

# nevada update

FALL 2022

YOUR  
NEVADA  
NEWS

## Creating a World Where People and Nature Thrive

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Public Lands

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The Nature  
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**Mauricia M.M. Baca**  
NEVADA STATE DIRECTOR



*Nevada Update* is the biannual newsletter for friends of The Nature Conservancy in Nevada. If you have questions or feedback, please contact Sara Cobble at [sara.cobble@tnc.org](mailto:sara.cobble@tnc.org).

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**ON THE COVER** Fall at River Fork Ranch Preserve © Chip Carroon/TNC; **THIS PAGE** Mauricia M.M. Baca © James Lavish; Aspens in the Toiyabe Range © Chip Carroon/TNC; Mule deer at River Fork Ranch Preserve © John Axtell; Celebration at Whit Hall Interpretive Center at River Fork Ranch Preserve © Chip Carroon/TNC; **OPPOSITE PAGE** Wire lettuce © Len Warren; Swamp cedars © Chip Carroon/TNC.

# DEAR FRIENDS,

**T**ogether, we find a way.

The Nature Conservancy was founded by a group of people looking for a solution to a problem bigger than any one of them could solve. Together, they did find a solution, and they protected an important river gorge in their neighborhood.

But, in doing so, they realized that they couldn't — they shouldn't — stop there. Other habitat was at risk and they wanted to see if more people wanted to partner to solve other and even bigger problems.

Fast forward almost seven decades and TNC is still doing the work in the same way: across common grounds and great divides, with both cutting-edge science and age-old wisdom. Now we partner with communities here in Nevada and across the globe to overcome barriers to addressing the climate and biodiversity crises.

The issues we seek to solve through science and collaboration are still local:

- How do we ensure that a green energy transition doesn't compromise the desert valleys we love that are critical habitat for wildlife?
- How do we ensure that land managers have native seeds so we can restore iconic landscapes like the Sagebrush Sea and keep them resilient to wildfires?
- How do we ensure that there is enough water — for people and nature — above and below ground?

We understand now that the answers we find in Nevada may help other states and countries with similar landscapes and similar development pressures. By doing the work locally, we are making a difference globally, and contributing to planet-sized solutions for planet-sized problems.

Together, we find the people and paths to make change happen, no matter the odds. Even when the future we seek feels far away, we believe that a world where both people and nature thrive is possible.

As a supporter of TNC, you are part of the solution. Thank you — we couldn't do this work without you. I hope this newsletter reminds you of the good that you are doing and helps you feel hopeful about the solutions that we are finding together.



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You can use highly appreciated assets to set up gifts that create an annuity for your lifetime, allow you to retain control of your assets during your lifetime, reduce tax burdens for heirs, avoid capital gains taxes and support the future work for The Nature Conservancy in Nevada.

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# Seeds of Hope

for Nevada's public lands

**Millions of pounds of seeds** are spread every year in Nevada to restore and rehabilitate public lands that have been burned by wildfires or disturbed by human uses. And millions of dollars are spent by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to procure these seeds. However, most of these seeds aren't from around here. Many are introduced forage species, and even the seeds native to the West have been grown in conditions different from our unique hot, dry climate, meaning they have a smaller chance of survival.

When Kevin Badik, rangeland ecologist with The Nature Conservancy in Nevada, thinks about successful restoration, he pictures diverse rangelands clothed in perennial grasses, shrubs and wildflowers, including colorful varieties of native plants. But all too often, our public lands are the alternative: a monoculture of bare dirt and a sea of annual invasive grasses like cheatgrass.

As wildfires, fueled in part by climate change, become increasingly larger and more catastrophic, conditions are right for cheatgrass to move in. And when cheatgrass takes over, burned areas don't recover on their own, creating a cycle in which fires repeatedly burn the same areas. These lands have little hope of recovering their biodiversity unless they receive the right seeds that can help them become more resilient and recover from these disturbances and stressors.

"A lot of restoration practitioners talk about having the right

seed in the right place at the right time," Badik says. "One of the things we're focused on is making sure we have enough of the right seed to achieve our goals."

Native plants are important for restoration because they are adapted to local conditions, which is especially important in some of Nevada's hottest and driest places. Seeds that are genetically appropriate and locally adapted are 2.7 times more likely to survive and establish than seeds that are from the same species but adapted to different conditions, and they often come with competitive traits that increase their chances of survival.

