



River Fork Ranch Preserve © Chip Carroon

What are GDEs? Groundwater-dependent ecosystems (GDEs) are natural communities that rely on groundwater for all or part of their water needs.

Learn More

- **Nevada's groundwater**
nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/nevada/stories-in-nevada/groundwater/
- **Nevada iGDE database**
nature.org/NVgde
- **Stressors and threats to Nevada's GDEs**
groundwaterresourcehub.org/where-we-work/nevada/nevada-gde-stressor-threat/

Addressing Nevada's overused groundwater supplies

Groundwater rights retirement

During the 2025 legislative season, Nevada passed two critical water bills, **Assembly Bill 104 (AB 104)** and **Senate Bill 36 (SB 36)**, to help protect and manage the state's groundwater. These laws established the Nevada Voluntary Water Rights Retirement Program, which enables water rights holders, including farmers and ranchers, to voluntarily sell their rights to the state. Once purchased, these rights are permanently retired, meaning the water can no longer be pumped. This helps reduce overuse in areas where more water is being taken out of the ground than is naturally replenished.

The program is especially important because groundwater levels are consistently declining in many parts of the state, indicating that more water is being used than is actually available. By retiring some of these rights, the state can help stabilize aquifers, protect ecosystems, and save water for future generations. While the program is a major step forward, finding financial support will be crucial to its success.

Why Groundwater Rights Retirement Matters

Groundwater is a vital resource for many Nevada communities and ecosystems. Many of Nevada's groundwater-dependent ecosystems (GDEs) like springs, wetlands, and riparian habitats are at risk. Because most GDEs don't have monitoring wells nearby, TNC used modeling to estimate groundwater trends at GDEs across the state.

[The results show](#) that about 44% of GDEs are likely experiencing groundwater declines near them, which threaten the plants, animals, and communities that rely on them.

Groundwater isn't just an environmental issue. In 2015, [half of Nevada's counties relied on groundwater for more than 80% of their water supply](#). This highlights the crucial role groundwater plays in providing drinking water, supporting agriculture and recreation, and sustaining industry across the state.

What the New Laws Do

In June 2025, Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo signed Senate Bill 36 (SB 36) and Assembly Bill 104 (AB 104) into law, creating the Nevada Voluntary Water Rights Retirement Program. These bills allow the state to permanently retire groundwater rights. The program is designed to protect Nevada's natural resources and address declining groundwater levels that cause conflicts between water users, including domestic well owners. The legislation also created a dedicated Account for Retiring Water Rights within the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The bills received [broad support from legislators, conservation groups, and water users across the state](#).



Newark Valley © Chip Carroon

For more information about groundwater rights retirement, please reach out to Laurel Saito at laurel.saito@tnc.org.



Ruby Valley; Crystal Spring at Ash Meadows © Chip Carroon

What's Next

Now that the legal framework is in place, the next steps are all about action:

- **Identify priority areas** where groundwater rights retirement is most needed, especially in overdrawn basins or near sensitive ecosystems.
- **Find willing water rights holders** who are interested in voluntarily retiring their rights.
- **Secure funding** through grants, donations, or partnerships to support the purchase and retirement of water rights.

This is a collaborative effort that will need support from communities, agencies, and funders. But with the right tools and partnerships, Nevada can make meaningful progress toward a more sustainable future.

Learn more about groundwater
at groundwaterresourcehub.org.