



2015

EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST
ANNUAL REPORT



Thanks to members, partners, advisors, and friends, 2015 was an important year for conservation in the Eastern Sierra.

Looking back, it's not a "what," but a "who" that made this year remarkable. People from all walks of life are speaking up to voice their commitment to the future of our Eastern Sierra lands and waters. **And they are making a profound difference.**

But the year wasn't all good news. On February 3, we were hit with disaster: the Round Fire tore up Sherwin Grade, burning 7,000 acres and destroying 40 homes in Swall Meadows and Paradise. Important habitat was damaged on ESLT's Swall Wildlife Preserve and four additional conservation projects.

Yet something remarkable rose from the ashes: a community coming together to support the families and wild creatures who lost their homes.

The work we do lasts forever. Sooner or later, disaster will strike – and how we respond shapes who we are.

So what does this devastating event reveal about our community? *It shows how deeply we care about our neighbors, our lands, our waters, and our wildlife.*

On-the-ground work is already underway to bring life back to the scorched landscape. Volunteers, ESLT staff, and conservation partners are teaming up to prevent the spread of invasive weeds and encourage native plants to regrow.

And our efforts aren't limited to the burn area. Across the Eastern Sierra, we have projects in action to create better, safer habitat for all the birds, fish, reptiles, and mammals that call this place home.

The insects, too: with the growth of our Eastside Pollinator Garden Project, bees, butterflies, and other pollinators have an ever-increasing number of safe havens and sanctuaries.

And to ensure that our conservation efforts really do last forever, we are advancing programs that teach young boys and girls about the magic of the natural world. Through educational activities and outdoor play, they are developing deep connections with our lands and waters. In time, they will grow up to be the conservationists of tomorrow.

Looking ahead, there are more conservation victories waiting on the horizon – and to get there, we have work to do. With our community behind us, we can conserve more special places, inspire more people, and keep the spirit of the Eastern Sierra alive and well for generations to come.



With thanks,

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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 help families protect their farms and ranchlands against rising pressures to subdivide.



Critical Habitats

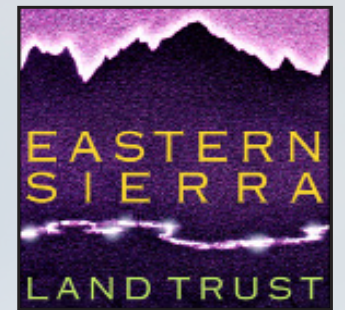
Poorly-planned development chops up wildlife habitat, leaving wild creatures with nowhere to go. We ensure that the Eastern Sierra's rare mammals, fish, and birds always have a place to thrive.



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 protect 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.

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. Productive working lands and wildlife habitat are at risk of disappearing forever.

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



In our 14 years of service to our community, ESLT has conserved nearly 10,500 acres of critically-important wildlife habitat, scenic marvels, and agricultural resources. And through community outreach and events, we offer people of all ages the opportunity to connect with our lands and waters, 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 make sure the Eastern Sierra's wild and productive lands remain intact. As an accredited land trust, ESLT is nationally-recognized for our rigorous standards of excellence, upholding the public trust, and ensuring that conservation efforts are permanent.

A land trust can't solve every problem—but by working side by side, we can make great strides towards conserving California's "Wild Side" forever.

SAVING THE SAGE-GROUSE



After years of teamwork to help keep the Eastern Sierra's Bi-State greater sage-grouse off of the Endangered Species List, a verdict has been reached – and it's a big win for conservation.

In April, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would not be listing the Bi-State population of greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act.

This decision is a major victory for local conservation, and Eastern Sierra Land Trust is proud to play a role in its success. As a member of the Bi-State Local Area Working Group (LAWG), for several years we've worked with ranchers, conservationists, private organizations, state and local officials, and public land managers to help sage-grouse thrive.

The Bi-State LAWG's goal is to help sage grouse populations rebound without enacting land use restrictions that an endangered species listing would impose. Together with the other members of the LAWG, we created the Bi-State Action Plan: a long-term conservation strategy to protect and enhance sage-grouse habitat.

The announcement in April proves that our teamwork has paid off. "The collaborative, science-based efforts [of the Bi-State LAWG] are proof that we can conserve sagebrush habitat across the West while we encourage sustainable economic development," Secretary Jewell said in a statement.

The Eastern Sierra's distinct population of greater sage-grouse is often found on rangeland where good range management and sustainable grazing provide an ideal environment for them to forage and raise their chicks.