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**I'm excited at the idea of restoring diverse, resilient places...We're closer than we have been before.**

**KEVIN BADIK**, Rangeland Ecologist, TNC in Nevada

"The right mix of native seeds can help make lands more diverse and resilient," says Liz Munn, Resilient Public Lands strategy director for The Nature Conservancy

in Nevada. "They can help support wildlife, recreation and multiple uses of landscapes. They can help reduce the risk of wildfire, support pollinators and increase carbon storage."

## **Building a restoration economy**

However, there's a challenge to achieving a future of resilient lands covered in native plants: the sheer amount of plant materials needed for restoration to keep up with threats like wildfire and invasive annual species. Currently, the supply of native seeds in Nevada isn't large enough to keep up with the demand, and stabilizing the native seed market is an essential



THIS PAGE Field scientist © Brady Holden; OPPOSITE PAGE Sagebrush in the Black Rock Desert © Chip Carroon/TNC.

step for long-term success.

To help solve this problem, Badik, Munn and partners recently completed a two-year project funded by a BLM Cooperative Agreement to quantify seed needs over the next 10 years for a large 13-million-acre BLM district, Carson City. The study aimed to develop a process that can be replicated for other BLM districts to assess their native plant seed needs. Key components include delivering seed menus to land managers that they can use to develop and order seed mixes for on-the-ground restoration, and providing industry leaders and policymakers with information about the future demand for native plant materials to improve how available and effective they are in the future.

“Now that we have identified the types of seeds we want, the next steps are to reduce the bottlenecks for producing those seeds in the large quantities needed for good restoration,” Munn says. “What we’re trying to do is build a restoration economy.”

nonprofits, conservation districts and the University of Nevada, Reno. The NNSP has been working together since 2016 to increase the availability and use of genetically appropriate seed to restore diverse plant communities and sustainable landscapes across the state.

The next steps are part of TNC’s ongoing work with the Nevada Native Seed Partnership (NNSP), a coalition of 11 federal and state agencies,

To support a thriving native seed market in Nevada, we must support every step of the seed cycle, Badik says.

“We need to consider all the support infrastructure that needs to go into seeding,” he says. “You don’t just get seed and grow it and put it on the landscape. You need to collect the right seed, you need to grow it so you have enough, you need to harvest it with people and equipment, the seed then needs to be cleaned until it’s stored and used, and then it needs to be delivered. We sometimes focus on the seed itself, not on all the parts of the supply chain. To go from collection to delivery, there’s a lot of things in between, and if you’re going to do a lot of seeding, you need to make sure the capacity is there.”

### Bringing back biodiversity

The timing is right to grow Nevada’s native seed market. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in 2021 and the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022 will bring a lot of funding for restoration to the Great Basin. But having the right restoration materials in addition to funding is the key to success, Badik says.

“We have a real opportunity with real money to be able to increase our investment, but you can’t increase your investment if you have a bad stock,” he says.

Once a quality seed supply is assured, TNC and partners plan to refine the process so it can be replicated across the state and the Great Basin, and eventually the Sagebrush Sea and beyond, a prospect that gives both Badik and Munn hope for the future of the West’s large landscapes.

“I’m excited at the idea of restoring diverse, resilient places,” Badik says. “We’ve been limited for a long time by technology and practices that haven’t gotten us all the way there, and I think that we’re close to being able to start doing this in a way that can break this cycle of cheatgrass and fire. We’re closer than we have been before.”

“So much of this work is about bringing in more diversity—it’s about diversity of perspectives, of species, of people,” Munn says. “When we incorporate diversity, we do better and we get a better outcome. To me, success is seeing substantially more native seed become available and used effectively in restoration.”



A RESTORATION ECONOMY Supporting a thriving native seed market in Nevada requires investing in every step of the seed cycle, from collection to restoration. © BLM PCRCP



LEARN MORE about the Nevada Native Seed Partnership at [tinyurl.com/nvseeds](https://tinyurl.com/nvseeds).



