

Tahoe National Forest purchases 732 acres of South Yuba River headwaters



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The Tahoe National Forest purchased Van Norden Meadow late last month and plans for a restoration project are currently in the works.

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The Tahoe National Forest and the South Yuba River Citizens League are making plans to restore Van Norden Meadow, a collaborative project they hope will improve water quality along the South Yuba River.

The National Forest purchased 732 acres of land, including the Van Norden Meadow, on Sept. 27 with money from the Land Water Conservation Fund, a federal program that supports the protection of public land and water. The land, which was slated for eventual development, was purchased by the Truckee Donner Land Trust in 2012 in an effort to protect the meadow, which includes the headwaters of the South Yuba River.

According to Fran Herbst, land programs manager with the National Forest, the meadow will continue to be used by Sugar Bowl Ski Resort for cross-country skiing, but the restoration project will help ensure its continued health.

SYRCL secured a \$1.1 million grant from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to fund meadow restoration work. The organization is collaborating with the National Forest on developing a plan for the project.

The stream that runs through Van Norden Meadow — the headwaters of the Yuba — is currently eroding, causing the surface of the meadow to dry out and reducing the available habitat for native species, according to Rachel Hutchinson, SYRCL's river science director.

The main goal of the restoration project, Hutchinson said, is to restore the hydrology of the meadow, which will allow more water to flood the meadow's surface and create more wetland habitat.

A healthy meadow, she said, will ensure healthy water is flowing into the Yuba. The project will also help delay runoff so that more water remains in the headwaters later in the year.

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