



TRUCKEE ▲ DONNER  
LAND TRUST

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## **Truckee River Canyon Protected**

A huge swath of the Truckee River Canyon west of Reno will be forever protected under a pact announced last week.

The deal, arranged by the Nature Conservancy, will pay Sierra Pacific Power Co. \$2.2 million for 3,350 acres of rugged, forested terrain and seven miles of riverfront between Floriston and the Nevada state line.

"This gateway between Nevada and California will now remain forever wild," said Michael Cameron, Nevada associate director for the conservancy.

The property, the bulk of which is west of the river, will be managed by the California Department of Fish and Game. The department will prepare a recreation strategy for public access by hikers, hunters and others, said Sandra Moree, fish and game regional manager.

Public acquisition of the canyon property follows a series of complicated negotiations between Sierra Pacific, the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, the Nature Conservancy and others. The deal's successful conclusion after more than four years of effort was celebrated Thursday on the grounds of the Verdi hydroelectric plant.

"It's not every day you get to buy and protect the majority of a watershed," said Perry Norris, executive director of the Truckee Donner Land Trust. "To be able to assemble this kind of acreage in a single watershed in between two booming communities is a conservation grand slam."

While much of the land is too steep to build upon, portions could have been developed had the public acquisition not occurred, said Jeff Ceccarelli, president of Sierra Pacific Power.

A gravel company had made an offer regarding a potential mining operation on the property, Ceccarelli said. Ranchette-style houses also are popping up on private land in the canyon.

"There clearly would have been some development interest," Ceccarelli said. "We came to the conclusion protecting this (land) in the state it's in for future generations is just critically important."

And any building that does occur in the watershed would come at risk to the river that supplies Reno-Sparks with 85 percent of its water, said Lori Williams, general manager of the Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

"The last thing we would want is for that 3,300 acres to be developed," Williams said. "Now, this is protected in perpetuity from having those kinds of activities taking place."

Preserving the land in its natural state is a boon to wildlife, particularly the Loyalton-Truckee mule deer herd, whose numbers are plummeting as development gobbles up crucial winter habitat across the region, experts said. The area also is home to bear, grouse, bobcats and mountain lions.

Elevation of the acquired land ranges from about 5,000 feet at the river to more than 8,000 feet at points of Boca Ridge. It is a diverse landscape combining aspects of the eastern Sierra and the Great Basin, with virgin old-growth stands of Jeffrey pine and towering incense cedars more than 400 years old.

Mike Conner, project manager for the Nature Conservancy, said motorists speeding on busy Interstate 80 drive by oblivious to the rich, mountainous landscape nearby.

"You have no idea this treasure is back here," Conner said.