
Schwarzenegger comes to Truckee to announce Sierra conservation partnership

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California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger strode along the shoreline of Donner Lake Wednesday morning, stepped up to a microphone in front of a small crowd and delivered good news for the Sierra Nevada.

Surrounded by environmental leaders from Truckee, Nevada and Placer counties, Schwarzenegger told a small crowd that a partnership of private donors has put up \$25 million for conservation efforts in the northern Sierra Nevada.

The money, which officials hope will grow to \$100 million in private funds matched by up to \$400 million in public dollars, will finance a broad effort to buy, or otherwise preserve, 100,000 acres of private property, and help the mountain range face the looming threat of climate change.

"Future generations from far and wide will come and enjoy the Sierra Nevada just the way it is today," said Schwarzenegger. "While we are faced with great challenges today — economic challenges, simultaneously we should not lose sight of long-lasting issues like protecting the environment."

The Northern Sierra Nevada Partnership is currently funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Morgan Family Foundation.

The partners include the Truckee Donner Land Trust, the Sierra Business Council, the Feather River Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land.

"We're talking about a conservation effort on a scale similar to the creation of Yosemite National Park," said Perry Norris, the executive director of the Truckee Donner Land Trust.

The partnership area spans from Lake Tahoe at its southern end up the Sierra Nevada to Lassen Volcanic National Park in the north.

"The West has already seen huge development pressure, but today we're facing perhaps the greatest threat — climate change," said Rhea Suh, western conservation program officer with the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. "We need to manage for resiliency."

Alex Mas, executive director of the Northern Sierra Partnership, said the group's five goals include protecting lakes, rivers, and wetlands; connect and manage healthy forests; enhance the well being of local economies and communities; adapting to and mitigating climate change; and creating a long-term culture of conservation.

Green economy

The partners say the effort will not only preserve the mountain range's natural resources, but create local jobs and a sustainable environment.

"The 20th century was about using natural resources; the 21st century will be about restoring natural resources" said Steve Frisch, president of the Sierra Business Council.

Frisch said one of those green sources of revenue, the creation and sale of carbon credits, will be aided by the new partnership.

“We anticipate the Northern Sierra Partnership assisting in funding some of those projects,” Frisch said. “We’ll be both working on carbon sequestration and retaining water later in the year.”

Carbon sequestration will create revenue for sustainable land management – including responsible logging he said.

Alex Mas, executive director of the new partnership, said these services will be invaluable to California, as 65 percent of the state’s water and about 50 percent of its timber come from the Sierra Nevada.

Why the northern Sierra?

Compared to the southern Sierra, where more than 90 percent of the land above 3,000 feet is protected, nearly half of the northern Sierra is not.

Tahoe National Forest Supervisor Tom Quinn said one of the most important effects of the Northern Sierra Partnership will be tying up the jumbled land ownership patterns – a checkerboard of public and private holdings.

“If any additional intermingled lands can be brought under a conservation easement or public ownership, from my perspective, that’s a good thing,” Quinn said.

Nevada County Supervisor Ted Owens said he was pleased to see the collaboration that created the partnership, but he is somewhat concerned about land conservation taking property off of local government’s tax rolls.

“Every little bit hits us,” said Owens. “We need to find a way to keep rural counties whole while protecting these resources.”

Creating a cohesive land ownership pattern is something members of the new partnership like the Truckee Donner Land Trust and the Trust for Public Land have already been working towards for years.

“With Waddle Ranch we raised \$2.5 million in a capital campaign towards the \$23.5 million total – with the Northern Sierra Partnership all five partners are raising \$100 million,” said Dave Sutton director of the Trust for Public Land. “When we first talked about the checkerboard people said it was fanciful. Now it’s plausible.”

The partnership comes at a critical time too, he said.

“Next time the economy takes off if we haven’t solved the land ownership pattern we will be hard pressed,” Sutton said. “We think we have about a five-year window.”

Meet the partners

- **Truckee Donner Land Trust:** Working in the greater Truckee area, the Truckee Donner Land Trust has led major land preservation efforts including Schallenberger Ridge, Waddle Ranch, and Perazzo Meadows.
- **Feather River Land Trust:** Focused on the largest watershed in the Sierra, the Feather River land Trust conserves, manages, and restores land within 2.4 million acres that provided water to 60 percent of the state’s population.
- **Trust for Public Land:** A national nonprofit conservation group, the Trust for Public Land has worked in 47 states to protect more than 2.5 million acres of land through more than 3,500 conservation deals.
- **Sierra Business Council:** Taking a holistic approach towards not only the environment but also community vitality and economic prosperity in the Sierra Nevada, the Sierra Business Council helped permanently protect 30,000 acres in the Sierra Valley, much of it on working ranches.
- **The Nature Conservancy:** The Nature Conservancy has protected more than 117 million acres of land, 5,000 miles of rivers, and operates more than 100 marine conservation projects around the world.