

EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST



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Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) Expands Conservation Reach with Landmark Project in Nevada

View ESLT's film on Desert Creek Ranch: <https://eslt.org/success-stories/desert-creek-ranch/>

Smith Valley, NV – November 15th, 2023 - Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) proudly announces the conservation of Desert Creek Ranch, a historic and ecologically significant ranch located in Smith Valley, Nevada. This marks the organization's inaugural conservation project in Nevada and a huge achievement for sage-grouse habitat in the state.

A Milestone Conservation Project in Nevada

The quest to conserve Desert Creek Ranch began in 2012 when securing a conservation easement for the area was identified in the 2012 Bi-State sage-grouse Action Plan. “It’s been a blend of challenges, learning, and ultimately, success, but our commitment to the land and our perseverance brought us here today,” said landowner David Park.

Funding was provided through the Livestock in Harmony with Bi-State Sage-Grouse project under USDA’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which provided \$7.2 million for the purchase of conservation and wetlands easements in Nevada and California. For the Desert Creek Ranch project, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provided \$1.545 million under RCPP, the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) provided an additional \$190,417 in funding, and the landowner also made a personal donation to the purchase of the easement. This funding partnership between ESLT, NRCS, NDOW and the landowner is a primary example of how Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) leverage local partnerships to match NRCS funding and local partners that are responsible for the long-term stewardship of the easement on working farms and ranches.

“Projects like this highlight the need for collaboration between federal, state, and non-government partners like ESLT to support landowners who want to maintain or enhance their land in a way beneficial to agriculture and/or the environment,” said Greg Becker, acting Nevada State Conservationist for NRCS.



Diverse Ecosystem & Historical Significance

Desert Creek Ranch is more than just a ranch; it's a designated grassland of special environmental significance. The property is home to the Bi-State Sage Grouse (BSSG), a sagebrush steppe species of paramount ecological importance. Additionally, its proximity to the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest accentuates its role in conserving the biodiversity of the region. From mule deer to sage grouse, Desert Creek Ranch is a treasure trove of biodiversity.

The ranch, with Desert Creek running through it, has a rich history, deeply intertwined with the growth and development of Smith Valley.

Landowner at the Heart of Conservation

“We have a deep history of ranching and have always wanted to continue this legacy. It seemed like the right thing for the ranch, especially given the vital role of water on this property,” said Park, a long time Carson Valley resident. “Preserving this land in perpetuity for agriculture and habitat for sage grouse is a perfect fit for the community, the Eastern Sierra, and for Park Ranch.”

Desert Creek Ranch holds senior water rights and plays a pivotal role in the Smith Valley ecosystem. Surface water from Desert Creek irrigates pastures, and the stored water from Lobdell Lake is released seasonally, both of which are essential to Bi-State Sage Grouse habitats.

“If it wasn’t for the water, there wouldn’t be a ranch, and without the ranch, these birds wouldn’t thrive as they do today,” stated Park. “When water gets diverted, it’s generally not beneficial to wildlife, but this is an incredible exception to the rule. These birds wouldn’t be here, certainly not in these numbers, without these irrigated meadows.”

“I am personally excited that the birds have a chance somewhere where they aren’t going to be bulldozed by building. We did our part to preserve the property as a habitat for sage grouse, and hopefully others will do the same and have the same intentions in moving forward in Western Nevada,” he added.

Looking to the Future

While this conservation easement protects vital habitats, it also ensures that future generations will enjoy the ranch without the looming threat of development. Public lands near Desert Creek Ranch offer regional recreational draws like off-road activities, fishing, and camping, with parts of the easement located in the canyon's recreational area.

“Ranching is my way of life and without land and water, you can’t provide otherwise. Land is the key component to raising and growing livestock and crops, which is something that I truly enjoy doing,” David emphasizes.

His advice to other landowners considering conservation is that while every property is unique, easements are a tool in the toolbox for agricultural operations.

A Message for the Future

With Desert Creek Ranch, ESLT not only celebrates its first project in Nevada but also the first time RCPP funding had been used in Nevada to purchase an easement. This project exemplifies patience, persistence, and the essence of community collaboration. Alan Jenne, Director of the Nevada Department of Wildlife, stated that “Seeing this project come to fruition reflects a tremendous commitment to a true collaborative effort that will benefit multiple species and their habitat for generations to come”.

Kay Ogden, ESLT ED/CEO shared, “This isn’t just about ESLT expanding its reach. It’s about celebrating the spirit of conservation, honoring the dedication of landowners like David, and setting a gold standard for future endeavors in Nevada.”

