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Mineral County and Walker Lake Working Group Announce Expanded Legal Team as Landmark Public Trust Water Case Enters Pivotal Phase

Mineral County, Nevada, and the Walker Lake Working Group, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit citizens' organization, announce a significant expansion of their legal team in the decades-long public trust litigation focused on restoring Walker Lake, one of Nevada's most precious and endangered natural water bodies.

This transition comes at a decisive turning point in the case pending before the U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada. Following the February 2025 passing of longtime lead attorney Simeon Herskovits after a courageous battle with lymphoma, the legal team is evolving to ensure continuity, broaden capacity, and advance the case through discovery toward trial.

Simeon's dedicated leadership for many years was instrumental in overcoming complex procedural hurdles and securing a landmark Nevada Supreme Court ruling in 2020, which affirmed that the public trust doctrine applies to all water in Nevada, including the vital flows that sustain Walker Lake. Building on this foundation, in 2021 Mineral County filed a Second Amended Complaint articulating achievable solutions that respect existing water rights while restoring the lake's inflows and public trust values. With these essential legal milestones in place, a durable, enforceable solution is now within reach.

To meet this pivotal moment, Jamie Saul, Founding Attorney and Executive Director of the Wild & Scenic Law Center, and Kevin Cassidy, Senior Staff Attorney at Lewis & Clark Law School's Earthrise Law Center, are joining longtime co-counsel Iris Thornton of Advocacy for Community and Environment. This seasoned team combines legal expertise with a shared dedication to environmental and public interest work, while ensuring that the case retains the continuity and institutional knowledge essential to building on decades of progress.

This team will lead the case forward as discovery continues through the spring of 2026, with trial expected to be scheduled thereafter.

Why Walker Lake Needs Defending

Walker Lake is one of Nevada's last remaining desert lakes, a rare and fragile terminus lake that receives the vast majority of its inflow from the Walker River. This vital ecosystem has faced significant challenges for decades.

Once teeming with life, the lake was home to native fish like the Lahontan cutthroat trout and served as a crucial stopover for tens of thousands of migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway. It was not just a natural wonder but a place of recreation and deep cultural meaning for generations of Nevadans.

But over the past century, upstream water diversions have drastically cut the flow from the Walker River, shrinking the lake's volume by nearly 90% and causing its salinity to soar tenfold. This has made the lake inhospitable for native species, pushing away wildlife and the people who once depended on it.

Restoring Walker Lake goes beyond environmental recovery. It's about restoring balance to an entire ecosystem and community. The public trust doctrine calls for responsible stewardship of Nevada's precious natural resources for the benefit of all. Through the legal process, we're working to find a fair and lasting solution that returns water to the lake while respecting the needs of existing water users and surrounding communities.

Legal Background: A Critical Turning Point for Walker Lake

After more than 30 years of advocacy, a meaningful solution for Walker Lake is increasingly within reach.

Mineral County and the Walker Lake Working Group have worked tirelessly since the 1990s to restore the lake and uphold the principle that Nevada's waters should serve the public good. After navigating decades of procedural hurdles and incremental progress, the case has reached a pivotal stage. Discovery is well underway and scheduled to close next spring. The legal team is preparing expert reports and gathering evidence—laying the groundwork for trial to follow the conclusion of discovery.

This is a rare and important opportunity. There is now a promising path toward a lasting outcome that could restore flows to the lake and help bring life back to this unique and vital ecosystem pursuant to the public trust doctrine, which requires that our natural resources be managed for the benefit of all Nevadans.

With an expanded and experienced legal team in place, we're ready to take the next steps. Support from the public will be critical as we move forward to ensure the best possible outcome for Walker Lake and the communities that depend on it.

About Walker Lake Working Group:

Founded in 1991, the Walker Lake Working Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring Walker Lake for its environmental, cultural, and recreational importance. The group has been actively involved in public outreach, water policy advocacy, and legal efforts—including supporting Mineral County's public trust litigation—since that time.

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