The American West often evokes visions of arid, wide-open spaces, grandiose natural formations, and rugged landscapes. The Walker Basin encompasses this vision and the spirit of the true American West. Walker Lake is a dazzling sapphire, gleaming amid a dry and somewhat unforgiving land where only the hardiest survive. The Walker River, the lifeblood of the region, brings a smattering of green to a palette that otherwise consists of browns, grays, and purples. To ensure that the Walker River can continue to support the region, the Walker Basin Conservancy is leading the effort to restore, preserve, and honor the unique biodiversity and rich cultural history of the Basin.

This report encapsulates a timespan from 2009 - 2019 during which the Walker Basin Restoration Program (Program) worked with agricultural, tribal, environmental, and recreational stakeholders to restore Walker Lake and preserve the natural resources of the Basin. In 2007, the Walker Basin Conservancy took the lead as the steward of the Program to ensure successful restoration of Walker Lake. As of the 10-year anniversary of the Program, approximately 46% of the water needed to restore Walker Lake was acquired. Reaching another milestone, after a lengthy legal process, a portion of this water was delivered to Walker Lake for the first time in 2019. However, as much as has been accomplished in the last 10 years, there is much more work ahead.

We will continue to work with local stakeholders to acquire water rights for Walker Lake and once again make the lake habitable to the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout and other wildlife. As we look to the future of the Walker Basin, we seek innovative approaches to continue to restore and preserve its natural splendor and to support the vibrant communities that call it home. The Walker Basin Restoration Program is an investment in our future, the future of the West, for generations to come.

Jeff Bryant
Executive Director - 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 Basin.
10 Years of Leading the Community Effort to Restore Walker Lake and Steward Lands

In 2017, the Walker Basin Conservancy accepted the lead role to implement and manage the Walker Basin Restoration Program, previously administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The Walker Basin Conservancy's restoration program has made invaluable contributions to our collective efforts to protect and restore Nevada's unique natural resources. Since its inception in 2015, the Conservancy has exceeded expectations in its work to restore Walker Lake while simultaneously contributing to protecting the broader landscape within the Walker Lake and River watershed.

As part of this work, the Walker Basin Conservancy was the critical, indispensable partner working with the State of Nevada to establish the Walker River State Recreation Area, the first new Nevada state park in the last decade.

Brad Crowell
Director - Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

ESTABLISHED THE 12,100-ACRE WALKER RIVER STATE RECREATION AREA

BUILT A NURSERY THAT CAN PRODUCE AN ESTIMATED 150,000 NATIVE PLANTS ANNUALLY TO BE USED FOR RESTORATION EFFORTS AND NATIVE SEED PRODUCTION

ACQUIRED 46% OF THE WATER RIGHTS NECESSARY TO RESTORE WALKER LAKE'S FISHERY

33 MILES OF THE WALKER RIVER CORRIDOR OPENED TO PUBLIC RECREATION

DELIVERED WATER RIGHTS FOR THE RESTORATION OF WALKER LAKE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2019

All Photos On Page: WBC
Since 1868, Walker Lake has lost 90% of its volume and 50% of its surface area, and lake salinity levels have increased by more than 400%.

History of Walker Lake

Decades of reduced freshwater inflows have resulted in the decline of the lake's volume and an increase in lake salinity, which today threatens to cause the ecological collapse of Walker Lake.

During the last quarter of the 19th century, farmers and ranchers established communities in the Walker Basin, part of the ancestral home of the Northern Paiute Tribe. As agriculture in the region grew, the natural flows of the Walker River were diverted to meet increasing irrigation demands.

As a result of declining lake levels, Total Dissolved Solids (TDS, primarily salts) in Walker Lake have increased dramatically to the point that the lake can no longer support native fish and wildlife populations.
Wildlife of Walker Lake and the Walker Basin
The Walker Basin is home to diverse and important native plant and animal species uniquely adapted to life in this dry and rugged landscape.

