

There is a Solution

It is true that there are legal requirements that must be met in order to satisfy the State of California concerning compliance with the Van Norden Dam. Reducing the amount of water the dam stores to less than 50 acre-ft. of water will relieve the State of any jurisdiction over the dam. This would simply require that the dam be lowered approximately two and a half ft. A 50 acre-ft. lake would preserve about 40-50% of the lake and wetland area, but most importantly it would still maintain enough of the lake and marshland habitat to preserve the bio-diversity in the valley.

It does not seem unreasonable to dedicate 50 acre-ft of the over 100,000 acre-ft of water that flows out of the Summit Valley every year to preserve the the health and environmental vitality of the valley. Additionally, this solution is completely compatible with any future plans for bringing more water into the valley through reconfiguration of the wet/dry meadow area of the valley, such as a “plug and pond” project. Preserving the 50 acre-ft lake and bringing more water to the drier parts of the meadow would insure the preservation of the biodiversity while relieving any legal issues, a **win, win!**



Save Van Norden Lake and Wetlands

Imagine you are sitting in your kayak on a high mountain lake with snow-capped majestic peaks surrounding you. To your left along the shore the heads of the first Western Toads are bobbing and sinking as the annual mating rituals begin. Suddenly from above a huge dark shape dives down from the sky and plucks a young fish from the water not 30 yards away. As you focus on this bolt from the sky, you see the huge knife sharp beak, the huge wingspan and the deadly yellow talons and you recognize it as a majestic young Bald Eagle. Then imagine that this youngster decides to perch on a boulder protruding from the waters of the lake only twenty feet away and lets you join him for a meal. After quickly devouring its catch the young eagle preens himself with an occasional glance in your direction before he flaps his huge wings and takes to the skies again.

Fortunately, you don't have to imagine this natural encounter, nor do you have to go to the wilds of Alaska or Wyoming to experience it. This wonderful experience happened less than a mile from one of the busiest highways in the Sierras, at Lake Van Norden, a rich and bio-diverse area perched on Donner Summit. Due to a serendipitous combination of natural and human events, the Donner Summit Valley has evolved into a unique high elevation valley in which a blend of lake, marsh and meadow habitats create a rich bio-diversity of flora and fauna. It is this combination of habitats that support wild species such as the majestic Bald Eagle and threatened species such as the Western Toad.

Unfortunately, this unique and wonderful place is now threatened by the Truckee Donner Land Trust that intends to drain the lake and wetlands. The removal of these sensitive habitats which are acknowledged worldwide as the most bio-diverse and also the most threatened, is contrary to the spirit of conservation and preservation of the natural landscape. In a time when climate change and drought threatens California and the Northern Sierras in particular, it is not the time to decrease high elevation water storage and remove these sensitive habitats that serve as an oasis for wildlife in the Summit Valley.

There is hope, however, that we can preserve this wonderful place. The State of California has stringent requirements in its CEQA process that serve to protect sensitive ecosystems like the Summit Valley. That process is open to all of us to give our input into the government agencies that regulate projects with large impacts on sensitive areas like the valley. It behooves all of us to learn as much as we can about the Summit Valley so that we can make our voices heard. Please consider the information we present here and see what you can do to preserve this wonderful natural resource



What Can We Do?

As concerned citizens of California we all have the opportunity to make our feelings know in the CEQA process. I would urge anyone with concerns about the future plans for the Summit Valley to

- Visit our website at SaveVanNordenLake.Org
- Contact appropriate public officials (see website)
- Participate in the CEQA process

For more information please contact us directly by email at

ots@onthesummit.net

Our Logo



It is the rich fishery of the Van Norden Lake and wetlands that brings the majestic White Pelicans to the Donner Summit Valley each year. The probable disappearance of this bird from the valley is a symbol of what the removal of that habitat will mean if the lake is drained.



Donner Summit Valley

A natural combination of high elevation habitats that blend together to create a unique, bio-diverse community of flora and fauna in the Sierras that is now threatened.

OPEN LAKE HABITAT

Open lake provides habitat for aquatic flora and fauna that enhance the biodiversity of the Summit Valley. It supports micro and macro invertebrates, amphibians and a strong fishery which in turn supports an assortment of fishing birds including Osprey, Bald Eagles, and White Pelicans. The open waters also provide beaver with the waterways to travel around the lake to harvest the prolific willows that they use for housing and food. The lake water maintains the water table that supports marshland habitat which prolongs the growing season during the dry summer months. Aquatic plants proliferate and provide a rich source of food for developing waterfowl and aquatic animals. On the edge of the Pacific Flyway, migratory birds such as Sand Hill Cranes and Tundra Swans use the lake as a stop over point for rest and food during the spring and fall migrations.

WET/DRY MEADOW HABITAT

The majority of the Summit Valley is made up of the wet/dry meadow habitat that was the primary habitat before the influx of Euro-American immigrants. This habitat starts the summer growing season covered with melt water and supports growth of many species of grasses and wild-flower species. As the water naturally drains from the meadow there is a progression of high elevation plant species that flourish during the summer months. As the meadow dries out raptors such as the Northern Harrier, Red-Tailed Hawk and Gosshawk hunt the meadow for the many small burrowing mammal species that make the dry meadow their home. The Coyotes and Martens also depend on this large population of rodents to feed their young.

- Threatened species that will most probably disappear
- Threatened species that will be severely reduced
- Stable species



Osprey



Coyote



Sandhill Crane



Willow Flycatcher



Western Toad



White Pelican



Ground Squirrel



Red-Tailed Hawk



Crayfish



Shooting Stars



Elephant Head



Beaver



Fish



Merganser



Western Toad Tadpoles



Marten

MIXED CONIFER HABITAT

The Summit Valley is rimmed by a mixed conifer forest of predominantly Lodgepole and Red Fir trees. The forest is a regrowth of the primordial forest that was logged extensively after American pioneers came into the area starting in 1844. As such it has still not reached the equilibrium of a terminal forest. Encroachment of the Lodgepoles into the meadow is an issue of concern at present. The forest does provide habitat for many animals including birds and mammals that depend on the wetter habitats for food and water.

MARSHLAND HABITAT

The large marshland habitat surrounding the lake remains saturated with surface water during most of the summer. The willows and sedges provide protected nesting habitat for water fowl in early summer as well as food and housing materials for the beaver. The shallow waters that transition with the open water lake provide the habitat for hundreds of thousands of Western Frog larvae and metamorphs during the summer season. As waters recede the marshes maintain the water table to support vegetation that serves as a food source for water fowl young as well as amphibians such as the Western Toad. The marshes also keep the valley green and protects the valley from catastrophic grass fires.

RIPARIAN HABITAT

The headwaters of the South Yuba River flow across the Summit Valley as it carries the valuable snow-melt from the surrounding mountains out of the valley and eventually to the Central Valley. As a seasonal river the flow is heavy in the spring and early summer and then trails off to nothing by the middle of the summer. Along the river, willows provide more riparian marsh habitat and the river waters provide habitat for salmonid fish such as the Brook Trout. Invertebrates such as crayfish also make this habitat their home. The ribbon of Riparian Habitat across the valley is an oasis during the drier months of August through October.