



Water Acquisitions in the Walker River Basin



California County Planning
Commissioners' Association General
Conference
Ashley Downing
October 23, 2015



NFWF

Overview

- Desert Terminal Lakes Geography
- Walker Lake Decline
- Walker Basin Restoration Program Purposes and Strategies
- Program Highlights (2010-2015)
- Legally Protecting Water to Walker Lake
- California Activities and Timeline
- Walker Lake Restoration Model Projections
- Future Acquisitions Strategy



Desert Terminal Lakes Geography

•Truckee and Carson River Basins

- Pyramid Lake and Tribes
- Stillwater NWR/Carson Lake
- Cui-ui, LCT, Sierra Meadows, American White Pelicans
- Newlands Reclamation Project
- Truckee River Op Agreement

•Summit Lake Basin

- Summit Lake and Tribe
- LCT

•Walker River Basin

- Walker Lake and Tribes
- LCT, Sage Grouse, Sierra Meadows
- U.S. v WRID

Desert Terminal Lakes Program

Carson, Summit, Truckee, Walker Basins

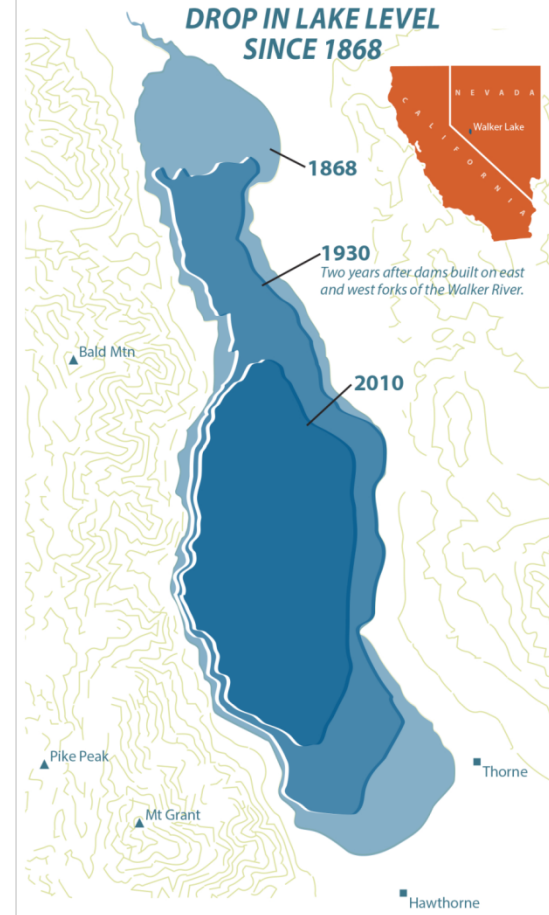
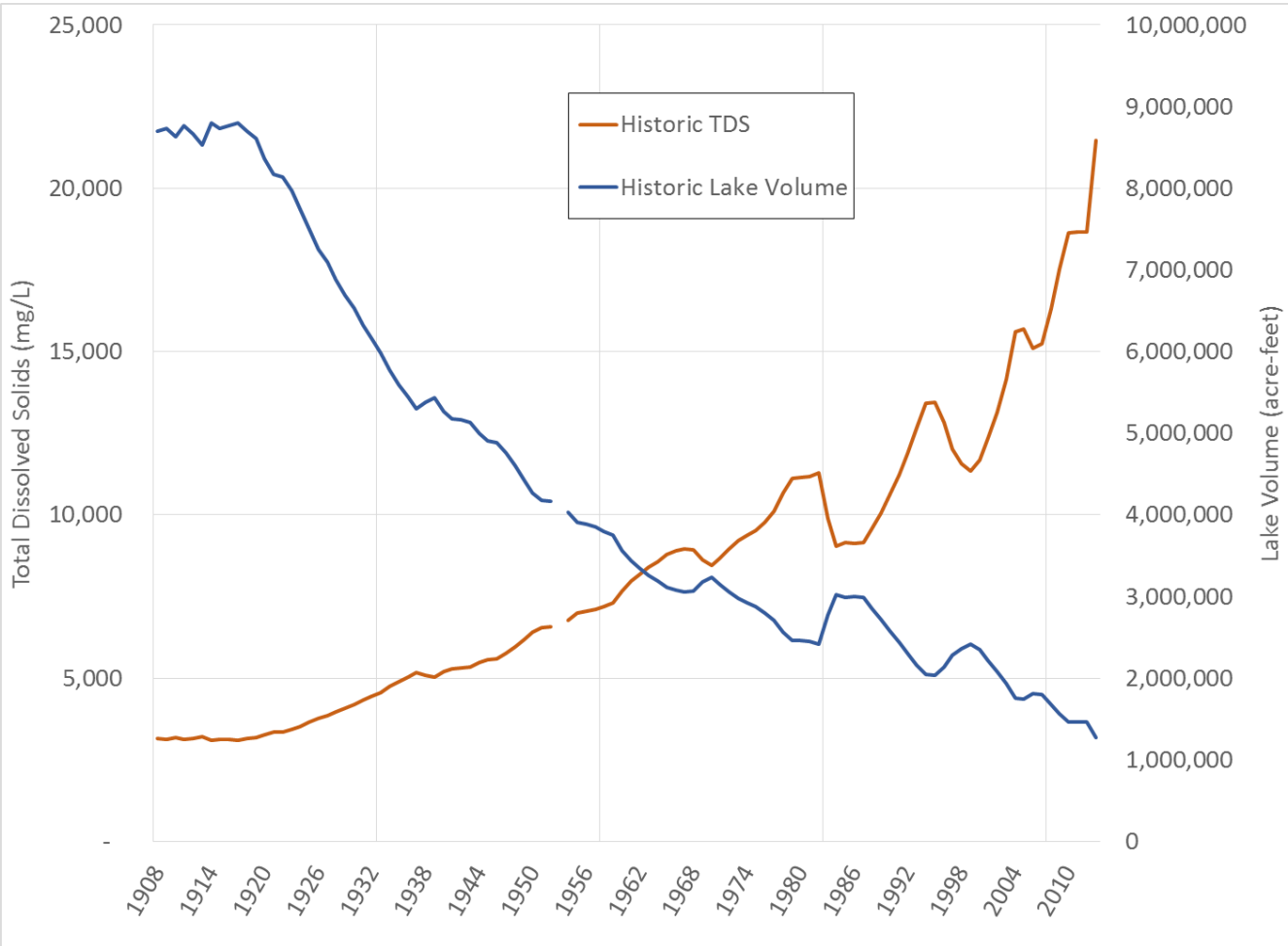


