

EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST SILVER ANNIVERSARY

By Fisher

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, offering a moment to look at how one of the region’s quieter conservation organizations works to protect private land in the Eastern Sierra.

Unlike public agencies that manage national forest or federal land, ESLT works primarily with private landowners, using conservation easements and land agreements to preserve ranchland, wetlands and wildlife habitat while allowing many properties to remain in active use.

“Our mission is to work with private landowners to protect working farms

and ranches and critical habitat for wildlife,” said Gena Wood, ESLT’s Community Connections Program Director.

Since its founding in 2001, the organization has helped place nearly 24,000 acres under protection across Eastern California and Western Nevada. Those acres include large ranch properties in places like Bridgeport Valley, where conservation easements are designed to preserve open space while supporting continued agricultural use.

Wood’s role focuses less on land transactions and more on public outreach, which includes bird walks, educational programs and community events aimed at connecting people

directly with protected landscapes.

Among the programs she manages, a new one is Sunflower Kids, which brings Bishop Elementary third graders to the ESLT office each spring to plant sunflower seeds and learn about pollinators and native plants. Another, the Pollinator Garden Program, helps residents create habitat in their own yards using native species and pesticide-free practices.

The pollinator program began in 2014 and has expanded through partnerships with volunteers, native plant advocates and grant funding. This year’s Garden Fest plant sale is scheduled for May 2.

Bird habitat has also become an increasingly visible part of ESLT’s work. Wood, who also serves on the board of the Eastern Sierra Bird Alliance, said birding interest has grown significantly in recent years, drawing more public attention to habitat protection.

“Birds are indicator species,” Wood said. “They can tell us a lot about the health of the landscape.”

That is especially true at Black Lake Preserve, an area northwest of Benton, which is one of the few ESLT-managed properties open to the public. The



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preserve’s wetlands provide habitat for migratory birds, and grazing restrictions are in place there to protect sensitive ecological areas.

Because most ESLT properties remain privately owned, public access is often limited. In many cases, protection happens through legal agreements tailored to individual landowners and landscapes.

“It’s never one-size-fits-all,” Wood said. “Every property is different.”

As the amount of privately held land in the Eastern Sierra remains finite, Wood said the organization’s future focus may shift increasingly toward stewardship of land already protected, rather than simply protecting more land.





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Birds are an indicator species. They can tell us a lot about the health of the landscape

-Gena Wood, ESLT

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BREWING



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ARE WE THERE YET?

It may not seem like a good bet, but keep your money on the tortoise

By Pam Bold

It feels ironic to wish everyone a “Happy Earth Month!” during what is being called the greatest global energy security threat in history; but the team at the High Sierra Energy Foundation (HSEF) remains committed to promoting energy efficiency in the Eastern Sierra for many reasons, and especially because of energy instability. The irony continues with the fact that most people don’t pay attention to their energy consumption unless it’s disrupted or causing economic distress. Our goal is to change that. Energy efficiency simply means doing the same with less: less energy, less waste, and usually less cost. The cheapest energy is the energy that you don’t use.

Over the past several decades, the United States—and California in particular—have enacted energy efficiency policies that have reduced per-capita consumption through improved building codes and efficiency standards for lighting, appliances and electronics and mechanical equipment, helping keep electricity demand per person relatively flat in California for decades. These gains matter, even if they often go unnoticed, as they have offset much

of the growth that would otherwise come from population increases and new demands like electric vehicles and data centers.

In the 2017 Sheet article titled, “Are We There Yet?,” former HSEF Executive Director Rick Phelps wrote, “Creating an energy efficiency culture seems to have three components: awareness, trial, and acceptance.”

Nearly a decade later, the HSEF has made significant impacts on our Eastern Sierra communities. Still, as with any long-term effort, progress can feel slow. While the “awareness” component continues to grow, many people have yet to enter the “acceptance” stage.