About Eastern Sierra Land Trust

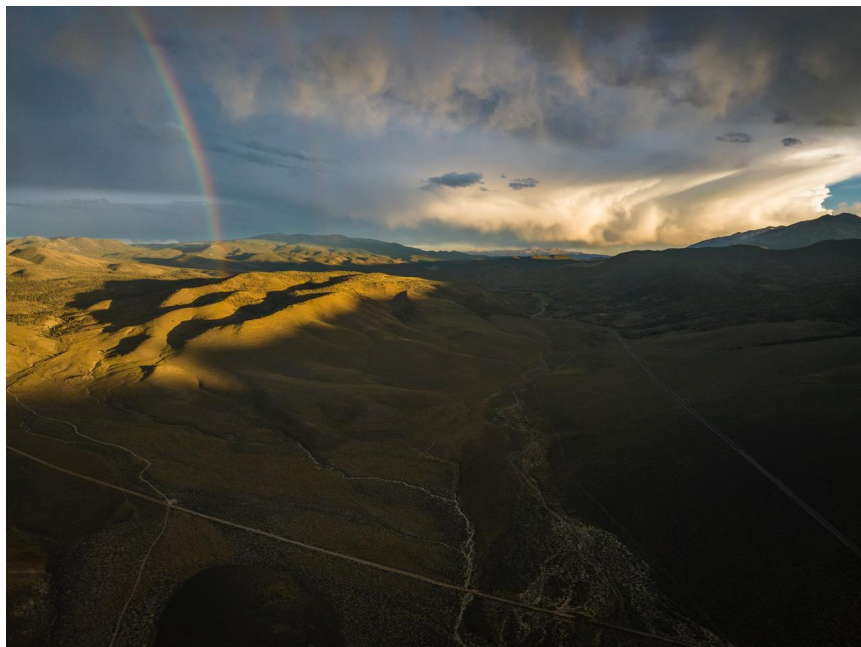
Eastern Sierra Land Trust is a nationally accredited land trust based in Bishop, CA. ESLT, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, works with willing landowners to protect vital lands in the Eastern Sierra region for their scenic, agricultural, natural, recreational, historical, and watershed values. ESLT collaborates with willing landowners to safeguard vital lands in the Eastern Sierra for their scenic, agricultural, natural, recreational, historical, and watershed values. The inclusion of Desert Creek signifies ESLT's commitment to expanding its horizons and championing diverse conservation causes. Learn more about ESLT’s work and how to get involved at www.eslt.org.

For more information about Conservation Easements, please contact your local NRCS field office or visit the Nevada NRCS webpage at:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/acep-agricultural-conservation-easement-program/nevada/agricultural>

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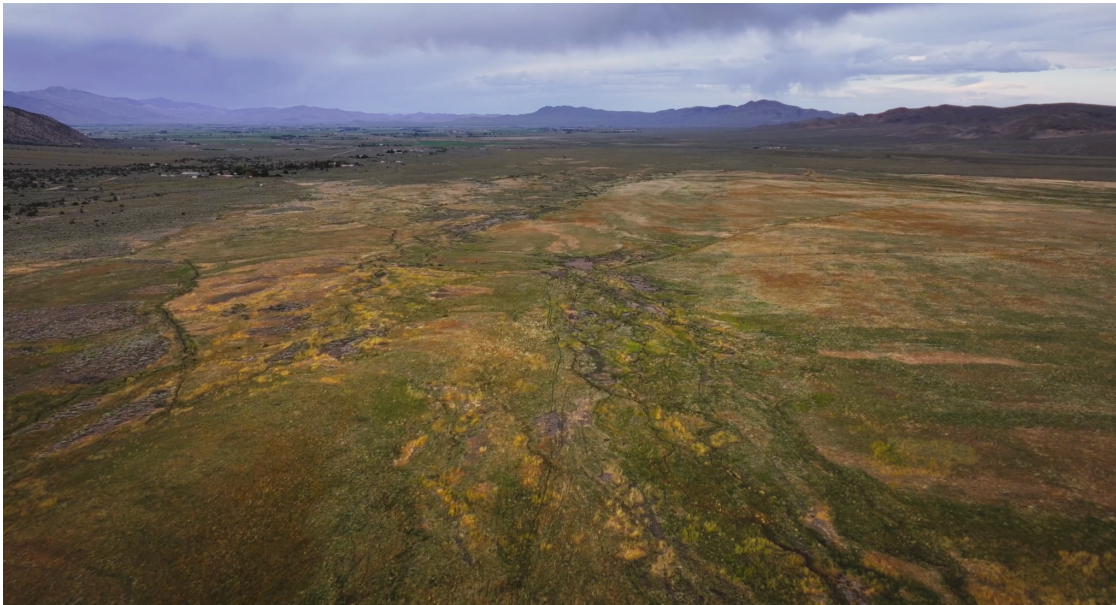
Photos: (Download high resolution images [here](#).)



Desert Creek Ranch's 1,228-acres holds senior water rights and plays a pivotal role in the Smith Valley ecosystem. Surface water from Desert Creek irrigated pastures, and the storage water in the watershed above the property are released seasonally, both of which are essential to the ranching operation and healthy wildlife habitats. **Photo by Dalton Paley & Andie Stewart.**



Protection of Desert Creek Ranch strengthens rural economies, contributes to food security, and provides important ecosystem services such as water filtration and carbon sequestration. **Photo by Dalton Paley & Andie Stewart.**



Desert Creek holds senior water rights and plays a pivotal role in the Smith Valley ecosystem. Surface water from Desert Creek irrigated pastures, and the storage water in the watershed above the property are released seasonally, both of which are essential to the ranching operation and healthy wildlife habitats. **Photo by Dalton Paley & Andie Stewart.**



Desert Creek Ranch pastures are a designated grassland of special environmental significance and home to the Bi-State sage grouse, a species of paramount ecological importance. In addition to sage grouse and mule deer, the Property also provides habitat for American badger, Paiute sculpin, mountain quail, sage-thrasher, golden eagle, pinyon jay, short-eared owl, bats and many other species of common and rare plants and animals. **Photo by Dalton Paley & Andie Stewart.**



While this conservation easement protects vital habitats, it also ensures that future generations will enjoy the ranch without the looming threat of development. **Photo by Dalton Paley & Andie Stewart.**



With Desert Creek, ESLT not only celebrates its first project in Nevada but also the maiden utilization of Natural Resource Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding. This project exemplifies patience, persistence, and the essence of collaborative conservation. **Photo by Dalton Paley & Andie Stewart.**



Desert Creek's conservation values intended to be preserved and protected under the conservation easement include healthy grasslands, wet meadows, aspen and conifer stands and high desert sagebrush steppe habitat. **Photo by Dalton Paley & Andie Stewart.**