Walker River Basin - California and Nevada

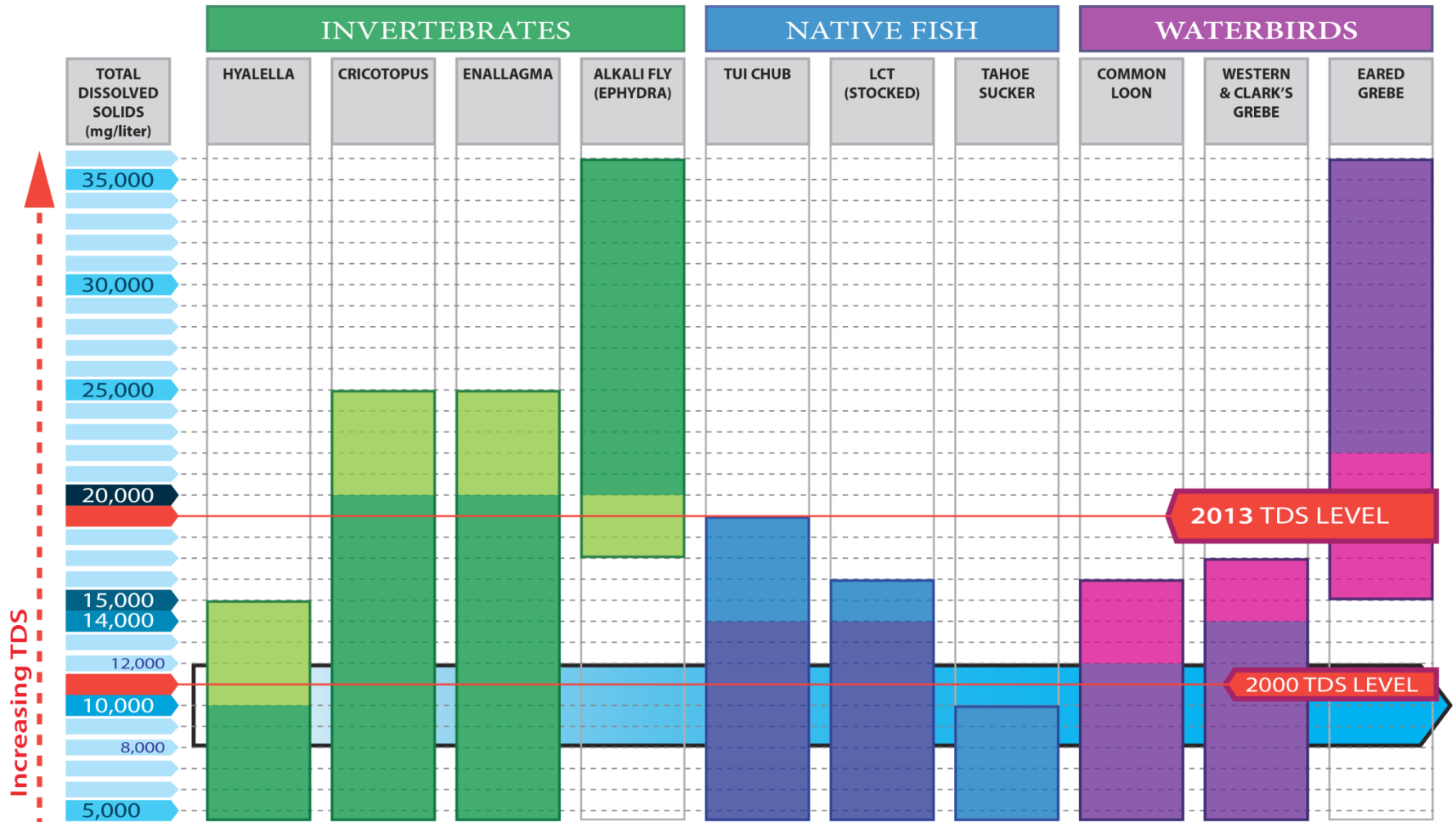


NFWF

Walker Lake TDS and Volume: 1908-2013



Presence of Indicator Species in Relation to TDS



Lighter shading in columns indicates decreasing abundance of species.



NFWF

Walker Basin Restoration Program

Primary Purpose

- Restore and maintain Walker Lake, a desert terminal lake in Nevada

Core Strategies

- Acquire water rights and protect instream to increase freshwater flows to Walker Lake

