

Pickel Meadow Restoration Project – FAQ

A guide for visitors about what's happening at Pickel Meadow, why restoration is needed, and what to expect during and after construction.

Where is the project? Pickel Meadow is located along the West Walker River near Sonora Pass (Highway 108) in Mono County, California. The project occurs on public lands jointly managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. It occurs on the ancestral lands of the Wašišiw (Washoe) and Nüümü (Northern Paiute) Tribes.

Why restoration is needed: Over nearly two centuries, human alterations have disrupted natural river and meadow processes. These changes disconnected the river from its historic alluvial fan, leading to channel incision, erosion, sedimentation, and drying of meadow soils. As a result:

- More than **50% of the meadow's wetland habitat** (about 250 acres) has been lost or is at risk
- The West Walker River has experienced **reduced habitat quality and impaired water quality**
- The landscape is less resilient to extreme weather



What the project does: The Pickel Meadow Restoration Project focuses on restoring natural processes. Work is designed to reconnect the river to its historic alluvial fan (an area where the river naturally spreads during high flows), restore groundwater levels in the meadow, improve instream and riparian habitat for fish and wildlife, and upgrade access infrastructure (trails/parking) in a way that protects sensitive areas and improves the visitor experience.

Why it matters: Healthy meadows support clean water, wildlife habitat, and sustainable recreation. This project will restore **~250 acres of meadow and ~3 miles of the West Walker River**, improving ecological health while maintaining long-term public access.

What restoration work will be done, and when? Construction will take place between **July 15 – October 31, 2026**. Major restoration actions include:

- **Removing approximately 40,000 cubic yards of artificial fill** that blocks natural river and floodplain processes
- **Reconnecting historic alluvial fan channels** so high flows can safely spread across the meadow
- **Installing natural instream features** (such as large wood and boulders) to improve channel stability and aquatic habitat diversity
- **Upgrading water diversion infrastructure** to improve reliability and performance
- **Revegetating native wet meadow and riparian plants**
- **Improving trails and parking areas**, including ADA-accessible features, to protect restored habitat while supporting recreation

Will there be in-water work? Yes. Portions of the project include in-water work within the West Walker River to reconnect channels and improve habitat.

- In-water work will be **carefully timed and permitted** to protect fish and wildlife
- A **map and construction schedule** showing in-water work areas and timing will be shared prior to implementation
- Work will follow state and federal environmental protection requirements



How will construction affect site access? During active construction, visitors should expect temporary impacts to access, including:

- **Short-term closures near active work areas** for public safety
- **Temporary modifications to the parking area** as it is relocated and upgraded
- Construction equipment and trucks moving through the site
- **Possible traffic delays on Highway 108** (Sonora Pass) during earthwork

All closures and access changes will be clearly signed and coordinated with land managers.

Will access improve after construction? Yes. Once restoration is complete, visitors can expect:

- A **relocated and improved parking area** that is ADA-compliant and designed to reduce impacts to sensitive habitat
- **Improved trail alignment** and access routes
- Continued opportunities for recreation that are more sustainable over the long term

Is this a short-term project? While construction will be short-term, this project is a long-term, process-based restoration designed to be self-sustaining. By restoring natural hydrology and connectivity, the meadow can maintain itself over time with minimal ongoing intervention.

How does this project help local and downstream communities? Healthy meadows act like natural sponges. Restoration at Pickel Meadow will:

- **Increase groundwater storage** and late-season flows
- **Reduce erosion** and sediment delivery to the river
- Help maintain **cooler summer water** temperatures
- Improve resilience to drought, wildfire, and extreme runoff

Who is leading the project? This project is led by the partnership of American Rivers, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, working with numerous state, federal, nonprofit, and technical partners. The project is funded by the California Wildlife Conservation Board.

How can visitors stay informed? Project updates, including access information and construction timing, will be shared through partner organization websites and social media, and on-site signage near Pickel Meadow.

The Bottom Line: This project involves **temporary changes for lasting benefits**. Short-term construction impacts will lead to long-term improvements in water quality, wildlife habitat, ecosystem resilience, and recreation at Pickel Meadow and along the West Walker River. **Thank you for your patience and stewardship while this important restoration work is underway!**