The same question “Are We There Yet?” also applies to the global transition toward clean energy. As journalist David Wallace-Wells recently wrote in

“Creating an energy efficiency culture seems to have three components: awareness, trial and acceptance”

-Rick Phelps

the New York Times magazine, what the current global energy crisis reveals is a new age of resource conflict arising just as the old energy order was being upended. But not before the new one has taken hold, where clean energy has grown at an incredibly rapid rate, but not yet to the point of insulating us from the reliance on and volatility of fossil fuels.

The global infrastructure built on oil, gas, and coal has powered modern life, but science and technology have

now long shown more efficient and healthier ways exist to power civilization. Researchers refer to the “social cost” of energy generation and how fossil fuels significantly contribute to air pollution, destruction of lands and groundwater contamination, to name a few

problematic side effects, which create increased indirect costs like healthcare and mitigation efforts.

The current energy landscape highlights the risks of relying on fossil fuels in an interconnected and often volatile market. At the same time, the transition to cleaner energy brings its own challenges, from supply chains to infrastructure needs. The standoff at

the Strait of Hormuz highlights the extreme vulnerability of reliance on fossil fuels in a global market. As any climate activist will tell you, “No one has ever started a war over solar panels.”

It’s difficult to see how far we’ve come when the snapshot right now shows hardship and high costs. Unfortunately, asking our leaders “Are We There Yet?” isn’t very effective when the federal government is sliding backwards on the topic.

In rural communities especially, we understand the importance of local action. Solutions start locally, and lasting change happens from the ground up. Since its inception, HSEF has remained focused on building a culture of energy efficiency and sustainability in Inyo and Mono Counties.

That means ensuring our public agencies, business owners, and residents have access to the same state-wide incentives and programs that are readily available in more urban locations. It also means helping our communities reduce energy use—and utility bills—through practical solutions like efficient appliances, heat pumps, and home weatherization. To all the supporters along the way, thank you.

If you’re just now learning the value of energy efficiency, welcome! Protecting the air and water quality of our incredible region is something worth working toward every day. And that is something we can all celebrate—not just during Earth Month, but every day.



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- Recycling at Mammoth Disposal Transfer Station is **FREE!** Plus, you can get paid to redeem your CRV (California Redemption Value) materials, including plastic bottles, aluminum cans, liquor and wine bottles, wine boxes, large juice bottles, or anything with a CRV label.
- Make sure materials are cleaned before recycling. When in doubt, throw it out! Contamination can cause an entire bin of recycling to be processed incorrectly.
- Public recycling bins provided by the Town are located throughout the community at bus stops and parks. There is also a community recycling center at Vons.
- For information on recycling or to sign your business or complex up for commercial recycling service, please call 760-934-2201.
- The Mammoth Disposal Transfer Station is open seven days a week. The Buyback Center to redeem CRV materials is open from 9am-3pm, Tuesday-Saturday.



Learn more at www.mammothdisposal.com

TownofMammothLakes.ca.gov   Town of Mammoth Lakes



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EARTH DAY CELEBRATION

PHOTOS: GAYLA WOLF, APRIL 12, BISHOP CITY PARK



LOCAL UPDATES



189 Pounds of Carrots

The Inyo Farm @ School on the Bishop Elementary School campus recently harvested 189 pounds of carrots grown by the students during the winter months. The carrots were served in the school's cafeteria last Monday and Tuesday.

The school farm started last May in an underutilized baseball field in a corner of the playground, and is managed by the Inyo County Office of Education.

Out of the 100 foot bed of carrots, the kids ate 50 feet on the farm and the cafeteria got 15 feet, which weighed in at 189 pounds.

There is still a 10 foot bed left for various farmers markets the program plans to attend, including the C5 art walk.

Fighting the Selloffs

The following update from Friends of the Inyo comes courtesy of Executive Director Wendy Schneider.

Friends of the Inyo continues to engage in many campaigns and initiatives to fulfill its mission of protecting and caring for the land and water of the Eastern Sierra. A major focus over the last 18 months has been participation in the very much bipartisan effort to protect our public lands from being sold off and other threats.

Along with many organizations across the country, Friends of the Inyo successfully organized the public to pressure Congress and the Senate to vote "no" on the selloff attempt earlier this year. Currently, we are organizing opposition to many attempts to weaken the federal land

management agencies and the environmental rules and regulations that protect our treasured Eastern Sierra public lands.