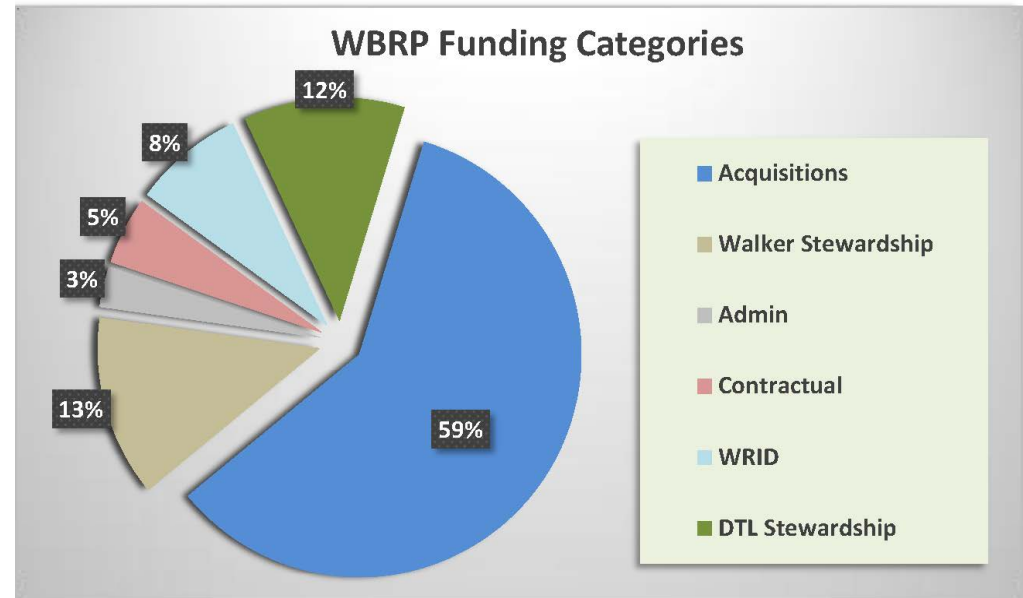
Secondary Purpose

- Protect agricultural, environmental and habitat interests in the Walker River Basin

Core Strategies

- Conservation and stewardship program focused on land stewardship, water conservation, alternative agriculture, watershed improvement and establishment of a local nonprofit.

(per PL 111-85 and related federal legislation)



Program Highlights 2010-2015

• Water Acquisitions

- FY10-FY15: The Program has spent \$54 million on 12 acquisitions for a total of 70 cubic feet per second (cfs) of decreed water rights and other associated land and water rights. This is 30 percent of the water needed to restore Walker Lake.
- Two additional acquisitions in escrow and expected to close by the end of 2015
- 6-8 deals in active negotiation

• Conservation and Stewardship

- Nearly \$60 million in grant funds in all DTL Basins (Walker, Truckee, Carson and Summit Lake)
- Revegetation of retired farmland (~550 acres in active reveg)
- Research grant with the University of Nevada – Reno and the Desert Research Institute
- Public access: land donation to NDOW and Rafter 7 Ranch opened in June 2015

• Establishment of Local Nonprofit - Walker Basin Conservancy

- Established in September 2014
- Funded by a multi-year grant from NFWF (fulfilling part of PL111-85 that established WBRP)
- Responsible for all “on-the-ground” aspects of the WBRP
 - Land stewardship activities
 - Property management
 - Public access



Legally Protecting Water Instream

- **Work with willing sellers to acquire water rights**
- **File change application with Nevada State Engineer (NSE)**
 - A change application is the process of changing the purpose and place of use from agriculture to instream for wildlife purposes
- **Negotiate agreements to resolve protests**
 - NSE holds hearings to address unresolved issues
- **NSE ruling is sent to the Federal Decree Court**
 - Accepts, denies or remands ruling back to NSE
 - Can be appealed to the 9th Circuit Court
- **Final Ruling**
 - Water is approved for instream delivery to Walker Lake
 - Program calls for water and monitors instream conveyance
- **Timeline for each permanent change can be a few years to a decade.**
 - After going through the Nevada State Engineer and the Federal District Court processes the application is now at the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals
 - We are 5 years in on the first application, with 1-2 years to go.
 - Future changes should be expedited once “threshold issues” have been resolved.

