

CONTACTS: Don Drysdale, Department of Conservation, (916) 323-1886
Karen Ferrel-Ingram, Eastern Sierra Land Trust, (760) 873-4554

EDITORS: Photo available upon request.

**For Immediate Release:
December 30, 2011**

**EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST TEAMS WITH STATE, FEDS
TO PROTECT WESTERN HERITAGE IN BRIDGEPORT VALLEY**

BRIDGEPORT, Calif. – In 1879, the gold mining boomtown of Bodie had a population of 10,000. Bodie has long since become a ghost town and state park. But the nearby rangeland that fed the miners, shopkeepers and blacksmiths will remain in agricultural use forever after being placed into a conservation easement through the efforts of local, state and federal agencies.

“This means the perpetuation of agriculture and the production of food and fiber,” said Mark Lacey, who owns the property along with his father, John Lacey and partner Dave Wood. “It’s important to preserve and maintain the history of the area and the legacy of the cattle. The only way to protect the lands is to not put houses on them. There’s a lot of history there.”

The development rights for the 718.8-acre Centennial Ranch Easement Addition – which borders an existing 6,390-acre easement known as Centennial Ranch – were purchased with funding from the Eastern Sierra Land Trust; the California Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program; the California Department of Transportation’s Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program; and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

The Laceys are proud to say they have re-acquired most of the contiguous parcels of land pioneered by their old friends the Dressler and Day families, often referred to as Sweetwater Ranch. Original deeds hold the signatures of at least five United States presidents, from Ulysses S. Grant to Herbert Hoover.

As a child, John Lacey dreamed of someday owning the property. In 2003, his dream came true.

“My partner Dave Wood and I had long-term relationships with the original landowners in the Bridgeport area,” he said. “I have a great love for that valley. I grew up out there as a kid. I always dreamed of owning a piece of it and keeping it in conservation and running livestock in an economic way for future generations. There are plenty of other areas in the Eastern Sierra for people to develop, so they can go somewhere else.”

The Centennial easement is within commuting distance of Mammoth Lakes, a popular four-season resort destination. The Bridgeport Valley is surrounded by the Bridgeport Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, including more than one million acres of protected public land.

"The Bridgeport Valley is so rich with scenic beauty, fascinating history, and valuable agricultural resources," said Karen Ferrel-Ingram, Executive Director of the Eastern Sierra Land Trust. "Preservation of this important grazing land would not have been possible without the cooperative partnership of the landowners and our three funding partners. This easement will benefit future generations throughout the state far into perpetuity."

"We're pleased to have been a part of this project, which will help ensure the viability of the local economy and its western heritage," said Brian Leahy, head of the Department of Conservation's Division of Land Resource Protection. "We congratulate the landowners, land trust and our funding partners on the completion of this easement."

About the Department of Conservation's California Farmland Conservancy Program: Begun in 1996, the CFCP has provided over \$77 million in funding to permanently shield more than 52,000 acres of the state's best and most vulnerable agricultural land from development. Landowners and trusts are encouraged to contact the Division of Land Resource Protection for information about the program and potential funding. For details, visit www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp.

About the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP): The federal FRPP is a voluntary easement program that protects productive agricultural land by providing funds for the purchase of conservation easements to limit conversion of farm and ranch lands to non-agricultural

uses. NRCS partners with state, tribal or local governments, and non-governmental organizations to fund the acquisition of conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners. More information is available at www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov.

About the Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) : 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. ESLT works with local ranchers like the Lacey family to sustain financially viable agricultural operations on their land against rising pressures to subdivide. <http://www.eslt.org>.

About the California Department of Transportation's Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation (EEM) Program: The Transportation Blueprint Legislation of 1989 established the EEM. The Legislature is authorized to allocate ten million dollars annually, to local, state, and federal agencies, and nonprofit organizations for grants to mitigate the environmental impacts of modified or new public transportation facilities. Visit <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/EEM/homepage.htm> for more information.