# Creating a More Resilient Future

## *for a River in Crisis*

**The drought in the Colorado River Basin** and its impacts are in the headlines across the country. TNC is the only non-profit working within and across all of the basin states and Mexico. We are developing on-the-ground solutions and influencing key policy measures to ensure that nature and people thrive. We have a critical window between now and 2026 to accelerate our work and increase climate and drought resilience with a focus on three key areas:

### **1 Accelerating Innovation** by:

- Ensuring nature has a seat at the table in the urgent policy negotiations that will determine the future of water security in the basin.
- Conserving more water through partnerships with a farmers while also strengthening their livelihoods.
- Advancing science and testing new approaches to increase drought resilience through better forest management and wetland and stream restoration.

### **2 Scaling up Solutions That Work** by:

- Investing and expanding projects that increase long-term drought and climate resilience through policy changes, nature-based solutions, reducing water use and water infrastructure improvements.
- Negotiating urgent water leases and sharing agreements that provide short-term relief for thirsty rivers.

### **3 Leveraging Private Funds** by doubling or tripling the impact of donor gifts:

- Using private donations as needed matching funds to unlock the unprecedented opportunity to direct federal money to TNC priorities.
- Leveraging private gifts to conduct early-stage project development and design so that we can take advantage of federal funding, which supports “shovel-ready” proposals.

**LEARN MORE** and help support our work by visiting [nature.org/coloradoriver](https://nature.org/coloradoriver) or emailing [kristen.mcinnis@tnc.org](mailto:kristen.mcinnis@tnc.org).

## Identifying Stressors and Threats to Nevada's Groundwater-Dependent Ecosystems

Though it's largely out of sight, groundwater is critical for biodiversity. It provides drinking water, helps grow food and provides other needs for a healthy planet. Nevada has many ecosystems that depend on this precious groundwater, and they provide essential habitat for important species like sage-grouse and mule deer, migratory birds, and rare endemic species like the Devils Hole pupfish that exist nowhere else in the world. These groundwater-dependent ecosystems (GDEs) also supply water for people, industry and agriculture.

Three years ago, we completed a map and database of Nevada's GDEs, in order to help identify threats to these ecosystems and develop strategies to protect them.

In consultation with managers and scientists, we recently completed the second step: a report that identifies stressors and threats to Nevada's GDEs. These stressors and threats are organized into five themes: groundwater withdrawals, climate, ungulates, non-native species and additional impacts due to human development.

We developed statewide maps for each of these risks using the best available data to help managers and interested parties understand where GDEs are most at risk and what design management interventions might be helpful. The next step will be to use these data to consider strategies for managing and restoring GDEs to help us prioritize our actions to sustain them.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS from the report



**More than 70 percent** of wetlands, phreatophyte (plants that can tap into groundwater with their roots) communities and lakes and playas are at high risk for potential groundwater withdrawals.



In the future, **all of Nevada is projected to have more "droughty" conditions**, meaning that all GDEs will have less water available from the atmosphere in the future, and especially those in southern Nevada.



**LEARN MORE** About our work on groundwater at [tinyurl.com/nvgroundwater](https://tinyurl.com/nvgroundwater).

## Protecting the Truckee River Watershed

*Partners form a 10-year agreement to safeguard forests and drinking water*

The Truckee River watershed is life for people and nature in Nevada. It supports threatened and endangered species and provides approximately 85 percent of the water supply for over 400,000 people and 7,000 businesses in Reno-Sparks. The river flows through the traditional lands of the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada and terminates on the lands of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe.

To help protect the river, The Nature Conservancy is partnering with the U.S. Forest Service, the National Forest Foundation, Truckee Meadows Water Authority and the Truckee River Watershed Council on a middle Truckee River forest partnership. Collectively, TNC and our partners own or manage 29,000 of the 60,000 acres needed for effective planning and restoration.

Together, we are developing a 10-year vegetation management strategy to: improve and restore forest health and resilience, reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire, protect communities from wildfire impacts, protect and secure water supplies and infrastructure and increase the pace and scale of our work.



The Nature Conservancy has been working to advance healthy forest management in the Middle Truckee River for years. Our science demonstrates there is a high likelihood of intense wildfire in the area absent the important work this public private partnership intends to tackle.