****This is the first time a water right has been permanently transferred to environmental use in the Walker Basin****

California Activities and Timeline

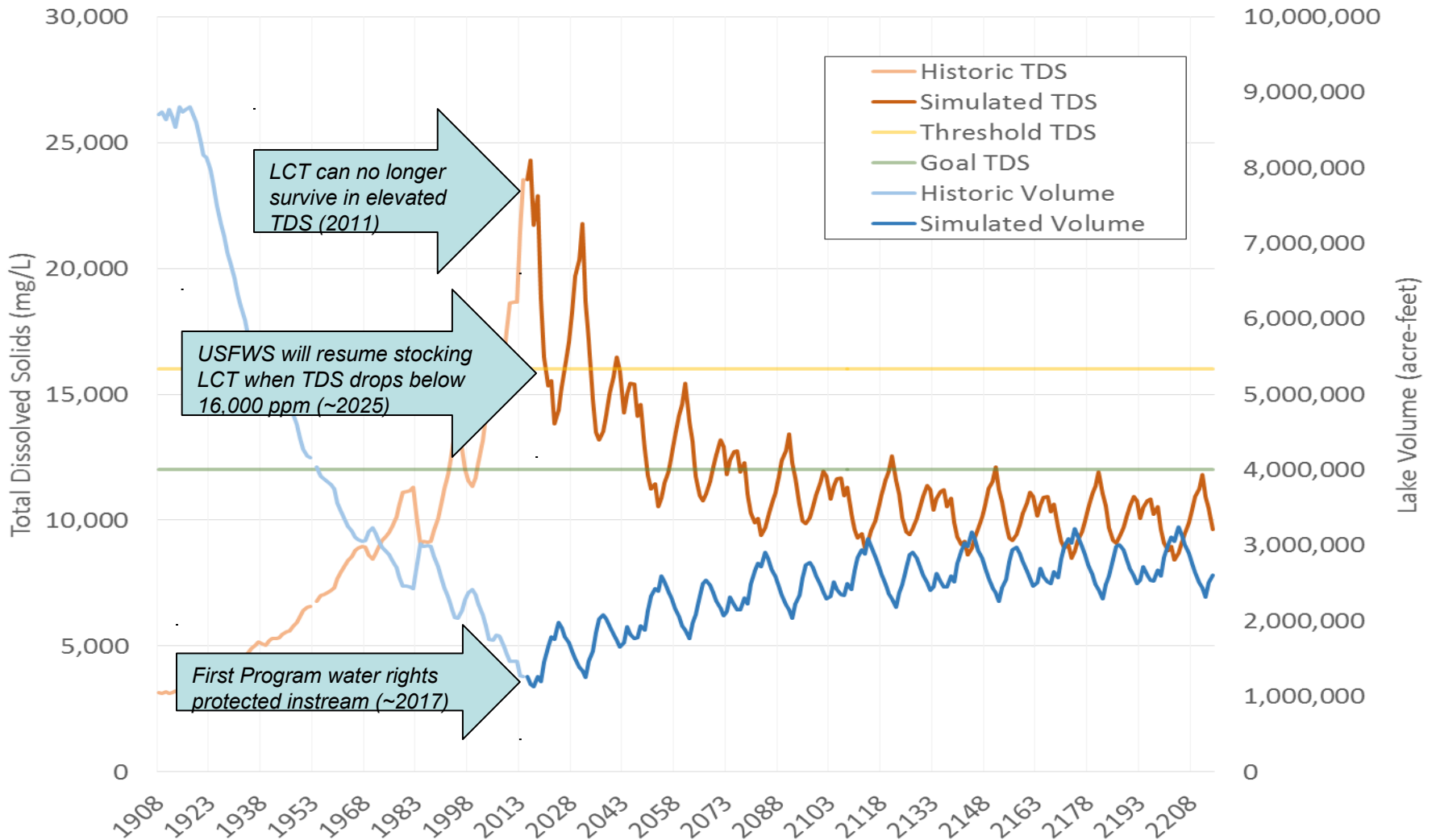
- **2012: NFWF and Mono County negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**
 - California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance and a structured approval process for potential water leases and acquisitions from willing sellers in the California portion of the Walker River Basin.
- **2013-2014: NFWF grant to Mono County Resource Conservation District**
 - Conducted feasibility study for providing surface water by sale or lease from the Walker River Basin in California for the benefit of Walker Lake.
- **2015-2018: NFWF grant to Mono County for California Environmental Quality Act**
 - CEQA analysis of water transfers related to Walker Lake restoration.
 - Mono County will prepare an environmental impact report to address potential participation in Walker Basin Restoration Program water acquisitions and leasing.
- **2014-present: California Pilot Leasing Program**
 - NFWF contractor Shannon Peterson Ciotti working with interested landowners in Antelope and Bridgeport valleys to set up 1-2 pilot leases with Mono County Board of Supervisors' approval.
- **Future: Acquisitions and Leasing programs in California for environmental instream purposes**