For several years, ESLT has been working with willing landowners in high-priority areas to help conserve their land against the threat of development, thereby protecting important habitat.



Yet working pastures also pose risks. Old fencing left on the range creates a dangerous hazard, and barbed wire has been known to snare birds in flight.

Knowing that protecting habitat is only part of the solution, ESLT is working with our community to create safer homes for sage-grouse. In October, we gathered a team of volunteers to flag, remove and

replace hazardous fences at Sinnamon Meadows. And at Conway Ranch, volunteers have helped clear downed fencing and other debris.

This is a great start – and there's much more to be done. In 2016, we look forward to continuing to partner with families from all walks of life to protect this iconic bird for generations to come.

In 2015, 46 volunteers dedicated over 1795 total hours to help protect and restore the Eastern Sierra they love.

From cleaning up our rivers and streams, to creating safer wildlife habitat by removing dangerous debris, to digging up invasive plants – and so much more – our volunteers know what it takes to get the job done. We are deeply grateful for their service.



Pulling invasive weeds in Swall Meadows



Checking water conditions at the Benton Ponds



Celebrating a job well done!



California's AmeriCorps Member of the Year

Eastern Sierra Land Trust's AmeriCorps Member of two years, Sara Kokkelenberg, was presented with the 2015 Catherine Milton Award for California AmeriCorps Member of the Year.

This annual award is given by *CaliforniaVolunteers*, the state office that manages the California AmeriCorps program and other initiatives aimed at engaging Californians in service and volunteering. It is one of the highest honors in community service throughout the county.

"Sara represents the very best of AmeriCorps," Catherine Milton told us shortly after the award ceremony on the capital steps in Sacramento in October.

"She has focused on real, important problems facing our nation and has learned specific skills to make a difference. Even better, she has shown that she is a true leader who has been able to encourage others to help."





For conservation to last forever, our community must remain committed to keeping our region healthy and thriving - for today, and for generations to come.

The Eastern Sierra has something to offer to everyone. For some it is a place of discovery and adventure; for others, of solitude and reflection. It's a recreationist's wonderland, an artist's muse, a historian's treasure trove.

Yet this special place can only be protected if those who live, work, and play here understand the great value this land gives us all.

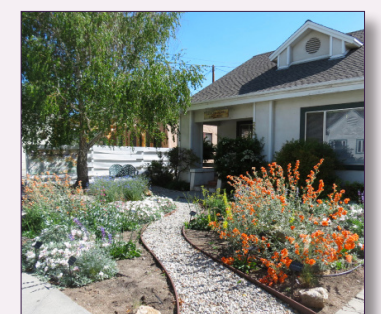
That's why Eastern Sierra Land Trust is dedicated to playing an active role in our community. By engaging people of all ages and inspiring lasting bonds with the land, we can help ensure that conservation lasts far beyond our lifetime.



On-the-ground events, such as our annual *Birds in the Classroom* community field trip, get local kids outside and away from their computer screens. They give residents and visitors the opportunity to connect with our lands, waters, and wildlife, discovering what it is that the Eastern Sierra offers *to them*.

In addition, our Eastside Pollinator Garden Project is helping community members take action to solve a problem now plaguing our wild and productive lands: the disappearance of bees, butterflies, and other pollinators.

Through this project, gardeners are now creating pollinator safe havens across our region. We help them certify their gardens as pollinator-friendly and provide them with resources and workshops to keep their gardens abuzz. In 2015, 20 new gardens were certified, bringing the total number of pollinator sanctuaries in the Eastern Sierra to 55.



What's more, over the course of the year, volunteers helped transform ESLT's front lawn into a beautiful new Native Plant and Pollinator Demonstration Garden (pictured above): a place for reflection, inspiration, and learning.

By offering residents and visitors alike the chance to develop deeper connections with this special region, and by teaching what each and every one of us can do to keep it thriving, we're building a lasting culture of conservation. Together with our community, we're keeping the Eastern Sierra beautiful and productive for generations to come.

Planting the Seeds of Conservation

As the Eastern Sierra warms each spring, Eastern Sierra Land Trust staff and volunteers team up with local teachers to help educate and inspire school kids with our annual Sunflower Garden Project. This project gives local elementary students the opportunity to get outside of the classroom and learn about life in their backyards.