The health of Walker Lake is critical for recovering the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout and supporting migratory waterfowl and other wildlife that previously used the lake.

Large-scale wildfires and the invasion of exotic plants have degraded wildlife habitat throughout the Western United States. Walker Basin Conservancy’s restoration and conservation efforts on acquired properties are expanding and improving habitat for the array of wildlife within the Basin.

“Restoring Walker Lake not only benefits those native species directly associated with the ecosystem of the lake, but also supports a wide variety of native species throughout the Walker Basin.”
Steve Tomac - Senior Advisor

Migratory waterfowl, including the common loon, once used Walker Lake as a stopover on the Pacific Flyway. The annual Loon Festival that took place at Walker Lake stopped in 2009 because there were not enough loons using the lake. That same year, the stocked Lahontan cutthroat trout stopped surviving in Walker Lake. The absence of both iconic species as well as other key indicator species is driven by declining water levels and the resulting increase in Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) in the lake.
Water Conservation

To restore Walker Lake, the Walker Basin Conservancy works with willing sellers in the Basin to acquire water rights and convey water instream to Walker Lake for the benefit of wildlife and the environment.

Acquiring and Monitoring Water Instream

In order to monitor acquired water instream to Walker Lake, the Conservancy does the following:

- Acquire water rights from willing sellers
- File application with Nevada State Engineer to change water use
- Change the water use to beneficial use
- Call federal water master to administer water during irrigation season
- Work with partners to monitor the water instream to Walker Lake

The Walker Basin Conservancy works closely with the Walker River Paiute Tribe to ensure that Program water will flow through the Paute Reservation on the lower Walker River to Walker Lake, without impacting the Tribe’s existing water rights. This is accomplished through a Lower Walker River Conveyance Agreement between the Walker Basin Conservancy and the Walker River Paiute tribe.

As of the beginning of 2020, we acquired 46% of the water needed to restore Walker Lake to target levels.

After years of collaborative efforts by the Walker Basin Conservancy and its partners, on July 5, 2019, water acquired for the primary purpose of restoring Walker Lake flowed into the lake for the first time.

This was a critical milestone for restoration goals at Walker Lake that include the eventual reintroduction of the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout.

July 5, 2019

Acquired water rights are delivered to Walker Lake for the first time.
Through the Walker Basin Conservancy’s stewardship activities, we strive to balance agricultural interests, wildlife needs, cultural activities, and recreational use, while creating sustainable landscapes. Conservancy staff work alongside AmeriCorps National Service Members to accomplish on-the-ground restoration goals. AmeriCorps is a national service program that provides opportunities for young adults and new professionals to learn conservation principles and develop new skills while completing valuable service projects on our public lands.

In 2019, the Walker Basin Conservancy built a 900-square-foot propagation tunnel and a 7,200-square-foot shade tunnel to grow native plants in house for restoration purposes. Since the start of propagation efforts, the Walker Basin Conservancy was able to germinate 8,000 plants in the nursery and transplant 600 willows along the East Walker River.

Stewardship efforts such as native plant revegetation, noxious weed control, and streambank stabilization improve habitat for important species like sage grouse and Lahontan cutthroat trout. They also benefit the local community by decreasing wildfire risk, suppressing dust, and preventing erosion while keeping the local agricultural economy strong.

**AmeriCorps by the numbers**

- 67 Members enrolled since 2018
- 42,992 Total hours served

**LAND CONSERVATION**

Walker Basin Conservancy’s activities balance agricultural interests, cultural activities, wildlife habitat, and recreational use, while preserving native ecosystems.

“*The Walker Basin Conservancy is responsible for restoration on over 15,000 acres of land where water use will be reduced for the benefit of Walker Lake...that’s a big responsibility, and we take the stewardship of that land very seriously.*”

Laura Patten - Land Conservation Director

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Public Lands and Our Community

In addition to stewardship, Walker Basin Conservancy has greatly expanded public access on acquired lands benefiting the local community and economy.