**MICKY HAZELWOOD**, NEVADA CONSERVATION DIRECTOR, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY



# Nevada's Clean Energy Future

*There is a remarkable transition underway* that seemingly gains momentum daily. The sudden speed at which the United States is moving to address the climate crisis is impressive and essential for curtailing greenhouse gas emissions and avoiding the worst effects from climate change. Catalyzing the movement toward cleaner power and a more connected energy grid are national and State Renewable Portfolio Standards and Goals, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. These driving forces are mandating and incentivizing state, local and private investments in climate infrastructure. The result is unprecedented financial investments in renewable energy generation projects, battery storage, carbon capture and storage and electrical grid modernization.

Nevada is at the center of the transition. Our abundant solar and geothermal energy resources make it among the most attractive states for clean energy investments. Nevada also has the goal of becoming net-zero by 2050. To meet this goal and the demand from neighboring states like California for carbon-free energy, some experts predict there could be as much as 16 gigawatts of new renewable energy permitted in Nevada by 2030 — enough to power 12 million homes. Processes are also already underway to permit and construct more than 1,000 miles of new electrical transmission lines across the state connecting these new clean energy projects. These changes would occur almost entirely on public lands.

As the transition accelerates, the need for a plan to guide action becomes more urgent. Without one, projects intended to mitigate the effects of climate change could take over the landscapes that nature and people rely upon for climate resilience. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions at the expense of clean air, fresh water, biodiversity, outdoor recreation opportunities and the sacred places of indigenous peoples is neither wise nor sustainable. Ultimately, the smartest plan is one that balances the clean energy transition with the protection of conservation values so that nature and people adapt and thrive in a changing climate. Now more than ever, and in Nevada as much as any other state, there is a need for a smart-from-the-start approach to guide the state's energy and infrastructure transformation.

By definition, a smart plan is one that uses good judgement to inform future decisions. The alternative is an unplanned, ad hoc proliferation of individual projects for which there is no way of knowing their incremental and cumulative impacts on land, water, wildlife and cultural values. Smart-from-the-start energy and infrastructure planning considers the implications of converting open spaces to industrial land uses and directs those uses towards previously developed areas or places with the least potential for harm to natural resources and communities. This approach reduces conflicts and impacts by identifying and incentivizing lower-impact sites upfront so development and conservation can proceed in tandem.



With our Mining the Sun program, we are catalyzing opportunities to build renewable energy on mine lands, brownfields and other disturbed sites. Building projects on these sites avoids conversion of other undeveloped habitat and open spaces. Reusing and revitalizing sites previously impacted by mining or other industrial activity also creates new economic opportunities with benefits to local communities and tribal nations.

New data from TNC's Power of Place-West report is available to inform smart-from-the-start planning in Nevada and throughout the west. The report concludes there is an adequate supply of low impact land in the west to meet the region's net-zero energy goals by 2050. Importantly, a smart-from-the-start approach ensures the economic and social

costs and benefits from renewable energy buildout are shared equitably among communities. This requires a holistic evaluation of energy and infrastructure build-out statewide, early and frequent coordination with community partners and an understanding of where and under what conditions projects will have maximum benefits while minimizing community and environmental impacts.

As smart-from-the-start energy planning gains momentum, Nevada is poised to be the model of a successful transition to an integrated, equitable, sustainable, clean energy future. This is great news for the climate, nature and people in Nevada.



**LEARN MORE** about our work on smart renewable energy siting and how you can help at [nature.org/miningthesunnv](https://nature.org/miningthesunnv).

## A Historic Investment and a decade of economic benefits



**\$445M**

generated each year  
in value added



**5,200**

jobs created annually



**10**

years of jobs created



**\$62M**

generated in local, state  
and federal taxes annually

**In August, President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) into law, making it the most significant climate change legislation in our nation's history. This historic investment in climate infrastructure will reduce carbon dioxide emissions 40 percent by 2030 while unlocking the promise of innovative, cleaner industries and the jobs that come with them.**

TNC supported this bill because it will benefit our communities and economies. We advocated for provisions in the bill, including tax credits on renewable energy projects that are built on brownfields and mine lands, and a 10 percent tax credit booster for building on these sites was included in the final bill. This policy will help advance our Mining the Sun program and encourage smart-from-the-start siting throughout our state, which will support our climate targets while protecting our precious public lands, desert and sagebrush valleys.

