

The Campaign to Conserve

Royal Gorge





Skiers on Rowton Peak's Razorback Trail with a view of Painted Rock and Lyon Peak ©David Galson

As a life-long skier and a member of a family deeply in love with Donner Summit, I am terrifically excited by the opportunity to protect the iconic Royal Gorge property forever.

– Nancy Bechtle, President, Board of Directors,
Sugar Bowl Corporation

Royal Gorge

Now or Never

The 3,000-acre Royal Gorge property straddles the Sierra Crest at Donner Summit. A mosaic of lush mountain meadows, old growth forests and crystal clear streams, Donner Summit's scenic and ecological richness have drawn generations of admirers from world over and made it one of the most iconic destinations in the entire Sierra Nevada.

Since the 1970s, Donner Summit has also been home to the largest cross-country ski resort in North America, Royal Gorge. At its peak of operations, Royal Gorge enjoyed international acclaim and drew thousands of skiers to its scenic and well-groomed track system. When the resort's founder sold Royal Gorge in 2005, the new owners proposed a 950-unit subdivision. For the past seven years, this unique property has been at immediate risk of conversion to residential development.

The financial downturn, technical obstacles, community opposition and other factors changed the economic equation and finally opened the door for the property's long-term protection. We now have Royal Gorge under contract and only a few short months to raise the \$13.5 million needed to acquire the property and re-establish it as a world-class Nordic ski destination. The result will be permanent protection of the property's ecological and recreational values—an investment that will pay dividends for generations to come.

With your help, Royal Gorge will continue to inspire future generations to cherish the outdoors, lead active lives, and appreciate Donner Summit's unique place in our nation's history. Join our campaign today.



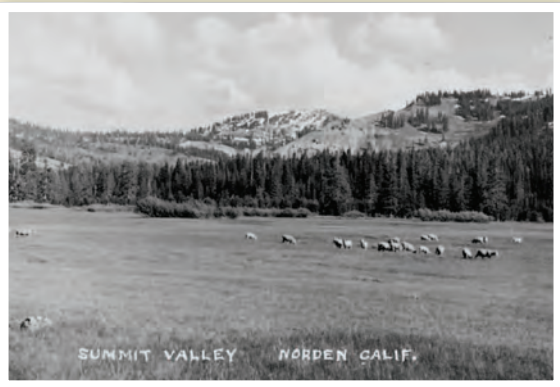
Van Norden Meadow ©George Lamson

This campaign is the culmination of decades of effort by conservationists, community groups, public agencies, historic preservationists, recreationists and others committed to the conservation of Royal Gorge. We finally have the chance we have been working for—to preserve the remarkable place we all hold dear, Donner Summit. Join us in protecting this magnificent property.

– Lucy Blake, President, Northern Sierra Partnership

A Landscape

Rich in History



Donner Pass has served as a critical gateway across the Sierra Nevada for much of the last three centuries. Even before the arrival of Euro-American emigrants, Native Americans living east and west of the Sierra Nevada used Donner Pass as an important spot for trading.

In 1844, the Stephens Party became the first wagon train to find a way over the Sierra Nevada, literally hauling their wagons up the rock faces below Donner Summit. Many of the geologic features nearby are named after members of the party, including Stephens Peak and Schallenberger Ridge. The summit itself was named for a less fortunate band of emigrants who, only two years later, was marooned east of the Sierra Crest before the onset of early winter storms.

The nation’s first transcontinental railroad traversed the Sierra Nevada at Donner Summit in 1869, following an audacious route that involved blasting 15 tunnels through solid granite. The railroad opened the beauties of the High Sierra for the first time to travelers and wonder seekers from world over. One of the most famous was American painter Albert Bierstadt whose canvas, *View of Donner Lake*, immortalized Donner Summit in the public’s imagination. The painting drew hundreds of viewers daily when it was displayed in San Francisco in 1873.