At the same time, we are addressing specific threats to the healthy ecosystems in our area. In partnership with many local, regional and national stakeholders, we are leading campaigns to protect special Eastern Sierra places, including the Bodie Hills (bodiehills.org), Hot Creek, and Conglomerate Mesa (protectconglomeratemesa.com) from industrial mining activity.

In 2024, we added a water justice education and advocacy team to our staff. This work is focused on:

1. Bringing an understanding of the effects of water extraction in Mono and Inyo Counties to our Eastern Sierra communities (ourwaterstory.org); and
2. Achieving meaningful change in extraction practices to benefit our communities (easternsierrawater.org).

To accomplish these goals, we are working with many local partners, including veteran Eastern Sierra water protectors and the Indigenous Community.

As always, Friends of the Inyo is also putting hands on the land to care for it directly. Again in the busy 2026 summer visitation season, we will have our Trail Ambassadors out there removing wandering rocks and logs and repairing sections of our trails damaged by erosion and avalanche. They will be leading interpretive activities and teaching Leave No Trace. Now more than ever our Trail Ambassador team is a critical part of ensuring our lands get the attention they need to stay healthy and vibrant.



happy

earth day

FROM THE

High Sierra Energy Foundation!

Our nonprofit focuses on energy efficiency and sustainability and supports local public agencies, Tribes, small businesses and residents. If you have questions about how you can reduce your energy bills, reach out to us at:

info@highsierraenergy.org

OR LEARN MORE AT

HighSierraEnergy.org



4th Annual Eastern Sierra WILDFIRE RESILIENCE MONTH Regional Community Events

MAY 3

SIERRA SPARK! Wildfire Ready Festival

- FREE Green Waste Disposal Onsite
- Workshops & Exhibits
- Resources & Demonstrations
- Kid's Zone & Food Trucks
- Participate to Win Prizes

**10am- 2pm
Bishop City Park**

THE FELT CUTOUTS
LIVE
MUSIC!

MAY 7

Science on Tap Speaker Series Fire Adapted Forests

Sarah M. Bisbing, PhD
University of Nevada, Reno

6:30-7:30pm

Mountain Rambler Brewery, Bishop

MAY 16

Mammoth Community Cleanup and Sustainability Fair

FREE Green Waste Disposal
Wildfire Taskforce Resources & BBQ
9am-1pm

Community Recreation Center

MAY 28

The Wildfire Laboratory Science That Reduces Ignition Risk

Steve Hawks - Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety's Research Center
5:30-6:30pm

Online Webinar - Link at website



Find MORE community preparedness events near you!

WhitebarkInstitute.org/events

Funding for this project provided in part by Edison International, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, the California Fire Safe Council, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's Fire Prevention Program as part of the California Climate Investments Program



SUSTAINABILITY

THE END OF THE LINE



The haul of fishing line collected last summer

By Fisher

What began in 2019 as a volunteer-led proposal to address discarded fishing lines in the Eastern Sierra has resulted in hundreds of feet of plastic being pulled out of local waterways each year.

Tangle Free Waters, first envisioned by Sierra Club volunteer Janet Barth as a coordinated fishing line recycling network, now operates under Mammoth Lakes Recreation (MLR) with 40 collection stations installed across Mono and Inyo counties. The program, which MLR formally took over around 2020, has expanded well beyond its original goal of 30 recycling tubes and now relies on a growing network of volunteers and sponsors to maintain the system.

Last summer alone, Tangle Free Waters logged 103 volunteer hours, removed 168 pounds of trash, collected 449 feet of discarded fishing line, and recycled more than 25 pounds of monofilament. Nineteen sponsors helped raise \$8,297 to support maintenance and shipping costs, while 31 volunteers monitored and cleaned stations throughout the region.

"Janet started it, and she was looking for a home because it's a really big program to manage," said MLR Community Outreach Coordinator Kim Anaclerio. "We realized how important it was, so we said, all right, let's do this."

