

Bringing restoration into focus

launching two new restoration projects

Editor's note: The following two articles highlight the Mono Lake Committee's two newest restoration projects: the Photopoint Project and the Mono Basin Clearinghouse. Together they represent the Committee's contribution to the larger picture of restoration in the Mono Basin. Make sure to check out the website at www.monobasinresearch.org.

The Mono Basin Clearinghouse

by Greg Reis

On May 18, the Mono Lake Committee launched a new website: the Mono Basin Clearinghouse. Also known as the Digital Archive project, the new site creates a solution for the often-difficult task of researching Mono Basin scientific studies, history, and more by bringing this information together in one spot for easy access by researchers, members, and the public.

Over the past 25 years, extensive work has gone into understanding the resources of the Mono Basin, from hydrology models to geomorphology studies and from historical interviews to present day documentation. Today, much restoration work is proceeding on the damaged Mono Basin streams and is designed to adapt to changing results, thus requiring access to detailed monitoring information. In the past, the lack of a central gathering point for this and other accumulated scientific knowledge about Mono Lake and the Mono Basin has impeded top quality resource management and led to duplication of effort.

By gathering in one place all the relevant Mono Lake and Mono Basin reports, data, observations, oral histories, and photographic records, the clearinghouse will serve as a central point for discussion and the exchange of ideas on this information by both scientists and the interested public.

We expect the Clearinghouse to

Restoration in the Mono Basin: Part Science, Part Art

by Lisa Cutting

Jeffrey pines are growing in the floodplains, willows line the stream banks, and Mono Lake is slowly rising. All of these are sure signs that restoration is occurring in the Mono Basin and confirms that nature can and will heal itself if given the chance. To keep up with this change, the Committee is launching the Photopoint Project—a documentary endeavor designed to keep track of restoration changes over time.

Restoration began in the 1980s with successful streamflow litigation and was formalized in 1994 with the State Water Resource Control Board's decision to protect Mono Lake. Throughout the entire restoration process the philosophy has been to reinstate natural processes so that the land can heal itself. This "holistic" approach has incorporated techniques such as raising the level of Mono Lake, providing stream flows that mimic natural flow patterns, planting areas not responding to natural reseeding, and reopening channels when channel complexity will not otherwise be achieved. Adaptive management—adjusting plans as the landscape responds to restoration measures—continues to be a key component in agency discussions and the decision-making process. And what is most inspiring about the work being done in the Mono Basin is that it is recognized nationally as a model for successful restoration.

To date, the restoration of Mono Lake

has focused on science—formulating plans, collecting data, opening channels, monitoring flows, and evaluating progress. But there is another part of the equation: people. How do we feel about what we are seeing? What emotions does it evoke in us? How can we involve ourselves in this recovery process that we are a witness to? And how can we share this story with others so that they too can experience the wonders of restoration at Mono Lake?

The Mono Basin Photopoint Project is one way that we can begin to answer these questions. The project itself is simple: participants choose a specific site in the Mono Basin that is coming back to life and photograph it each year. These photos will be collected and organized by the Mono Lake Committee and posted together on at www.monobasinresearch.com for everyone to view. As time goes on, we will accumulate a collection of photos that will show the actual effects of restoration as seen through the eyes of the non-scientific community—our own eyes.

The Photopoint Project will supplement the vast amount of scientific information with photos that actually show the changes in the shoreline coupled with lake level measurements; photos of the increased vegetation in the floodplains paired with revegetation transect studies. What a wonderful way to connect ourselves to restoration and really understand what is going on and how it all fits together.

The Photopoint Project was kicked off last month during Restoration Days. Professional photographers, locals from Lee Vining, and loyal Mono Lake visitors have all expressed their enthusiasm for the project. Because the project will span decades, you can become involved at any time. For more information, please contact Lisa Cutting (lisa@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595. 🐾

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