As early as 1932, alpine enthusiasts started taking the “Snowball Special” train from the San Francisco Bay Area to ski at Donner Summit. In 1939, Sugar Bowl became the site of the first chair lift and first destination ski resort in California.



Sunset over Lake Dulzura ©George Lamson

The air has a fresh crispness about it that gives a new life to the visitor whether he has come from the fertile plains or the foggy city. And no wonder...there are seven thousand feet between you and sea level. Seven thousand feet nearer heaven and so much nearer purity. It is a relief to...look up to the stars, nowhere brighter than here, with only the dark pines closing in the distance...The air redolent with the perfume of fresh grass and wild flowers; and aromatic with pine needles. It is a physical pleasure to breathe, a ‘delight to exist’...It is small wonder that a millionaire [railroad magnate Mark Hopkins]...should confess to be happier and healthier here than in the handsomest house on California Street. Nob Hill, to the sierras indeed.

– California Spirit of the Times Magazine June 13, 1885

Top: Historic photograph of Summit Valley with Donner Pass in the distance; courtesy of Donner Summit Historical Society
Middle: *View of Donner Lake*, California, 1871–1872. Oil on paper mounted on canvas 29 1/4" x 21 7/8".
The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of Anna Bennett and Jessie Jonas in memory of August F. Jonas, Jr., 1984.54.
Bottom: Heading of E. portal tunnel 8, Alfred A. Hart #204; courtesy Donner Summit Historical Society

Conservation

What's at Stake

Irreplaceable habitat

Donner Summit is a top priority for biodiversity conservation in the Sierra Nevada. Van Norden Meadow, one of the largest sub-alpine meadows north of Yosemite National Park, supports an abundance of wildlife, including 115 species of butterflies, 16 species of amphibians, 20 species of mammals, and at least 100 species of birds. Royal Gorge also supports a number of rare plants found only in this part of the Sierra Nevada, including the starved daisy.

Fresh water

Donner Summit, at an elevation of 7,239 feet, creates the great divide between three major watersheds in the Sierra Nevada: the Yuba, American, and Truckee Rivers. These rivers deliver water to millions of downstream users throughout California and northern Nevada.

Critical wildlife corridors

The conservation of Royal Gorge is essential to ensuring the free and safe movement of wildlife along and down from the Sierra Crest. For the past 20 years, conservationists have been working to enhance habitat connectivity.

This property provides an extremely large, complex mixture of high quality Sierran habitats. This mixture of wet meadow, fresh water emergent wetland, riverine, and lacustrine habitats is bounded on the south by lodgepole, red fir, and mixed coniferous forest habitats. The open environments are bisected by the South Fork of the Yuba river with attendant fishery values.

– California Department of Fish & Game, Acquisition Evaluation for Van Norden Wildlife Area, September 1990



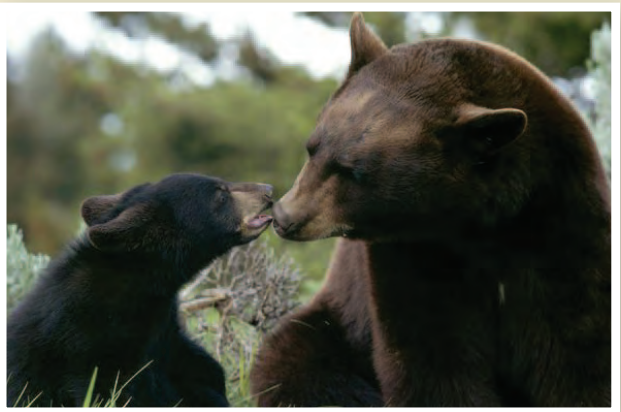
White Pelicans in flight at Lake Van Norden ©George Lamson



Starved daisy—a very rare plant found on the property ©Steve Matson



Water running over the dam on Lake Van Norden ©George Lamson



California black bear and cub



Cross-country ski race at Royal Gorge ©Anne Chadwick

Royal Gorge

A Mecca for Recreation

Royal Gorge is a recreation paradise. In winter, skiers flock to Royal Gorge to enjoy some of the best cross-country skiing in North America. Going forward, Sugar Bowl will run the Nordic ski operation and make investments to bring the quality of the ski experience up to its legendary brand. The continued operation of the ski area is critical for the fast-growing sport of Nordic skiing, as well as for the local economy. Even today, the Royal Gorge Nordic Ski Area has over 50 employees and generates nearly a million dollars of annual gross revenue.

