

# Black-led conservation group purchases 650 acres of Sierra forest land in Placer County

October 30 2023, by Darrell Smith, The Sacramento Bee

---



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

A Sacramento Black-led land conservation nonprofit will soon take control of hundreds of acres in the Sierra Nevada, opening up opportunity for more Californians to explore the outdoors.

The 40 Acre Conservation League acquired more than 650 acres of Sierra forest land in the Emigrant Gap area of Placer County in August, using a \$3 million award from a pair of conservation groups, the Wildlife Conservation Board and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Emigrant Gap, at an elevation of roughly 5,200 feet, is about an hour's drive northeast of Sacramento on Interstate 80.

The group, the first such Black-led conservancy in California, expects to take over the land in early 2024.

"We're hopeful that we'll be in possession by the top of the New Year," said the nonprofit's president, Jade Stevens.

The land features a 30-acre lake and miles of trails, Stevens said.

"There's so much to look at," she said. "The cool thing about it is you can see the lake on our property from the freeway."

The land deal is the first for the two-year-old conservation group. Seeking out [open space](#) close to Sacramento was key to its mission of making the outdoors more accessible to more people, particularly to the Black community and other [people of color](#).

"Our core mission is to conserve natural lands, but also find ways to foster a greater human connection to the outdoors," Stevens said. "What we'd heard anecdotally from people of color is that they tend to want to go somewhere within a 2-3 hour distance, so we wanted to acquire property close to Sacramento. It's one hour from Sacramento, so that fits the bill for us."

Planning for how the land will be used, assessing the space for fire risks and finding the funding for that are next on the agenda.

Acquiring the land "was a fairly long process—10 months, from the research and conversations to starting to talk to the wildlife conservancy. All of that took place in 10-12 months," Stevens said. "There is a lot of forest management that will need to be taken; assessment for wildfire risk and overgrowth."

Stevens says the young nonprofit's purchase is also part of a broader mission to develop recreational spaces that are publicly accessible, safe and accommodating and that lift barriers to participating in the nearly half-billion dollar U.S. outdoor economy.

That also means changing the perception of Black and other people of color's relationship with the great outdoors both in and outside those communities.

"Historically, when it comes to the Black community and land, it's centered in ownership, with banks not lending to Black families, making it nearly impossible to own land," Stevens said. "Without access or resources, we're standing decades behind others who had that access."

The league is also doing its part to meet President Biden's [30x30 conservation](#) plan, which aims to protect 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. The Sacramento group seeks to conserve more than 25,000 acres of land by 2030.

Partnerships with Wildlife Conservation Fund and Sierra Nevada Conservancy were crucial—both supplied the funding for the land purchase. Also, Assemblyman Mike Gipson, D-Carson, who paved the way for the funding in 2022 amid California's budget surplus.

In a statement announcing the funding in August, Gipson recalled his youth in Watts and the vacations to the family's farm in rural Texas that sparked his love of the outdoors.

"The 40-Acre Conservation League's goal is to increase recreational and [economic opportunities](#) for all Californians with a focus on ensuring that Black families understand these opportunities, families like mine who are from deeply urban areas," Gipson said. "My hope is that these 650 acres of land will help other little Black boys and girls fall in love with and grow a deep appreciation of the great outdoors."

"Black people are not afraid of the outdoors," Stevens said. "We go to places where we feel welcome."

2023 The Sacramento Bee.

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Black-led conservation group purchases 650 acres of Sierra forest land in Placer County (2023, October 30) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-black-led-group-acres-sierra-forest.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.