Each station consists of a fishing line collection tube placed at popular fishing areas, from high-traffic lakes like Convict and Crowley to smaller remote waters. Volunteers adopt individual sites, emptying tubes, removing entangled lines

from shorelines, and collecting litter from surrounding habitat. Sponsorships help cover upkeep, including repairs after harsh winters that often damage infrastructure.

The collected line is sent in bulk to Berkley Fishing, a national manufacturer that recycles monofilament into new products such as fishing gear components and artificial reef structures.

The program has grown steadily over the six years since its inception. In 2024, Tangle Free Waters maintained 31 stations with 26 volunteers and 16 sponsors, raising \$7,800. That same year, MLR hosted its first "sorting party," where volunteers gathered to untangle debris, remove hooks and tackle, and prepare 40 pounds of fishing line for shipment to Berkley.

Anaclerio said public awareness among anglers has improved as the stations become more recognizable. A digital station locator map now helps anglers find disposal points, and new outreach efforts, including QR-coded tube signage and educational materials distributed during fishing opener, aim to make proper disposal easier.

"It's really important to stress that the line needs to get recycled versus going to the landfill," Anaclerio said. "Otherwise, birds and animals end up getting entangled at the landfill."

This summer, MLR plans to launch a new series of "Clear the Line" cleanup events, held every third Tuesday from June through September at lakes throughout the region.



Volunteers organize fishing line at last year's "sorting party."

SPARK
continued from page 1

will be in attendance, including Edison International and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

The event will include workshops to help seniors set up fire alerts on their phones, an evacuation readiness session, and a “bump and run” demonstration, where CalFire and the Bishop Fire Department illustrate how they would approach defending a home from wildfire.

“Those kinds of demos go a long way,” Pfeiler said. “It hits home when you’re hearing from a firefighter that your home is either a winner or a loser, and the firefighter will make a split second decision on whether it’s safe for them to defend and protect.”

There will also be resources for becoming a Firewise Community, a nationally recognized designation which includes residents, local fire departments, state forestry agencies, elected officials, emergency managers, and property management companies. These colations are monitored locally and by CalFire.

They boost fire preparedness, resilience, and may give members discounts on their fire insurance. Multiple Firewise Communities can be located within a city or town. Currently, there are 17 of them on the Eastside.

“I think we’ll likely add another 20 [Firewise] Communities in the next eight months or so,” said Wendilyn

Grasseschi, the Mono County Wild-fire Coordinator. “It’s very rare for anywhere to have that many firewise communities. I think it’s just because people are so engaged and they want to do something.”

Other upcoming Wildfire Resilience Month events include a Science on Tap Speaker Series Event by forest ecologist Sarah Bisbing (May 7), a Mammoth Lakes Community Cleanup and Sustainability Fair (May 16), and an online webinar discussion on the connection between wildfire science and insurance (May 28).

“Fires are part of and important for our natural landscape,” Beardsley said. “We can all be part of ensuring that we have better outcomes if a fire were to come into our communities.”

Sierra Spark! and Wildfire Resilience Month are funded in part by Edison International, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, the California Firesafe Council, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection as part of the California Climate Investments Program.

Grasseschi and Pfeiler also secured a \$4.6 million grant from the USDA Forest Service which will continue Sierra Spark! for the next five years and implement fire resilience into the Mono and Inyo public works departments.

BLUE HERON TAKES OFF



Above, Blue Heron Farm co-owner Rachel Kulchin presents to a crowd at a Bishop Chamber of Commerce sponsored tour of the land. Below, Rebekah Rivera (left) and Hannah Gern (right) hold a tray of sprouts.



PHOTOS GAYLA WOLF

By Lunch

Rachel Kulchin and partner Aki Stankioski are poised for year two at their Blue Heron Farm in Wilkerson.

The 10-acre farm hosted a Bishop Chamber of Commerce event last week. It was reservation only and sold out.

In an interview this week, Kulchin said last year was a “year of observation.” This year, the goal is a season of “farm-scaping.”

