

The Truckee Meadows Restoration Project

The area near the Truckee River Regional Park was once a large, vibrant wetland, replaced by roads, parking lots, and development. Yet pockets of wetlands remain, fragmented and disconnected.

Believing that nature and humanity can thrive together, the Truckee River Watershed Council formed a partnership to develop the Truckee Meadows Restoration Project.

After six years of planning, the first phase of construction was completed in the summer of 2017 restoring wetlands north of Brockway Road. The result was more and better habitat for our birds and frogs, as well as less sediment entering the Truckee River.

A drive on Brockway Road now prompts the viewer to notice water flowing across a renewed wetland, promising to spring to life a once overlooked portion of our watershed.



BRENDA GILBERT

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1. Wetlands Restored

Problem: The meadow was fragmented and modified by urban development—it was crossed by roads, parking areas, ditches, and an irrigation pond. This resulted in a hydrologically altered meadow that provided poor habitat quality and contributed to erosion and sedimentation of the Truckee River.

Restoration Action: To restore hydrology and topography of the original wetland, we removed 7,000 cubic yards of fill, dispersed flows, and graded the sides of the pond.

Result: Water now spreads over the surface of the wetland that had long been dry. Habitat and ecological function are restored. Migratory birds visit the site. The pond continues to support golf course irrigation.

2. Stream Channel Reconnected

Problem: Rapid runoff through the floodplain caused sediment to enter the Truckee River, degrading fish habitat and threatening their food source (bugs).

Restoration Action: In addition to removing a concrete-lined ditch, we restored the floodplain topography by planting native willows and dispersing and slowing the stream's flow across the floodplain, which allows sediment to drop out before reaching the Truckee River.

Result: The restored floodplain now functions naturally, filtering sediment before it enters the Truckee River and supporting a wetland habitat.

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Volunteer to Change the Future

Everyone can be part of the solution.

Join a River Talk (and get the dirt on the Truckee). Like us, you love our river. And like us, you find it one of the most breathtaking places on earth to hike, fish, swim or simply gaze. But behind her natural beauty, the Truckee holds some disturbing secrets.

Come learn about The Truckee's troubled past—and why the watershed is the key to her future.

- Get a 'virtual tour' of restoration projects
- Meet fellow river-lovers
- Become part of the solution

Call Brenda at 530.550.8760, 5#

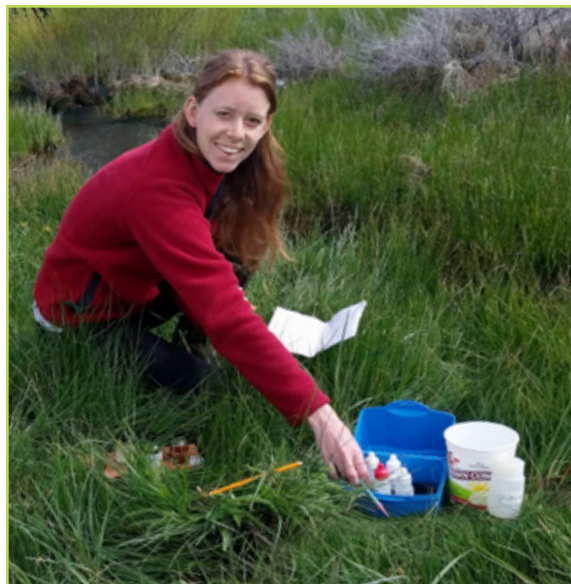
Be a Weed Warrior. Help prevent and control invasive weeds in the Truckee River watershed.

Non-native weeds can invade anywhere. Neighborhoods. Meadows. Wilderness. In fact, there are over 2,800 infestations of nearly 60 non-native invasive plant species in the Truckee River watershed. Call Matt at 530.550.8760, 6#

River-Friendly Landscaping. One ton. That's how much sediment and sludge runs off the average property in the Truckee area each year—degrading water quality, suffocating habitats and eroding riverbanks. Call us today to get a free site evaluation of your yard.

Call Eben at 530.550.8760, 7#

Adopt-A-Stream. It starts with the watershed and monitoring is a critical step! Participate in important biology and chemistry monitoring through our popular Adopt-A-Stream program. There are several ways to practice watershed science. We train and equip you.



Three simple steps to volunteer with the TRWC

STEP 1

Sign up for our newsletter, *Truckee River Currents*.