The whole suite of policies also means significant economic benefits for Nevada. To find out just how much, we asked BW Research Partnership, an independent economic research firm, to analyze the economic impacts of the \$370 billion in federal investments created by the IRA, including clean energy tax credits, infrastructure investments, transportation and building electrification investments and reforestation and conservation grants. In Nevada, the anticipated \$4 billion in federal climate investments will sustain 5,200 jobs annually for 10 years, with almost half of these jobs coming from the Agriculture & Forestry sector. More than \$445 million is generated in value added each year for 10 years from these policies, with \$231 million in employee compensation and \$62 million in local, state and federal taxes. Learn more and read the full report at [nature.org/nvclimate](https://nature.org/nvclimate).

# remembering Sam McMullen

**We are mourning Sam McMullen:** lawyer, lobbyist and longtime trustee of The Nature Conservancy in Nevada, who passed away last May at the age of 72.

TNC in Nevada would not be where we are today without Sam, who was with us since our beginning. He was instrumental in establishing the chapter in 1984 and was an early board member, along with Bill Douglass, Joe Brown and others. He was Board Chair in 1996 and, after a hiatus, returned to serve as a board member from 2018 until his death.

Sam was born and raised in Elko, a place he maintained a deep connection with long after leaving. His great-great-grandfather left Ireland in the 1860s to settle in Elko, and Sam's family owned a ranch there, where he lived until he began college at the University of Nevada, Reno.

From these roots, Sam built a substantial conservation legacy in Nevada. A respected lawyer and lobbyist, Sam helped pass the first conservation easement legislation in the state. He also helped pass legislation that put Question 5 on the ballot: a statewide, high-profile, first-of-its-kind endeavor that ultimately raised \$47 million for parks, wildlife and open space. When the desert tortoise was listed as an endangered species in 1993, Sam assisted with legislation to support and pass a habitat conservation plan. His introductions to influential Nevadans laid the foundation for generous philanthropic support that continues to this day.

"Sam may be gone, but he will not be forgotten: His legacy will live on in the places, programs and spirit of The Nature Conservancy in Nevada," said Dave Livermore, founding state director of TNC in Nevada and current state director for TNC in Utah. "Sam was a friend-raiser—he made more friends for TNC in Nevada than most anyone I know. He had an amazing way with people, and was always willing to lend a hand."

Sam was well-known in the Nevada legislature; there are few policy issues with which he wasn't involved over the last 40-plus years. After earning his J.D. from Georgetown University, he started his own lobbying firm, The McMullen Strategic Group, in 1990, serving most recently as Chairman and Chief Strategic Officer. He also worked as an adjunct

professor at the William S. Boyd School of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

He often shared his extensive experience and expertise in Nevada politics with TNC staff, and his insights helped shape our conservation agenda. He was an integral part of our development committee and helped establish our external affairs committee; in both committees, he assisted with recruiting new, connected board members. He was also famous for asking great questions. Sam is remembered by our staff and trustees for always bringing his brilliant marketing mind, fundraising expertise and unique perspective to our board meetings. He was a trusted source of innovative ideas to promote our work and share our vision with the public.



"Sam was one of the good guys, across Nevada and within TNC," said Joel Laub, chair of the Board of Trustees for TNC in Nevada. "He constantly said that he wasn't a fundraiser and would then fill our meetings with some of the best ideas for fundraising that we've ever heard! I always knew that any meeting Sam attended would be interesting because he asked such great questions, always from his unique perspective in government relations and as a lobbyist. Hearing his take added tremendous value to any topic."

Sam's passion for service came from his deep Nevada roots and desire to preserve the state's beauty and resources for future generations, said Mary-Ellen McMullen, his wife of 48 years. In addition to his work with TNC, Sam helped establish the Western Folklife Center, home of Cowboy Poetry, and he served on its board of directors.

"The most important thing to know about Sam is that he was a fourth-generation Nevadan," Mary-Ellen said. "At the heart of everything that he was involved in, whether it be his paid work or his volunteer activities, he always was concerned about things that would benefit his home state of Nevada and make it a better place."

