

5. WALKER RIVER

The Walker River originates in the crest of the Sierra Nevada. The clear, cold water drains eastward in two forks – the East Walker and the West Walker Rivers. Though the vast majority of the river's flow is contributed by precipitation in California, only 25 percent of the entire Walker River basin is within the state. Well inside Nevada, the east and west forks join to become the Walker River. Here the river slows significantly and is laden with sediment. The river terminates in Walker Lake. In 1989, a portion of the West Walker was included in the state wild and scenic river system, thus precluding the construction of once-proposed dams and reservoirs.³³

Walker Lake is one of only two major remnants of ancient Lake Lahontan and contains just over 2,000,000 acre-feet of water. The lake's waters are of relatively poor quality and tend to support large algal blooms; this creates an inhospitable environment to fish species, particularly native Lahontan cutthroat trout.³⁴ The Walker River system once supported huge spawning runs of Lahontan cutthroat trout, and until the early 1800s the region supported a thriving commercial fishery. The mining boom and construction of dams and diversions began to severely reduce the population of trout.³⁵ Today the major conflict in the basin is between California fisheries and Nevada irrigators. The Lahontan cutthroat, now maintained by hatchery propagation, is at extreme risk of extinction.

Public Access and Recreation

The scenery in the Walker River basin is diverse and exceptional, as the river is one of the last undeveloped eastern Sierra drainages. The river hosts a premium trout fishery, and fishing is popular on both the east and west branches of the Walker in California. DFG now actively manages for hatchery-raised rainbow, brook, and brown trout.³⁶ The river is a source of outstanding recreational opportunities. The Inyo, Stanislaus, and Toiyabe National Forests and Bodie



State Historic Park all lie within the Walker River basin and provide hiking, camping, and other recreational activities for the public.³⁷

Fish Species of Interest

Lahontan cutthroat trout (wild trout may be extinct).

For more information contact:

Mono County, (760) 924-3055

U.S. Bureau of Land Management, (760) 872-4881