STEP 2

Find a program you're interested in and RSVP to the staff member.

STEP 3

Mark your calendar and join us!

Be a biologist:

- Collect aquatic organisms
- Learn field collection techniques and habitat assessment skills
- Learn about aquatic insects
- Identify benthic macroinvertebrates (BMIs)

Call Beth at 530.550.8760, 1#

Be a chemist:

- Monitor water temperature
- Measure conductivity
- Assess chemical pH readings
- Evaluate dissolved oxygen
- Measure turbidity
- Collect nutrient samples

Call Eben at 530.550.8760, 7#

River-Friendly Landscaping

Did you know...

Soil erosion and water runoff are the biggest contributors to water pollution in our rivers and streams. Join us in protecting the Truckee River watershed. Help improve water quality by controlling soil erosion and reduce water consumption by converting your thirsty lawn to a more efficient drought tolerant landscape.

Schedule a FREE evaluation of your property. A Conservation Assistant will design a plan and make site-specific recommendations to help reduce pollutants entering our waterways.

Homeowners who implement erosion control recommendations and/or convert lawns can receive up to \$3,000 in rebates (while funds last).

Call for an appointment today: 530.550.8760, 7#



FAERTHEN FELIX, UC BERKELEY SAGEHEN CREEK FIELD STATION

Ambassadors Are River Heroes

Ambassadors link their network of friends, family, co-workers and club members to us when they bring them to a River Talk—one hour of fun and information about the TRWC.

Will you be a 2018-2019 Ambassador?
Call Brenda 530.550.8760, 5#

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EBEN SWAIN

Thank you to the donors of the Truckee River Watershed Council and to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the State of California through the Department of Water Resources, and the State Water Resources Control Board.

Before, above: Bare soil at this Tahoe Donner home caused erosion.

After, right: The homeowners installed mulch and vegetation to protect the previously bare soil.



TAHOE QUARTERLY

Truckee River Watershed Council a Restorer of Wetlands

Local nonprofit has enjoyed much success since forming in 1996

By Vangela Wightman

Reprinted with permission. Tahoe Quarterly, Best of Tahoe 2018 – Environment. Vangela Wightman is a Truckee-based writer.

Jim Plehn spent transformative childhood summers on the edge of the Truckee River at Bear Rock, his family's riverfront cabin just a few miles west of Tahoe City. After moving to Bear Rock full time in the late 1960s, Plehn watched the nonstop summertime flow of river revelers float past his house on rafts, kayaks and the occasional giant rubber duck. Through the 1970s and '80s, his alarm grew as erosion and sediment damaged the microenvironment he had spent his life exploring and admiring.

As Plehn considered options to stifle the destabilizing impacts along his specific stretch of riverfront, he and friend Sara Trebilcock—an original owner of Truckee's Villager Nursery—landed on the notion of planting a "green fence" of willows and other water-loving, soil-stabilizing plants.

Functioning as both a trespassing deterrent and a riverbank stabilizer, the success of Plehn's green fence inspired him to share this idea with another friend, Alice Berg, a U.S. Forest Service employee.

Standing in Plehn's yard, the trio realized that the "green fence" approach could be implemented along other compromised stretches of the river via a well-organized and environmentally empathetic body of volunteers. Plehn recognized that while people were the problem, they were also the solution.

"One thing led to another and they created this volunteer event called Truckee River Day," says Brenda Gilbert, development director at the Truckee River Watershed Council. "They hoped maybe 75 people would show up, but 300 volunteers came ready to help."

The outpouring of community support confirmed that Plehn, Berg and Trebilcock were far from alone in their desire to improve and protect the watershed.

River Stewards

The Truckee River Watershed Council was born from the success of that inaugural volunteer day in 1996. The sole focus of the nonprofit is to return the watershed to a state of resiliency for generations to come, one stream, meadow and project at a time. Encapsulated under the recently adopted moniker "Foriver," the Watershed Council has become a well-connected entity, working with multiple government and environmental organizations, and a lengthy list of partners, and enjoying notable successes over the course of 23 years.

Volunteerism for Truckee River Day, the Watershed Council's most well-known public event, continues to thrive with about 400 annual participants. Groups meet up with project leaders not only on the banks of the Truckee River, but along tributary streams and creeks throughout the watershed for a day of erosion control work, water sampling, weed pulling and tree planting.

