

Acreage near Truckee bought by public land trusts

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

Two land trusts have acquired an alpine lake, along with biologically and historically significant property north of Truckee, and plan to open the land to the public for the first time in more than a century.

The Truckee Donner Land Trust and the Trust for Public Land announced Nov. 16 that they have purchased the 3,000 acres of property for \$8 million from a conservation-minded owner, a press release states.

The acquisition includes the 260-acre Webber Lake at the headwaters of the Little Truckee watershed. The other major component of the purchase is Lacey Meadows. The meadows near Webber Lake provide critical habitat for several species.

"This property has it all: 1,900 acres of pristine sub-alpine meadow, California history with Hennes Pass Road and Webber Lake Hotel," said Donner Lake Trust Executive Director Perry Norris, "and critical habitat for a number of threatened or endangered species."

The property will be opened to the public for the first time in more than 100 years when the snow melts in the spring.

"This will provide exceptional recreation opportunities," said Dave Sutton, Northern California director of the Trust for Public Land in the press release. "It was the largest piece of unprotected private land in the entire Little Truckee river watershed."

The property was purchased from Clifton and Barbara Johnson. The family owned the property for almost a century, using

Lacey Meadows for summer sheep pasture.

The sheep were herded from the Johnson ranch near Roseville. The the trip took 15 days into the mountains and 10 back to the valley.

“The beautiful lands we have worked on and cared for are, at long last, protected for future generations to enjoy forever,” said Barbara Johnson.

Highlights include Webber Lake, stocked with trout as far back as the 1800s, Henness Pass Road, which was once a heavily traveled emigrant route, and the 1860s-era Webber Lake Hotel, once a stagecoach stop.

The property also is home of animals protected by state law, such as the pine marten and the Sierra Nevada red fox. Other animals include black bear, mule deer, mountain lion and birds such as the bald eagle and the endangered willow flycatcher.

Flora includes exceptional wildflower displays in Lacey Meadows, which include lupine, larkspur and alpine buttercups.

The Truckee Donner Land Trust will own and manage the property. Near-term plans include establishing new trailheads along Henness Pass Road and Meadow Lake Road, paths that would provide non-motorized access to Lacey Meadows.