



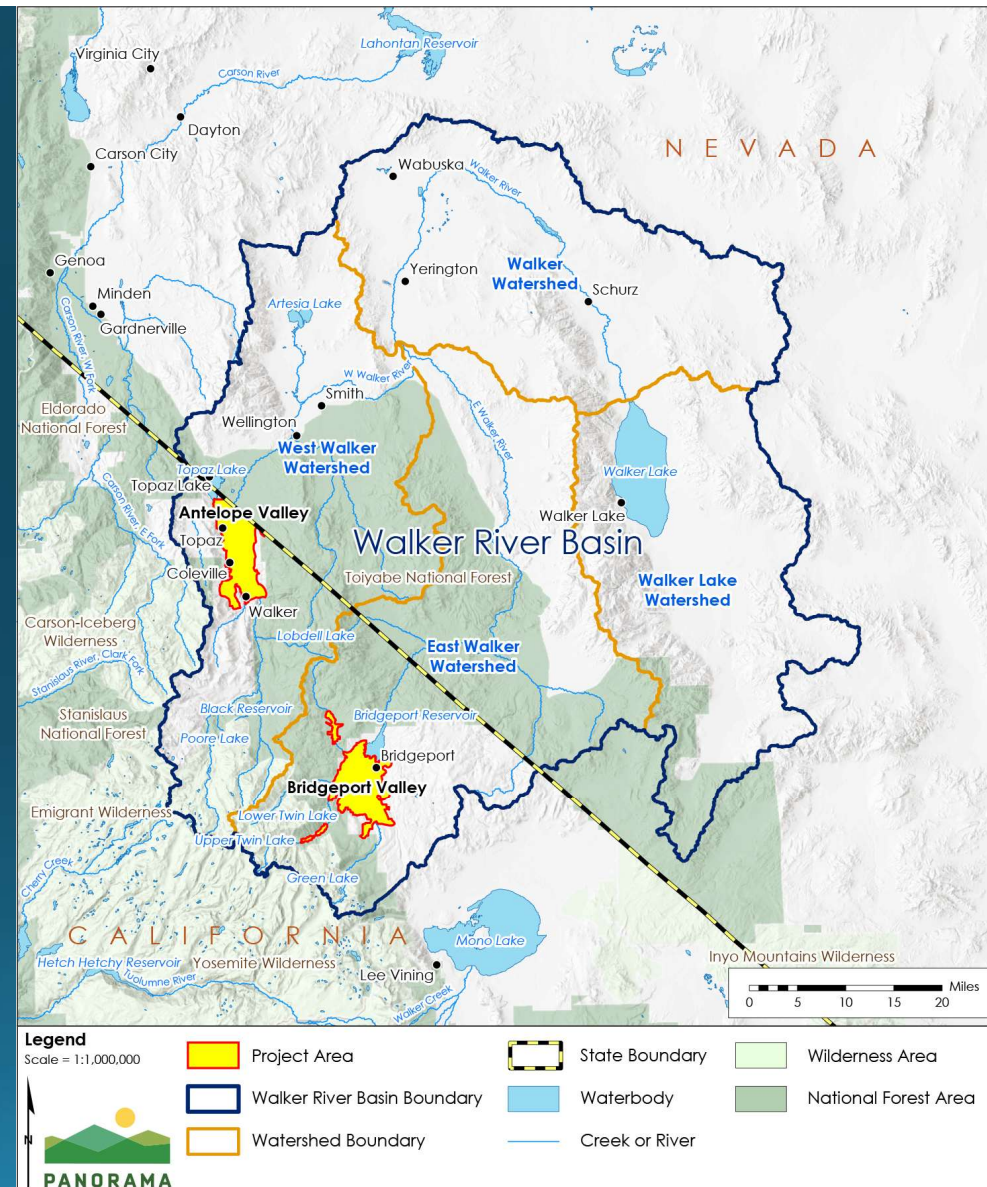
Mono County

# North County Water Transaction Criteria

Planning Commission: March 2024

# Background

- Terminal Lake at end of Walker River in Nevada
- Due to water diversions, water levels dropped and salinity increased, threatening ecosystem collapse.
- Study Area: private lands in the Antelope and Bridgeport valleys



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2009: Walker Basin Restoration Program (WBRP) established and funded by congressional Desert Terminal Lakes fund.