That includes phase 1 of water irrigation, which wouldn’t have been possible without an assist from the local chapter of the non-profit group “100 Women Who Care.” They donated \$10,000 to Farm-to-Crag, which subsequently went to the irrigation project.

The planned farm-scaping will also include creating hedgerows for pollinators, planting cover crops between the fruit trees to promote biodiversity, and the installation of hoop houses to extend the growing season.

Blue Heron represents part of a larger mission to “bring ag back to the valley.”

Kulchin noted we import 98% of our food here. So, “how can we build a more resilient food system?”

A la Kennedy, she suggests the moon-shot quest should be to produce 10% of our food locally within the next ten years.

In addition to her sold-out CSA (community-supported agriculture) subscription program, Blue Heron oper-

ates a food stand onsite and also travels to the Mammoth Farmers Market every Wednesday during the summer (starting in June). The Market is now held in the Outbound Mammoth parking lot.

“They’ve been so supportive,” says Kulchin, “and we plan to expand our offerings there.”

As we toured the farm and looked at all the improvements, I gestured towards the house and said to Kulchin, “I guess you don’t have a lot of time to work on it. What’s the house like?”

Silence, and then a nod and smile. “She doesn’t leak too bad.” Before adding, “We moved in last February and lived out of boxes ’til November.” Because to survive, “we gotta grow food!”

As we wrapped up, Kulchin brought it back to the community, effusively talking about the farm-to-table dinner held in February at the Fairgrounds, and all the folks who participated in the panel discussion. They included Bruce Willey of farm@school, Jake Dornan of Montgomery Creek Ranch, local Hostel owner Nina Williams, Ellyn Greene, who runs the farm and garden program at Deep Springs College, and Milo Vella of the Bishop Paiute Food Sovereignty program.

Blue Heron’s food stand operates Tuesday and Friday from 4-7 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday 9 a.m.-2 p.m. while in-season, typically starting late May. The farm is located at 475 Sierra Grande St.



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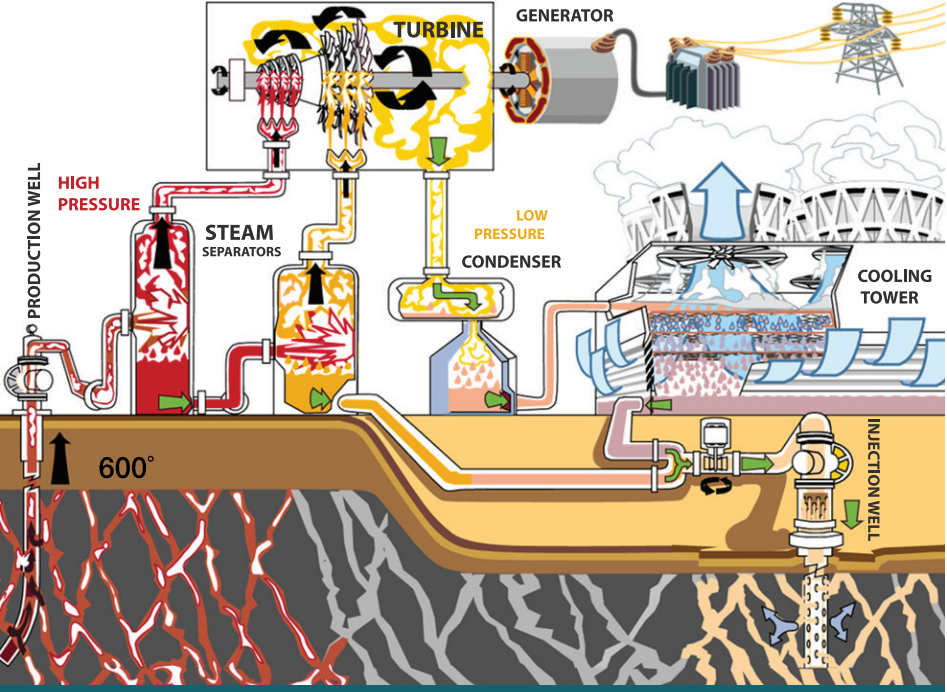
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