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EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST MISSION

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

EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST SECURES CONSERVATION EASEMENT FOR HISTORIC HUNEWILL RANCH

Agreement permanently conserves 4,100 acres and over 6 miles of rivers and streams in Bridgeport Valley, Mono County, California

Garnering the support of local, state and federal agencies over the course of years, the not-for-profit Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) secured a conservation easement in perpetuity for the historic Hunewill Ranch (est. 1861). As a result, the working ranch located in the heart of beautiful, expansive Bridgeport Valley framed by the mountain peaks of Yosemite National Park is now preserved for wildlife and sustainable ranching. This historic agreement marks ESLT’s largest conservation easement to date and ensures a bright, secure future for Bridgeport Valley. A conservation easement property continues to provide economic benefits for the region in the form of jobs, productivity, and property taxes, while protecting conservation values such as wildlife habitat.

When Esther and Napoleon Bonaparte Hunewill founded Hunewill Ranch in 1861, they began supplying timber, hauled by teams of oxen, to build the young mining town of Bodie. After the construction of the Bodie & Benton Railway, the ever-enterprising family built a thriving business supplying beef to workers and residents in the burgeoning area. In 1931, the Hunewills added a guest ranch on the property to welcome paying visitors to learn to ride horses, herd cattle, and appreciate the majestic beauty of the area.

The Hunewills are one of the region’s longest-established ranching families. Over the course of seven generations, the family has owned and operated the ranch and proven themselves to be exceptional stewards of the land.

Their ranch protects habitat for Bi-State sage-grouse, which raise their chicks in the ranch’s wet meadows – the “emerald islands” so critical to wildlife in the arid West. By agreeing not to subdivide and develop the ranch, the Hunewills are preserving a critical migration route and securing habitat for a variety of wide-ranging wildlife such as sage-grouse, black bear, American badger, and mule deer. The ranch provides animals with room to roam, by connecting neighboring public and private conserved lands. Hunewill Ranch also provides a buffer for alpine habitat used by the federally-endangered Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep.

Eastern Sierra Land Trust worked with the Hunewill family to craft the conservation easement, and secure the federal, state, and local funding needed to complete the project. Funders include National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), California Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), California Deer Association, and California Department of Conservation.



NRCS provides financial and technical resources that help landowners and partners protect the nation's most productive grasslands, wetlands, and agricultural lands by providing funding to purchase easements on private working lands. NRCS' Agricultural Conservation Easement Program that protects grasslands of special significance provided funding for the Hunewill Ranch conservation easement because of the habitat the ranch provides for Bi-State greater sage-grouse. The WCB protects, restores, and enhances California's spectacular natural resources for wildlife and for the public's use and enjoyment in partnership with conservation groups, government agencies, and the people of California. The California Deer Association's principal goal is to improve California deer herds and other wildlife through direct financial support for habitat improvement and research projects, and the California Department of Conservation balances today's needs with tomorrow's challenges and fosters intelligent, sustainable, and efficient use of California's energy, land, and mineral resources.

"We are deeply grateful to the fine people that are the Eastern Sierra Land Trust. It is very important to our family that this ranch be preserved and remain green and productive forever," says Jeff Hunewill, landowner. "Through their steadfast commitment to the preservation of the Bridgeport Ranch, ESLT has helped us to realize that goal."

"The Hunewill family's longstanding care for the land embodies how the strong agricultural tradition of our region works hand in hand with conservation goals," says ESLT's Executive Director and CEO, Kay Ogden. "The Hunewill family's vision for the future of their ranch has been protected by the conservation easement. Working with the family to achieve this result was incredibly inspiring for everyone at ESLT. Preserving Hunewill Ranch is a win for the wildlife who rely on this valley. And it's a win for future generations who will always be able to enjoy this area's beauty, history, and peace."

ABOUT

Eastern Sierra Land Trust works with willing landowners to protect vital lands in the Eastern Sierra region for their scenic, agricultural, natural, recreational, historical, and watershed values, and is an accredited land trust. To learn more about ESLT's work and how to get involved, visit www.eslt.org.

PHOTOS *(For high resolution images, please contact kristen@eslt.org or kay@eslt.org.)*



Caption: “We extend our sincere congratulations to Hunewill Ranch,” stated Carlos Suarez, State Conservationist for United States Department of Agriculture’s NRCS in California. “We are excited to help protect these working agricultural lands,” he continued. Photo by Dwayne Leonard.



Caption: This historic working ranch spans wide green valleys, rises to fragrant sagebrush steppe, and is framed by the high peaks that border Yosemite National Park. Additional funding was awarded from California Deer Association and California Department of Conservation through Proposition 68. Photo by Dwayne Leonard.



"This conservation easement on Hunewill Ranch is excellent for all kinds of wildlife that live throughout the spectacular Bridgeport Valley," says John Donnelly, Executive Director of California's Wildlife Conservation Board. "From black bear and Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, to mule deer and Bi-State sage-grouse, many species will benefit tremendously from this outcome for generations to come. I congratulate all the parties who had a role in this successful project." Photo by Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management