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2012: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) charged with program.

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2012: NFWF entered into Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Mono County not to appropriate funds until the County has considered a water transfer program.

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# History

# Mono County Authority

- The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) has exclusive authority to issue and administer water right permits and licenses for surface water appropriations.
- Mono County's criteria neither permit nor prohibit any future water right transactions.
- 2012 MOU grants the County the authority to consider a program for water transactions.
- This work analyzes potentially significant environmental impacts under CEQA.

# What Does That Mean?

- For all transactions, the SWRCB must conduct an environmental analysis.

## With a Program:

- The SWRCB must evaluate potential conflicts with the County's General Plan.
- The SWRCB must consider the County's environmental impact information.
- The County may comment on water transaction petitions.
- The County may challenge inconsistent projects due to potentially significant impacts.

## Without a Program

- The County may comment on water transaction petitions.
- The County may raise environmental impact concerns and provide evidence on a project-by-project basis.
- The County may challenge a project based on the record.





# History

- 2014: The Resource Conservation District of Mono County released an assessment of potential water transaction impacts.
- 2014/2015: Walker Basin Conservancy established to lead Walker Lake restoration effort.
- 2015: Mono County received NFWF grant to develop a water lease or transfer program and conduct environmental review.
  - Project had starts and stops for various reasons.
  - Draft Administrative Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared but never released for public comment.
  - NFWF funding no longer available – project stalled.

*Photo credit: By Raquel Baranow - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=28993516>*

# Walker Basin Conservancy

- Protect the watershed of the Walker River Basin and restore Walker Lake
- Protect water rights for environmental benefit
- Improve habitat on former monoculture
- 155 ranchers have participated
- 22 permanent water rights transactions
- 4<sup>th</sup> year of storage leasing program
- All water tracked transparently online
- Created public access to 29 miles of the Walker River
- Established a new Nevada state park
- Expanded Mason Valley Wildlife Management Area

# Water Transaction Criteria Objectives

1. To inform the State Water Resources Control Board's (SWRCB's) consideration of environmental impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) that may result from water transactions in Mono County.
2. To support the voluntary participation of Mono County private property owners and water rights holders in a water transaction program consistent with the purposes and objectives of the WBRP.
3. To ensure water transactions under WBRP in Mono County are consistent with Mono County General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element Objectives.
4. To satisfy the requirement of the 2012 MOU between NFWF and Mono County that Mono County input into any Mono County water transaction program utilizing DTL funds.



# Criteria & Transactions

- The criteria do not define or limit the types of water transactions.
- Criteria identify potentially significant environmental impacts for which the County may oppose or challenge the proposed water transaction.



*Photo Credit: <https://www.worldatlas.com/lakes/walker-lake-nevada.html>*

# Environmental Topics

## Likely No Impact

- Cultural resources
- Energy
- Forestry Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Transportation
- Utilities and Service Systems

## Less Than Significant

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Public Services
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Wildfire
- Mandatory Findings of Significance



## Environmental Topics of Concern

- Water Resources
- Biological Resources
- Agriculture
- Recreation

*Complete environmental analysis conducted and mitigation measures developed.*

Photo Credit: <https://travelnevada.com/outdoor-recreation/walker-lake/>

# WBC Transaction Principles

1. Develop long-term land use plans.
2. Sustain the local agricultural economy.
3. Protect groundwater.
4. Prioritize acquiring land with significant conservation value.
5. Prioritize acquiring land with recreation opportunities.
6. Work with willing sellers at market value.
7. Prevent potential conflicts with other surface water users.
8. Support Tribal priorities.
9. Support local objectives with land acquisition.
10. Protect wildlife and plants.
11. Address risk of subdivision.
12. Continue to pay water assessments and fees.