Traveling 121 miles and dropping 2,440 vertical feet from its source at Lake Tahoe to the mouth of Pyramid Lake, the Truckee River is a waterway curiosity. As an endorheic basin, it is part of a closed system with no outflow to the ocean. It also runs primarily north and east, a bit peculiar for a river west of the Continental Divide.

While the entire Truckee River watershed comprises over 3,000 square miles, the Watershed Council focuses on the middle watershed, an area of 435 square miles between the source at Lake Tahoe and the California–Nevada state line. Within these parameters, seven large bodies of water and 26 major tributaries empty into the river before it leaves the Golden State behind. Recreational activities combined with a century's worth of sedimentation from damaging and detrimental land-use practices have resulted in the United States Environmental Protection Agency classifying the Truckee River as a polluted waterway.

Working to reverse this designation, seven full-time staff members presently occupy the Watershed Council's office in downtown Truckee, and countless volunteers participate at various levels throughout the year. Funding is secured through grants and donations to support projects ranging in size from a one-day planting of sugar pines as part of Truckee River Day to large, multi-year undertakings such as the restoration of Perazzo Meadows.

A Wetland Restored

Located 15 miles north of Truckee, Perazzo Meadows endured the disruption of logging and road construction in the late 1800s. But it was the de-watering for grazing in a dairy operation sometime in the early 1900s that transformed the meadow from a thriving wetland to drier meadow habitat with an eroding stream channel. Water from the Little Truckee River and Perazzo Creek were diverted into a single concentrated channel, causing rapid erosion and habitat disruption. Native wetland vegetation, which

MATTHEW GRIMM

was historically inundated by water as the river overflowed its banks every year or two, subsequently dried up as the sustaining floods only occurred with large 10-year weather events.

In 2010, with painstakingly careful use of heavy equipment, native soil plugs were installed into the channel, restoring Perazzo Creek and the Little Truckee River to their original routes through the meadow. Eight years later, the results are like driving into a postcard.

Traveling along Henness Pass Road, west of Highway 89, Perazzo Meadows is now a lush, verdant expanse. A winding ribbon of fresh water snakes through native grasslands linking sapphire ponds, and wetlands teem with wildlife.

"Perazzo Meadows was part of a larger bird study that was done in the Tahoe National Forest and was identified as one of the only meadows where willow flycatcher populations were not declining," says Gilbert, highlighting one of many successful project outcomes.

One Project at a Time

A more recent project that not only enjoys greater public visibility but speaks to the origin of the Watershed Council itself is F4M, or the First 4 Miles.

Decades of recreational activity between Tahoe City and River Ranch has taken an undeniable toll on the river environment, undercutting banks, killing vegetation and increasing sediment. In an effort to counter these effects, the Watershed Council worked hand-in-hand with the Forest Service and Tahoe City Public Utility District through the fall of 2016.

Staging areas for recreational pursuits were designed and installed in four locations; 1,200 feet of heavily eroded riverbank was stabilized with logs, root wads and boulders; and 3,000 square feet of meadow plants were re-established along with native fish habitat. Regular users of the bike path and summertime river floaters will not only notice the improvements, but will contribute themselves by using the intended access points along the way, leaving the remaining riverbank to heal and flourish.

Gilbert describes the culture of the Watershed Council as positive, well informed and considerate of community factors. Council staff and leadership focus resources and energy on what can be accomplished relative to a given situation and are unswayed by potential project shortcomings or unachievable ideals.

"We understand that our economy is better supported by a healthy watershed, and we don't try to work against it; we try to work alongside it," Gilbert says. "We work from a position of knowledge and science and don't haphazardly wander around and find things to fix. We've done assessments of our watershed, basin by basin. This allows us to identify and prioritize projects and put them in the pipeline, setting them up for an optimal outcome."

The Watershed Council recently outlined and implemented its 50:10 campaign strategy—"50 projects in 10 years"—and currently has several projects of varying sizes underway.

"Fifty projects in 10 years gets us a really long way toward our overarching goal of having a fully functioning, resilient watershed," says Gilbert.

Work can be seen at the Middle Martis Wetland project along Highway 267 near Northstar; the Truckee Meadows Restoration Project adjacent the Truckee rodeo grounds; and, soon to begin, the McIver Dairy Meadow Restoration, a seasonal wetland that also hosts an informal but popular wintertime sled hill in Truckee's Gateway neighborhood.