Royal Gorge also offers the very best of summer in the Sierra Nevada. The acquisition of the property will open the way to expanded year-round recreation. In addition to building new warming huts and signage, we envision creating a network of trails to help visitors explore the remarkable scenic and natural diversity of the land, as well as the extraordinary historic and recreational assets of the Northern Sierra Crest. Those assets include the Pacific Crest Trail, Donner Lake Rim Trail, Western States Trail, and Emigrant Trail, among others.

With hundreds of kilometers of beautiful trails, amazing scenery, very lengthy ski seasons with plenty of sunshine and deep snow, Nordic skiing on Donner Summit is some of the best in the world! I have friends from New York to California that have considered their vacations to Royal Gorge a highlight of the ski season.

– Glenn Jobe,
Olympic Biathlete



Mountain bikers on Donner Summit ©Truckee Donner Land Trust



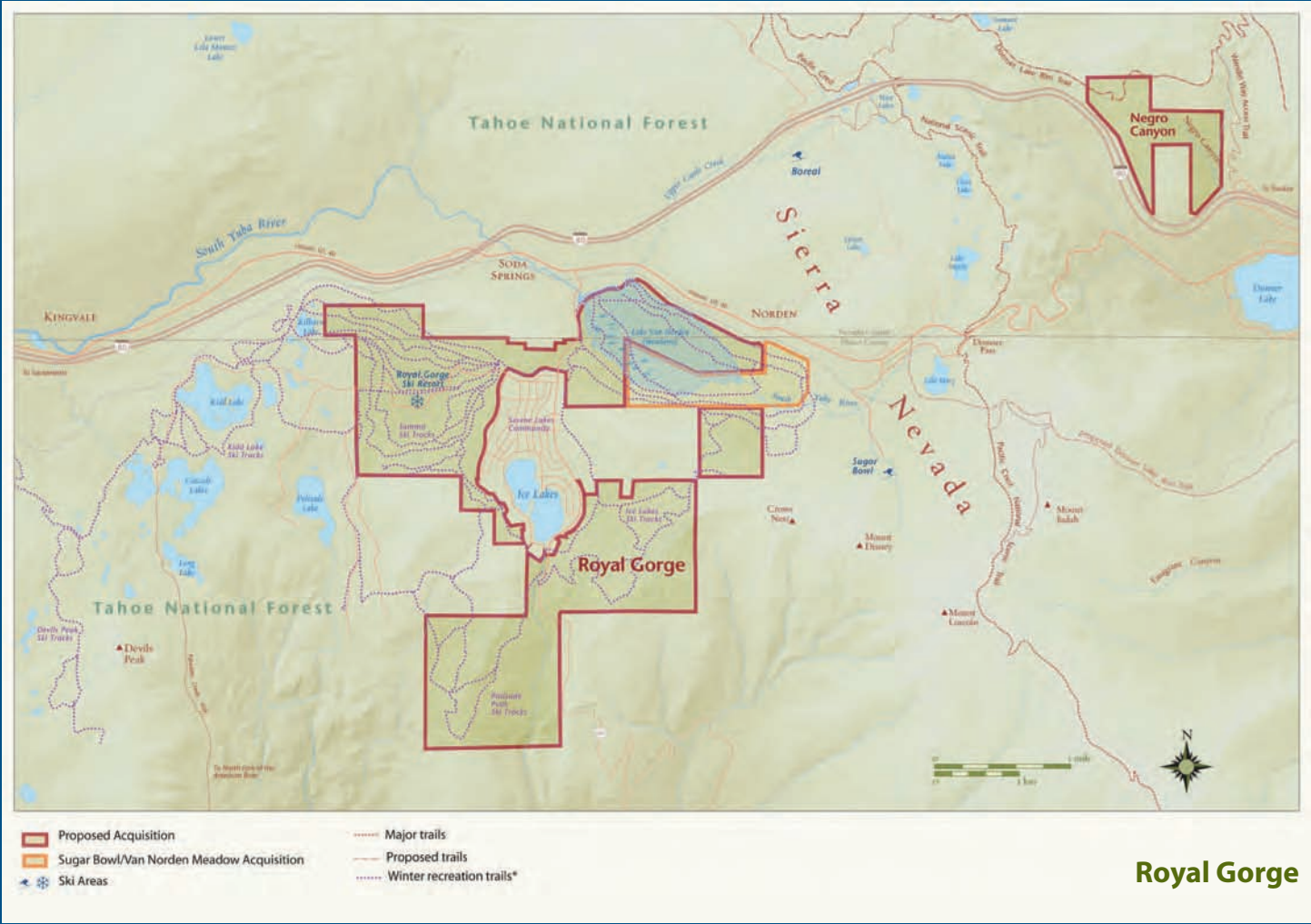
Kayaker on Lake Van Norden ©George Lamson

