NFWF ranch on East Walker now open for public access

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The Walker Basin Conservancy announced last week that a large portion of the Rafter 7 Ranch, which the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation purchased in early 2013 and which runs along 11 miles of the East Walker River, is now open for public access.

“Visitors to that area can enjoy this well-preserved section of the East Walker River for recreational activities such as hiking, fishing and wildlife viewing,” stated a press release from the WBC of the ranch located off of the East Walker Road in far south Mason Valley.

Rafter 7 Ranch, which was used for years for grazing both cattle and sheep, is privately owned by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and was purchased as part of the Walker River Basin Restoration Program, which is administered by NFWF and funded by Congressional appropriations.

The primary purpose of the ranch acquisition is to transfer most of the Rafter 7 Ranch’s water rights instream to Walker Lake. However, according to the press release, NFWF determined the unique attributes of the property allowed for additional conservation and enjoyment of the riparian corridor and decided to work to allow public access, little of which is available along the river, as most of the river is on private land.

Public access on the ranch is managed by the WBC, a nonprofit established by NFWF to manage on-the-ground operations associated with this program and provide long-term stewardship.

Portions of the property will remain restricted from public access, though, as it is still an active ranch with cattle grazing and a variety of re-vegetation efforts in progress, the Walker Basin Conservancy reported.

Visitors should be aware that areas of the ranch available for public enjoyment could change over time due to adjustments in land management practices, according to the WBC release, but currently the majority of the ranch is open to the public.

“The opening of a portion of the Rafter 7 Ranch for public use presents a very unique opportunity for people to enjoy up to 11 miles of the East Walker River that has not previously been available to the general public,” Bull said.

“In today’s world, where public access has been increasingly limited on many properties, the Rafter 7 opening represents a welcome reversal of that trend and demonstrates the program’s ongoing commitment to the community,” he said. “We hope the public takes advantage of the
opportunity to enjoy one of the most well-preserved stretches of riverine habitat within the Walker Basin.”

The Rafter 7 Ranch, which overall incorporates about 3,233 acres, is open from dawn to dusk daily. There are three locations for parking at the ranch and a kiosk is located at the north parking lot with maps and handouts. No camping, hunting or use of firearms will be allowed on the property.

Suggested uses at the ranch include hiking, birdwatching, horseback riding, fishing (but consult Nevada fishing regulations), bicycling, picnicking, floating/kayaking and overserving and enjoying nature.

Due to the remote location of the ranch, new visitors are strongly encouraged to visit the WBC office located at 1 Hwy 95A East in Yerington to view maps, learn about visitation rules and gain additional information about the ranch before traveling to the property. Additional information also is available at www.walkerprogram.org/rafter7.

“Please enjoy this ranch respectfully and follow all visitation rules,” the Rafter 7 webpage says.

Among the wildlife and native vegetation found on the ranch, according to the website, include: (fish) rainbow and German brown trout, mountain whitefish, (reptiles) collared lizard, great basin gopher snake (and many other reptiles), (birds) willow flycatcher, wood duck, bald eagle (over 36 species of bird, including upland game), (mammals) mule deer, black bear, mountain lion, coyote, beavers, (plants) buffaloberry, wild rose, native grasses, forb and several species of willow.

Among other rules include: no trespassing into restricted areas; no lighting of fires or use of fireworks; no dumping of waste; no driving off existing roads; keep dogs on leash and clean up after them; and pack out your own trash.

Land managers plan to return this ranch to a more natural state, the website says, by replanting native vegetation in former agricultural fields, installing more efficient irrigation systems, controlling invasive plant species and managing grazing for appropriate location and season of use.