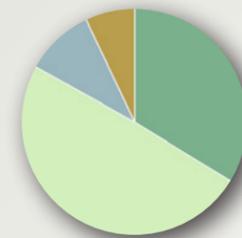
	2013	2014
Contributions <i>(Individual, corporate, and foundation)</i>	\$198,600	\$229,010
Donated Land	\$182,001	\$211,659
Program Services/Events	\$22,897	\$25,794
Investment Interest and Gains (loss)	\$18,859	\$10,145
In-Kind Donations	n/a	\$17,690
Funds Released from Restriction	\$149,087	\$119,511
Unrestricted Revenue Total	\$571,444	\$613,809

Restricted Revenue *(not including land acquisition grants)*

	2013	2014
	\$132,364	\$136,131

Expenses

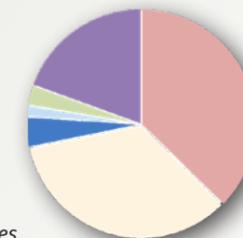
	2013	2014
Program Services <i>(Land conservation and education)</i>	\$136,138	\$144,729
Land & Easement Acquisition	\$163,293	\$202,464
Fundraising*	\$40,482	\$39,260
Administration*	\$31,356	\$24,313
Expense Total	\$371,269	\$410,766



2014 Expenses

- Program Services
- Land & Easement Acquisition
- Fundraising
- Administration

*Fundraising and Administration expenses account for 15.5% of total 2014 expenses



2014 Unrestricted Revenue

- Contributions
- Donated Land
- Program Services
- Investment
- In-Kind Donations
- Funds Released from Restriction

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Our sincere thanks to Kathleen Bishop, Bill Dunlap, Stephen Ingram, Randy Keller, Tony Taylor, Bob Wick (BLM), and ESLT staff members for providing the pictures included in the 2014 Annual Report.

*Indicates a member of the ESLT Staff, Board of Directors, Advisory Board, or Committees.

2014:

a year of conservation.



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