

Old Mustang Ranch may become conservationists' oasis

By Leslie Kaufman, New York Times

SPARKS — Watching bulldozers pour crushed rocks to force the Truckee River into a more natural serpentine pattern, Mickey Hazelwood, project director for the Nature Conservancy, mused that like many acts of salvation, this one has its roots deep in sin.

For decades, this high-desert site eight miles east of Reno was best known as the home of the Mustang Ranch, the first licensed brothel in the United States. From thin to plump, dwarflike to Amazonian, women hired to suit a range of tastes would line up for inspection by clients in pink stucco buildings tucked into a cottonwood grove 300 yards from the river's bank.

The brothel reopened a few miles downriver in 2006, after the land was confiscated by the Internal Revenue Service and the name and buildings were sold to the highest bidder. Working 12-hour shifts at their new complex, part of which was airlifted from the old site, the women still greet customers in knee socks, push-up bras and other intimate wear.

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