Sam leaves behind his two children, Sam and Erin, and granddaughter Mia, a sixth-generation Nevadan. He is remembered by his family for being a wonderful father, husband and family man. His love of travel and exploring parts unknown often took the family on spontaneous trips



*[Sam's] legacy will live on in the places, programs and spirit of The Nature Conservancy in Nevada.*

DAVE LIVERMORE, Founding State Director, TNC in Nevada

OPPOSITE PAGE Sam McMullen at The Nature Conservancy's Western Trustee Summit in 2019 © Courtesy Dave Livermore; THIS PAGE Lamoille Canyon © Simon Williams/TNC.

to destinations like Petra and Easter Island. But he also had favorite places closer to home, such as Lamoille Canyon near Elko and Marlette Lake above Lake Tahoe, another place close to his heart that he supported through the Tahoe Fund.

"Sam was a force for Nevada and for the chapter," said Mauricia Baca, state director for TNC in Nevada. "He always brought passion, energy and positivity to his work with TNC and was focused on helping us achieve our mission to ensure that people and nature thrive in Nevada."




From the bottom of our hearts, we send our condolences to his family, friends and all who love him. Thank you for being such a big part of so many lives and making such a difference for nature in Nevada, Sam.

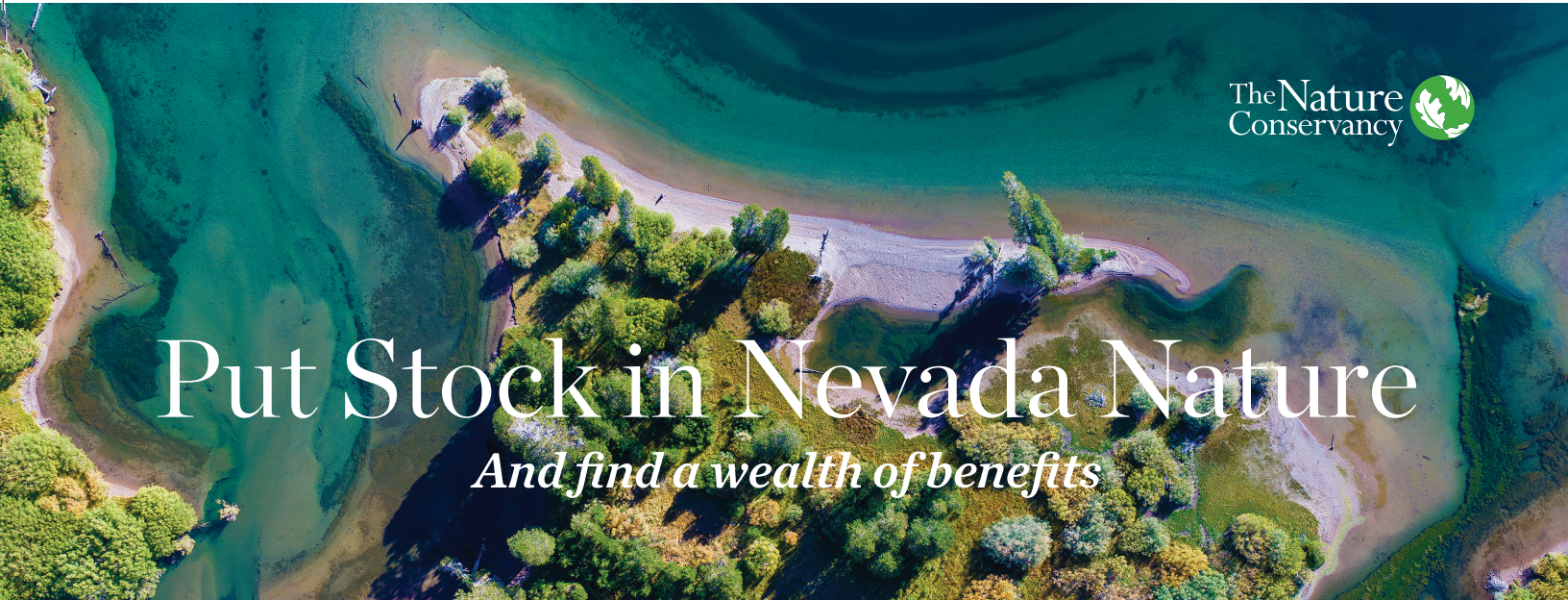


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