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Walker Basin Conservancy Acquires Over 50% of the Water Needed to Restore Walker Lake
The Conservancy successfully continues legal process to protect acquired water rights instream for the benefit of wildlife and recreation – up to 22.9 Olympic sized pools per day

Yerington, Nev.— Friday, December 18, 2020, the Walker Basin Conservancy (Conservancy) completed the purchase of water rights in Smith Valley, bringing the Conservancy’s water portfolio to 51.1% of the estimated amount needed to restore Walker Lake’s water quality to levels similar to the year 2000 — the TDS level needed for the reintroduction of many species, including the Lahontan cutthroat trout.

Acquiring water rights is only the first step to achieving the goal of delivering water to Walker Lake. The Conservancy must also go through a rigorous and lengthy legal process to change the designation of use (from irrigation to wildlife) and place of use of the water right so that the historically consumed portion of the water right remains instream in Walker River to Walker Lake for the environmental benefit of the Lake and the Basin.

“The road that leads to the restoration of Walker Lake is a long one and the Conservancy is now halfway there. Reaching the milestone of 50% of the necessary water acquired is incredibly encouraging and should give Walker Lake’s advocates newfound hope,” said Jeff Bryant, Executive Director of Walker Basin Conservancy. *“In addition, the momentum for changing the beneficial use of our water rights to benefit the lake is picking up speed. Hope for Walker Lake is no longer on the horizon, it’s in our grasp.”*

The new purchase includes 11.122 cubic feet per second (cfs) of decreed water, and 317.861 acre-feet (AF) of New Land and apportioned storage water. The Conservancy acquires water from willing sellers in the Walker Basin to achieve the goal of restoring and maintaining Walker Lake while protecting agricultural and recreational interests in the Basin.

Progress in Protecting Water Rights Instream

In 2019, after a decade of work by conservationists, the Conservancy successfully finalized this process for a portion of the water rights and delivered those water rights to Walker Lake for the first time, setting a historic precedent for additional rights to follow.

On November 30, 2020, the Conservancy received formal approval to change the beneficial use of three additional water rights from irrigation use to instream flow for wildlife purposes. This approval will allow the Conservancy to protect the water from these water rights instream in Walker River during the 2021 irrigation season and beyond, bringing the total amount of water that the Conservancy is able to protect instream up to 23.429 cfs when in priority. This is the equivalent of up to 15,139,595 gallons per day or 22.9 Olympic sized pools per day while those rights are in priority.

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About Walker Basin Conservancy: The Walker Basin Conservancy is leading the effort to restore and maintain Walker Lake while protecting agricultural, environmental and recreational interests in the Walker River Basin. The Conservancy manages thousands of acres of land in the Basin and oversees revegetation activities, habitat enhancement and ongoing research. The Conservancy protects and monitors acquired water resources to ensure that they are used as intended for stewardship and to increase stream flows to Walker Lake.

About Walker Lake: Walker Lake is a natural lake located in the geographic low point of the Walker River Basin and is the terminus of the Walker River. Decades of water diversions have resulted in declining water levels and dramatic increases in Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) to a level where Walker Lake can no longer support native fish or waterfowl. The Walker Basin Conservancy is working to acquire and protect enough water to reintroduce a stable population of Lahontan cutthroat trout, and other keystone species, in Walker Lake. On July 5, 2019, the Conservancy delivered water acquired for restoration to Walker Lake for the first time.