Our Campaign

Protect & Steward

The campaign to protect and steward Royal Gorge is highly collaborative, involving many organizations and individuals working together toward a common goal.

Our campaign budget includes the cost of buying the property, as well as a modest, initial endowment to support the long-term costs of stewarding the natural, historic and recreational assets of Royal Gorge.



Step One: Buy The Property

The Northern Sierra Partnership, the Truckee Donner Land Trust, and The Trust for Public Land are spearheading the campaign to raise the \$13.5 million needed to protect and steward Royal Gorge. Our organizations have a long and proven record of success in partnering to complete conservation transactions in the area. Joining us in this fundraising campaign are the Sugar Bowl Corporation and homeowners, the Serene Lakes Property Owners Association, the North Fork Association, The Palisades, Sierra Watch, and many other organizations and individuals long concerned about the future of Donner Summit.

The Truckee Donner Land Trust and The Trust for Public Land have negotiated and secured a Purchase and Sale Agreement on the property and will manage the purchase of the property, ensuring that the transaction is successful.

Step Two: Steward The Land

After the purchase, the Truckee Donner Land Trust will own and manage most of the property. The Sugar Bowl Corporation will own the Nordic ski center at Summit Station and manage the Nordic ski operation.

The Truckee Donner Land Trust has an excellent reputation for stewarding the lands it owns and manages, practicing sustainable forestry and enhancing public recreation by constructing trailheads, trails and interpretative signage. The Land Trust has identified five management priorities for Royal Gorge:

- Engage the community in a planning process for Royal Gorge prior to close.
- Keep the Nordic ski area open and improve the skiing experience.
- Make the property a recreational destination, in summer as well as winter.
- Help build a sustainable economy on Donner Summit.
- Address short and long-term management needs, including restoring and stewarding the property’s natural resources.

Campaign Budget

Our campaign budget includes two primary costs: (1) Land acquisition, and (2) Capital improvements and stewardship, as outlined below. Looking forward beyond the campaign, the Truckee Donner Land Trust will partner with Sugar Bowl, local homeowner groups, and interested public agencies to make further investments in recreation and resource restoration and management.