13,700 Acres of recently established public lands

A total 33 miles of Walker River corridor opened to the public for the first time in a century

The Walker Basin Conservancy facilitated the conveyance of over 12,900 acres of land and nearly 30 miles of the East Walker River to the State of Nevada to become the Walker River State Recreation Area. Nevada State Parks manages the property, allowing public access to previously private lands.

Nearly 1,600 acres of upland and riparian land, including more than three miles of the Walker River, was transferred to the State of Nevada and is now part of the Mason Valley Wildlife Management Area, which provides public access for hunting, fishing, and general recreation.

Local Projects with National Support

Senator Cortez Masto swears in new AmeriCorps National Service Members at the Walker River State Recreation Area. AmeriCorps Service Members help the Conservancy accomplish restoration goals that benefit the lands and communities within the Walker Basin.

Broedi Riccio

The Conservancy recruits local involvement in our program. Broedi Riccio’s story is a great example of our efforts to inspire the community to be part of our work. Broedi was first introduced to the Walker Basin Conservancy’s youth field work crew by his local high school government teacher and immediately applied to the program. He loved the work and wanted a permanent job with the Walker Basin Conservancy. He joined the AmeriCorps Program and was able to continue doing field work and gaining experience. In November 2019, Broedi was hired on full time as a Field Technician and now lives in Yerington with his dogs, Gemma and Rayder.

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Investing in the Walker Basin

Our work extends beyond water and land conservation; we invest in the long-term sustainability of local communities. The work of the Walker Basin Conservancy and the establishment of the Walker River State Recreation Area (WRSRA) support full-time and seasonal employees who not only live and work in the Walker Basin but have also become part of the culture and community. Additionally, the recreation area has brought more visitors to the Basin increasing tourism for local communities.

Financial Information

The Walker Basin Conservancy works diligently and efficiently to oversee the conservation and stewardship initiatives established by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Walker Basin Restoration Program.

Local Operating Expenses

- Auto-related Expenses $174,670
- Contract Services $653,837
- Insurance $12,7170
- Property-related Improvements $141,697
- Rent and Utilities $363,733
- Salaries and Payroll $2,304,543
- Supplies and Materials $229,965
- Taxes, Fees, and Water Assessments $1,183,736

Total Operating Expenses $5,179,351

Expanded Public Lands Impact

- 6 Seasonal WRSRA Employees
- 12 Full-time WRSRA Employees
- 80,000+ Visitors to WRSRA

Acquisition Expenses

- By National Fish and Wildlife Foundation $75,796,113
- By Walker Basin Conservancy $16,581,370

Total Acquisition Expenses $92,377,483

Total Expenditures $97,556,834

$2,104,186 Payroll to staff living in the Walker Basin

$1,183,736 Local taxes and fee payments
In 2009, the Walker Basin Restoration Program was established by Public Law 111-85 for the primary purpose of restoring and maintaining Walker Lake, while also protecting agricultural, environmental, and habitat interests in the Walker Basin.

In 2015, the Walker Basin Conservancy was established to oversee the conservation and stewardship initiatives associated with the Walker Basin Restoration Program. Funding and authority for this was central to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s commitments to agricultural and watershed interests.

By the end of 2019, the Walker Basin Restoration Program acquired approximately 46% of the water necessary to restore Walker Lake to the primary restoration goal of 12,000 mg/L TDS.

Continue to acquire water and increase instream water to benefit Walker Lake.

Sustain and expand interdisciplinary conservation efforts on lands associated with water acquisition activities.

Increase native plant and seed production for the purpose of broad revegetation and landscape restoration in the Basin.

Our Past, Present,... and Future.
One of the great restoration stories of the American West is being written; will you help write the final chapters?

Visit walkerbasin.org to learn more about how you can support our work.

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