This year, third graders learned about the life of plants, including the process of photosynthesis, the important role pollinators play, and the magic of germination. They've planted seeds and monitored their growth, and had lots of fun learning through educational games and activities.



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 800 strong, ESLT's member base is the heart and soul of our success. Every one of our conservation victories is made possible by their commitment, and their support throughout the year makes local conservation a reality.

We are especially grateful to those members who help lead our conservation work by participating on ESLT's Advisory Board and Committees. Advisors and committee members bring unique expertise and fresh perspectives to our team. Some, like our Lands Committee members, help navigate the complex legal and conservation concerns ESLT faces in our efforts to protect the Eastern Sierra lands we all treasure.

Others are instrumental in helping connect us with the broader conservation community. For example, in August ESLT members Elaine and Doug Muchmore (pictured at right) hosted their third annual Garden Concert in our honor at their home in La Jolla, CA. This event provides an ideal opportunity for us to spread the word about our conservation work to those in the Southern California area.



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 special places for generations to come.



Our Lands, Our Legacy

Bringing together ESLT supporters from across the state and beyond, Lands & Legacy is ESLT's "Party of the Year." This annual fundraising weekend aims to inspire and energize our community, engaging supporters in our work to save the Eastern Sierra lands we all love.

At this year's 7th annual Lands & Legacy, held July 24-26, members went a step further by helping us raise much-needed funds to keep our boots on the ground to protect the places, plants, and creatures we treasure. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our donors, we tripled our ambitious fundraising goal.

We are deeply grateful to Rusty Gregory and Mammoth Mountain for hosting this sold-out event. It was a magical, memorable night – and it meant the world to us to have so much of our extended ESLT family together. Our sincere thanks goes out to all who helped make the Lands & Legacy weekend so wonderful.



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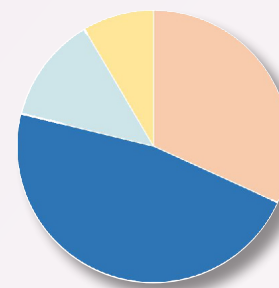
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	2014	2015
Contributions (<i>Individual, corporate, and foundation</i>)	\$229,010	\$188,214
Donated Land	\$211,659	n/a
Program Services/Events	\$25,794	\$94,262
Investment Interest and Gains (loss)	\$10,145	-\$31
In-Kind Donations	\$17,690	\$69,066
Funds Released from Restriction	\$119,511	\$68,642
Unrestricted Revenue Total	\$613,809	\$420,153

Restricted Revenue (*not including land acquisition grants*) **\$136,131** **\$725**
**In 2015, ESLT also raised \$3,821,250 that goes directly to landowners for conservation easement acquisition.*

Expenses

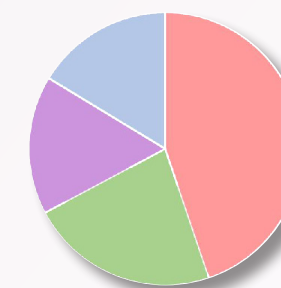
	2014	2015
Program Services (<i>Land conservation and education</i>)	\$144,729	\$132,656
Land & Easement Acquisition	\$202,464	\$196,172
Fundraising	\$39,260	\$53,005
Administration	\$24,313	\$35,336
Expense Total	\$410,766	\$417,169



2015 Expenses

- Program Services
- Land & Easement Acquisition
- Fundraising¹
- Administration¹

¹ | Fundraising and Administration expenses account for 21.2% of total 2015 expenses



2015 Unrestricted Revenue

- Contributions
- Program Services/Events
- In-Kind Donations
- Funds Released from Restriction

Independent Accountants: Healy and Associates

special thanks... to our conservation partners:



photo credits:

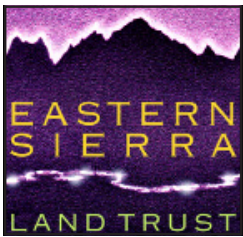
Our sincere thanks to Bill Dunlap, Stephen Ingram, Randy Keller, Dwayne Leonard (Ranch Memories Photography), Tony Taylor, Bob Wick (BLM), and ESLT staff members for providing the pictures included in the 2015 Annual Report.



The Future of the Eastern Sierra is up to You.

Thanks to you and growing community support, nearly 10,500 acres of treasured wild and productive lands in the Eastern Sierra are now conserved – for today, and for generations to come.

To keep up with Eastern Sierra Land Trust's latest conservation news, sign up for our monthly e-newsletter at www.eslt.org!



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