Campaign Costs

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Land acquisition (1) | \$ 12,875,000 |
| Capital improvements and stewardship (2) | 625,000 |
| Total | \$ 13,500,000 |

Funding Sources (Projected)

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Private contributions (3) | \$ 9,250,000 |
| Public agencies (4) | 3,500,000 |
| Sale of assets (5) | 750,000 |
| Total | \$ 13,500,000 |

Notes:

- (1) Includes \$11.25 million for Royal Gorge, \$750,000 for the Sugar Bowl portion of Van Norden Meadow, and \$875,000 in transaction costs.
- (2) Includes a modest, initial endowment of \$500,000 for long-term management, \$100,000 for short-term capital improvements and management, and \$25,000 to conduct a community outreach process to seek public input on the future management of Royal Gorge.
- (3) Donations from individuals, foundations and corporations.
- (4) We are approaching at least two public agencies for acquisition funding: the US Forest Service and the California Wildlife Conservation Board.
- (5) We anticipate revenue of approximately \$750,000 from the sale of Summit Station and the Royal Gorge brand to the Sugar Bowl Corporation.





Serena Creek ©David Galson



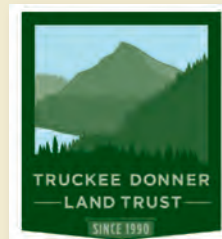
Van Norden Meadow in fall ©George Lamson

Our Partnership

The campaign to protect Royal Gorge is being led by the Northern Sierra Partnership (NSP), a collaborative initiative to conserve, restore, and enhance the magnificent natural landscape of the northern Sierra Nevada, and build the foundation for sustainable rural prosperity. The Partnership's fiscal sponsor is Resources Legacy Fund, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization based in Sacramento, CA.

The five organizations that make up NSP have been working in the region for more than two decades, helping to conserve over 100,000 acres for the public's benefit since 1990. In 2007, we joined forces to increase public awareness of the threats to the Sierra, expand our collective resources, and accelerate conservation investment in this extraordinary region. From the historic landscapes of Donner Summit and Webber Lake, to working family ranches in the Sierra Valley and Indian Valley, our Partnership is conserving the very best of the northern Sierra Nevada for all of us.

The campaign to conserve Royal Gorge is a critical part of NSP's longer-term campaign to conserve large, connected landscapes across the northern Sierra Nevada. For more information about our partnership, please go to www.northernsierrapartnership.org.



Truckee Donner Land Trust

The Truckee Donner Land Trust works to preserve and protect important historic, recreational, and scenic open spaces in the greater Truckee region. The Truckee Donner Land Trust works with landowners, federal, state, and local governments, and the public-at-large, to create win-win situations for private and public interests.



The Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land is a national, non-profit conservation organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, community gardens, historic sites, rural lands, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come.



View from Palisade Peak ©George Lamson

Royal Gorge

How You Can Help

The Truckee Donner Land Trust, The Trust for Public Land, and other concerned organizations have been working since 2005 to protect Royal Gorge, a place treasured by many generations of Californians. Today we finally have the chance to conserve Royal Gorge forever but must raise the funds to purchase the property by December 20th, 2012.

Every gift to protect Royal Gorge will help to preserve Donner Summit’s extraordinary history, ecological diversity and natural beauty in perpetuity. Your support will ensure that this unique property continues to inspire and enliven generations to come and provide connected habitat for the thousands of creatures that live, breed and thrive on this remarkable landscape.

Gifts of cash or stock are welcome and may be pledged over a period of three years. To join us in this historic effort, please complete a pledge form or send your one-time tax-deductible contribution to:

NSP/Royal Gorge
Northern Sierra Partnership
130A Seale Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94301

For more information, please call
one of the following individuals:

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Youth skiing ©Mark Nadell

Northern Sierra Partnership



Natural Bridge on the trail to Rowton Peak ©George Lamson

The Northern Sierra Partnership, Truckee Donner Land Trust and The Trust for Public Land would like to thank the following photographers for graciously donating images for this brochure: George Lamson, David Galson, Anne Chadwick, Steve Matson, Mark Nadell

www.northernsierrapartnership.org/royalgorge