Get Involved

Volunteer options contributing to watershed restoration efforts are numerous. Those looking to help can download the Invasive Weeds brochure from the Watershed Council's website and join the Weed Warrior program, which strives to remove invasive plants. The Adopt-A-Stream water-monitoring program guides volunteers as they chart water temperature, collect aquatic organisms and measure sediment levels.

River Talk presentations are regularly scheduled at the organization's office to provide a general lowdown on restoration projects, and free property evaluations and landscape assessments are available to homeowners to ensure that the runoff from private parcels is not contributing to water-quality degradation. And, of course, the nonprofit's cornerstone event, Truckee River Day, is scheduled for October 14.

The piece-by-piece restoration approach of the Truckee River Watershed Council is intended to re-establish healthier microenvironments over time, allowing for enriched habitat, reintroducing a diversity of plant and animal species, and bolstering a watershed more capable of successfully adapting to change.

What does the community at large get out of all this work? One could argue that when the natural environment is functioning at its best, so are the humans inhabiting it. As Calvin Coolidge wrote, "Remember that nature is your great restorer." The work of the Watershed Council is actively and positively enhancing the symbiotic relationship between nature and man, and with each successful project and rejuvenated landscape, it demonstrates how we must be nature's great restorer as well.



Left: The First 4 Miles Restoration Project between Tahoe City and River Ranch during construction.

Opposite page: After restoration efforts by the Truckee River Watershed Council, Perazzo Meadows north of Tahoe is now a thriving wetland once again.

Members of the Together for the Truckee Society pledge a minimum of \$1,000 a year for five years toward our long-term sustainability. We deeply appreciate their confidence in our restoration and protection projects.

PRESERVE THE WATERSHED – \$10,000 A YEAR FOR 5 YEARS

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Stream by Stream, Meadow by Meadow, Project by Project

2018 is a busy year for us!

10 restoration projects across the watershed are moving ahead to improve water quality, habitat, and resiliency of the natural system.



In the **Big Chief Corridor**, which includes many sub-basins along Highway 89 between Lake Tahoe and Truckee, we're conducting archeology and botanical surveys to prepare for project design. We will also implement erosion control

measures on 18 miles of dirt roads to reduce the amount of sediment flowing into nearby waterways.

In **Coldstream Canyon** we're designing several restoration projects to stabilize degraded stream channels, enhance wetland habitat, and reduce erosion from dirt roads.

Construction continues at the **Dry Creek** Restoration project where we plan to restore a large meadow, repair an eroding streambank, and remove obsolete roads. Another project in the Dry Creek watershed will treat over 100 acres of forest to increase resiliency to fire, disease, and climate change.

Construction of the **East Martis Creek** Restoration project begins this summer to reduce erosion and sedimentation and improve water flow across the landscape.

In **Johnson Canyon** we're working to reduce erosion by decommissioning abandoned roads and improve habitat and water quality by decompacting and vegetating several sites.



Near **Sagehen Creek** we're restoring degraded fen (a type of wetland) and wetland habitat.

Vegetation monitoring and wetland delineation will be conducted as part of the pre-project monitoring for our **Sardine Meadow** Restoration project. This project will restore 350 acres of meadow that has been heavily impacted by the railroad, roads, and grazing.

For more information about our work to protect the watershed, join us for a River Talk (see page 2).

The Truckee Meadows Restoration Project

Continued from page 1

3. Stream Crossing Stabilized

Problem: The stream that was fed by the meadow had been redirected and forced to flow along a road, causing erosion and impaired water quality.

Restoration Action: We returned the channel to its natural alignment and built a sustainable crossing for the road.

Result: The stream's new alignment has enhanced its seasonal drainage and prevented sediment from reaching the Truckee River, leading to improved conditions for fish and bugs.

The aerial photo above indicates the best locations from which to view each phase of the project.



Project Partners: Tahoe-Truckee Sanitation Agency, Town of Truckee, Truckee Donner Land Trust, Truckee Donner Public Utility District, Truckee-Donner Recreation and Park District, Truckee Sanitary District, Truckee Tahoe Airport District

All partners provided funding. Additional funding came from Donors of the Truckee River Watershed Council, California Department of Conservation, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Community Foundation of Western Nevada – Truckee River Fund, Lahontan Community Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation.

For more information, contact Matt at 530.550.8760, 6#