

Natural Heritage Institute: Building Capacity in the Sierra Nevada EcoRegion



The North Yuba River on a misty morning.



View of the South Yuba River.



Meadow in the Sierra Nevada.

Targeted Watersheds Capacity Building Grant

The Natural Heritage Institute (NHI), a nonprofit organization founded in 1989, focuses domestically and internationally on efforts to restore and protect the natural functions that support water-dependent ecosystems and the services they provide to sustain and enrich human life. Project partners include the Nevada Irrigation District, American Rivers, Sierra Nevada Alliance and the University of California at Davis.

Watershed Capacity Building Efforts

A Water Trust for the Sierra Nevada Region

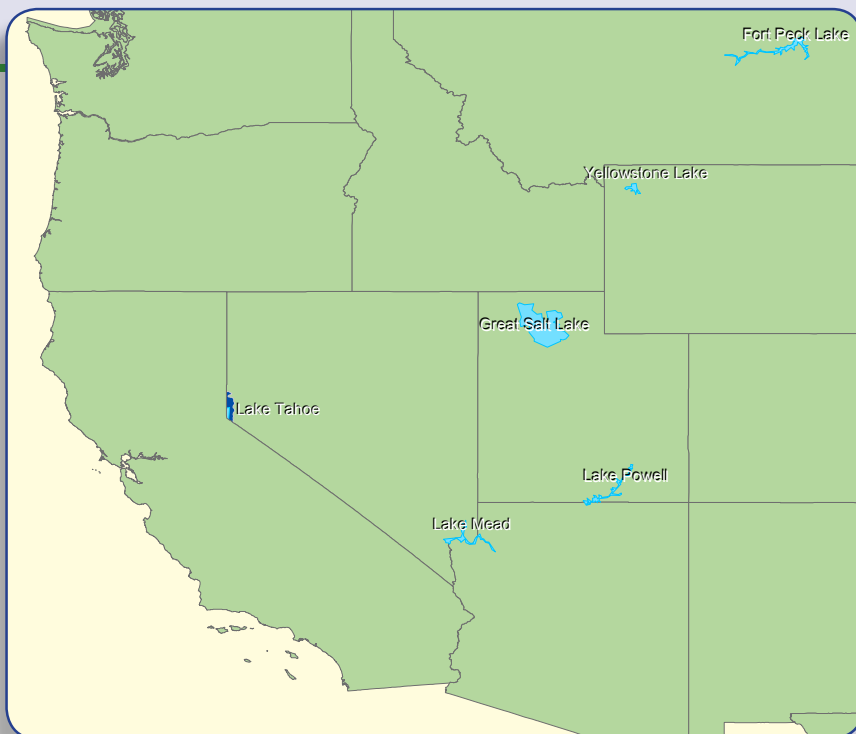
The rivers of the Sierra Nevada provide 60 percent of California's water supply and 25 percent of Nevada's. However, increasing population and development in the area are increasing the need to withdraw water from the rivers, limiting the in-stream flow available to aquatic ecosystems. There are over 10,000 individual holders of water rights in the Sierra Nevada region, many for small quantities. If a portion of the water rights could be reclaimed for strategic flow augmentation, then river stress could be managed, and the ecosystem services protected or restored. Water rights acquisition is well suited for headwater rivers and streams because adding even a small amount of additional flow in the right stream reaches at the right time can be critical to maintaining and improving river function. Acquiring a water right from the private sector and converting it to "trust water" has been successfully used in the Pacific Northwest to allocate water specifically for beneficial uses in perpetuity. NHI will look to replicate this successful approach in the Sierra Nevada region.

A Regional Water Trust Roundtable comprised of a broad group of stakeholders will be convened to guide the project and pro-

vide a forum for discussion. Watershed groups, water and power districts, land trusts, farming and economic interests, planning departments, and state and federal agencies will be invited to participate.

NHI and project partners will research existing water acquisition programs in other states to develop a Sierra model for trust water. The project partners will work with watershed organizations to identify the legal, institutional, and social barriers, as well as the incentives and benefits to water rights acquisition in the Sierra Nevada region of California and Nevada. To build organizational capacity, NHI will provide outreach strategies and share technical information and resources. NHI will also sponsor workshops on how to apply trust water approaches and assess flow augmentation needs. Participants will be trained in the use of The Nature Conservancy's Regime Prescription Tool, which allows users to build alternative hydrographs in real-time to analyze different flow scenarios.

Additionally, a mini-grant program will provide funding and technical assistance to three to five watershed organizations in the Sierra Nevada Ecoregion to assess the flow augmentation needs for habitat and water quality in their watersheds. Analysis of the river conditions, water quality factors, biodiversity, flow timing, etc. will help in the selection of priority reaches and identification of potential acquisition areas.



Location of the Natural Heritage Institute's work with trust waters and stream flow augmentation

For more information:

www.n-h-i.org

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EPA's Targeted Watersheds Grant program is a competitive grant program designed to encourage collaborative, community-driven approaches to meet clean water goals.

For more information about the selected watersheds, please visit:
<http://www.epa.gov/twg>

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