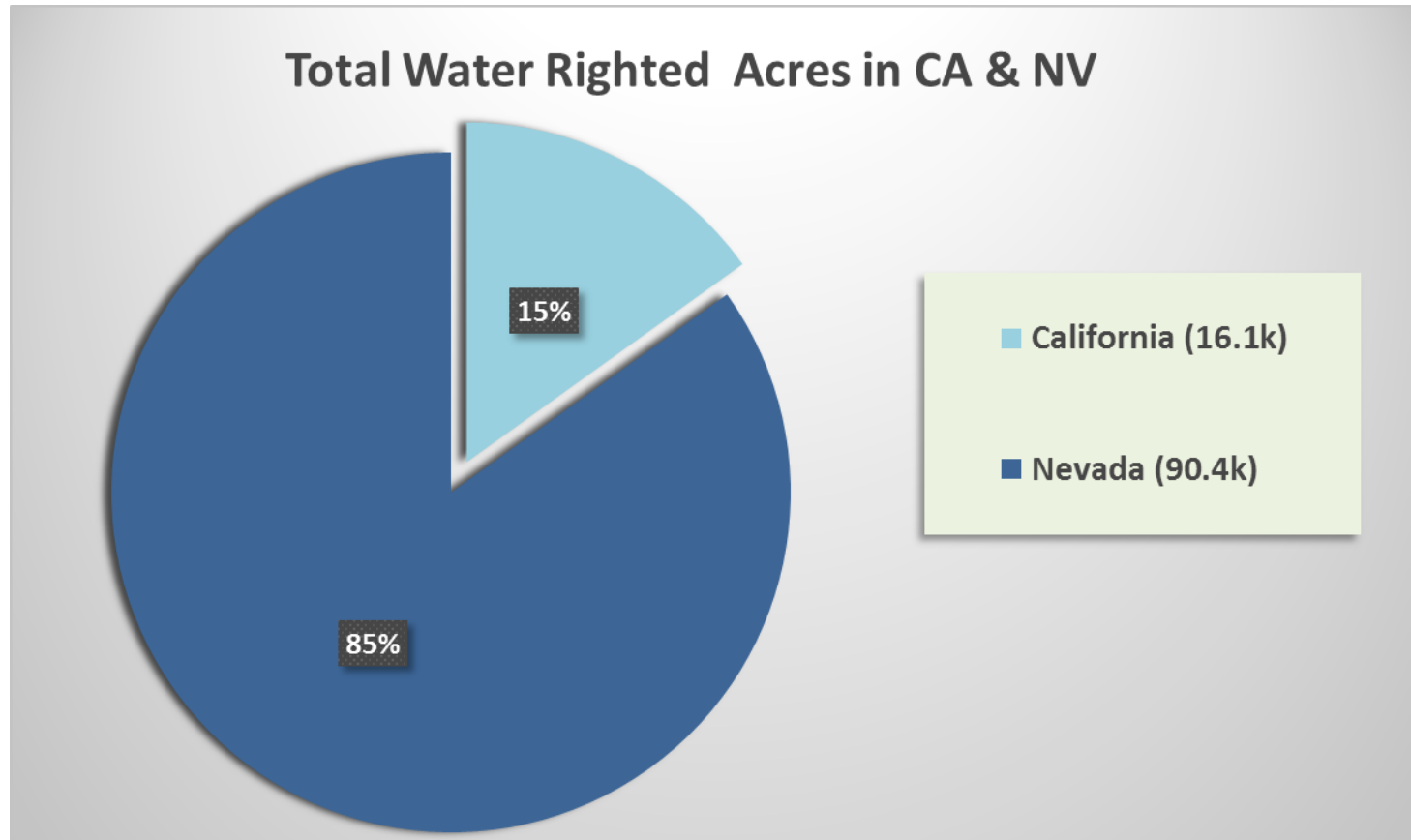
Walker Lake Restoration Model

Actual TDS and Projected TDS over a 200 period

Long Term TDS Goal: 10,000 – 12,000 ppm

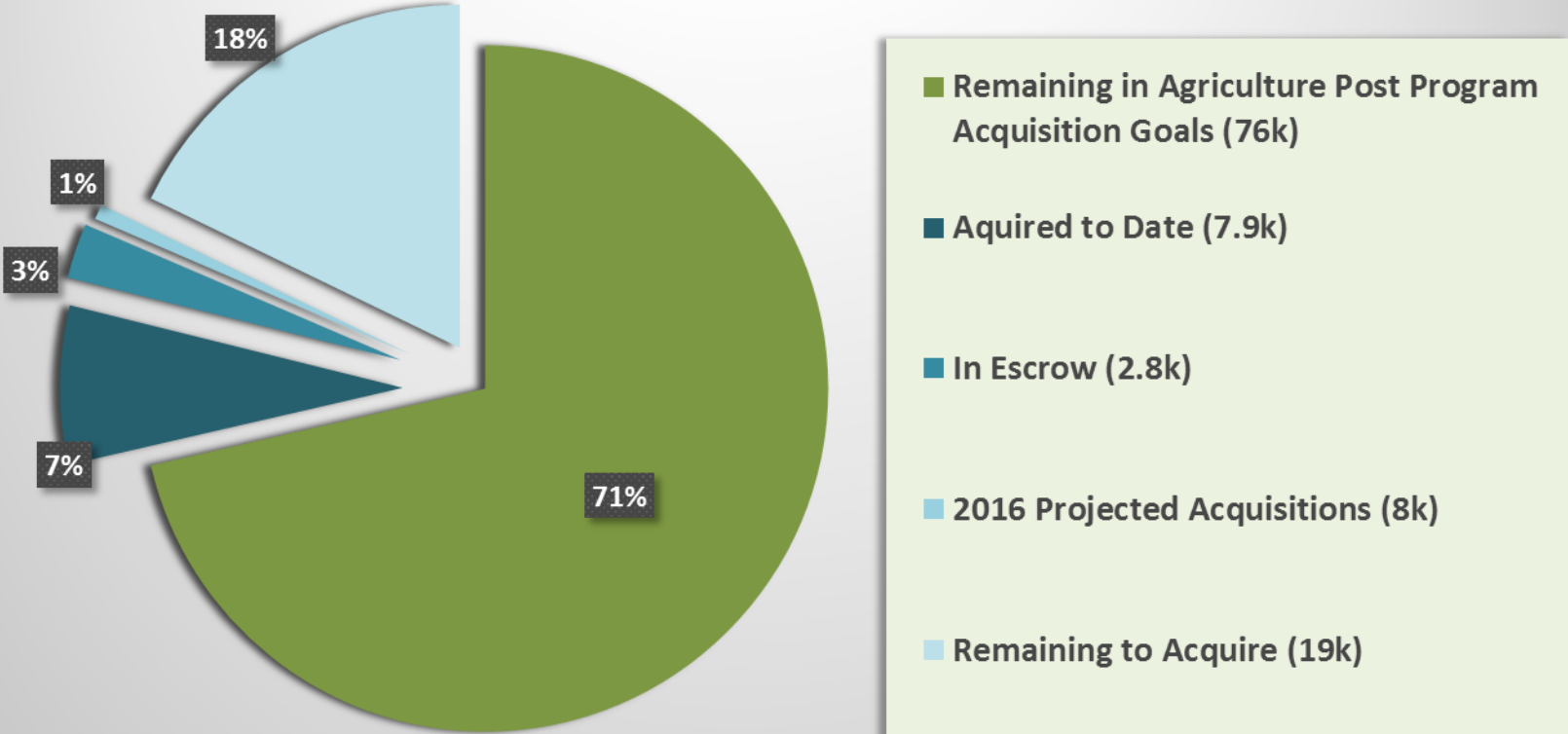


Walker Basin - Total Water Righted Acres



Acquisition Strategy in California and Nevada

Water Righted Acres Acquired and Remaining in Agriculture
CA and NV Combined





Questions



NFWF