

Threat to State Reserve is on hold

by Craig Roecker

There has been progress in the negotiations between private property owners and state agencies representing the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve regarding land use issues at Mono Lake. While the resolution passed in February by the Mono County Board of Supervisors—a resolution that threatened the land base of the State Reserve (see Spring 2000 *Newsletter*)—remains on the desks of legislators in Sacramento, it is clear that most parties prefer an administrative solution allowing private landowners to make reasonable use of adjacent land at Mono Lake while maintaining the State Reserve itself.

On March 21, the Board issued a memorandum in response to the flood of letters that they had received from private parties and public agencies about this issue. The purpose of the memorandum was to clarify the intent of the February resolution. In it the Board laid out the land use issues at hand and the status to date. They also stated emphatically their support for the State Reserve. They

indicated that the intention of the Board “was not to undermine the land base of the Tufa State Reserve, nor to adversely affect the Reserve in any fashion.” The Board also reaffirmed that “the Board of Supervisors has historically supported the existence of the Tufa State Reserve, most recently by Board Resolution 92-11, and still supports it today.” These statements are reassuring, and the Committee is arguing that the Board can best substantiate them by withdrawing its original, confusing resolution.

The matter was reheard by the supervisors in early May. Representatives for the state and the landowners explained that they had reached a conceptual land-use agreement. It appears that the main “sticking point” was whether the agreement would be in the form of a lease or another type of contractual arrangement. The upland property owners feel that any agreement drafted in the form of a lease would prejudice an ongoing ownership dispute. (The land exposed by the falling lake, Mono Lake’s relicted land, is currently

claimed by the state under the laws of reliction. Several upland landowners dispute this claim.)

While the February resolution was not rescinded, several positive steps were taken. The Board decided to conduct a workshop in the field to better understand the issues at hand. They also passed a resolution, in part because of how this issue was handled, that requires that all future resolutions submitted by the public be subject to a two-week review by staff prior to any action.

However, the State Reserve issue will not be resolved until the Board of Supervisors withdraws the February resolution from the desks of legislators in Sacramento. Thank you to all members who have written letters reminding the Board of the critical role of the State Reserve at Mono Lake. Keep checking our website at www.monolake.org for updates, or call Craig (craig@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595 for information about this ongoing issue. ↩

Craig Roecker is the Committee’s Mono County Outreach Coordinator. He and his family just got an adorable yellow lab puppy named Ritter.

Important public trust protections for Mono Lake

Editor’s note: The recent threat to the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve revealed some confusion about the respective roles of the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve and the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area in the Mono Basin. Both provide important and different protections for Mono Lake and the lake’s many public trust values.

The **Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve** was established in 1982 by the California Legislature to protect tufa and associated sand structures, to provide for their interpretation to visitors, and to provide all of the natural resource protections of the

state park code. As a California State Reserve it provides the highest degree of environmental protection in the state park system. The Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve protects tufa on relicted lands and throughout the Mono Basin, and staff provide law enforcement, public safety, interpretive programs, and a general field presence at the lake. Approximately 3.5 million visitors have come to the State Reserve since 1983.

The **Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area** was created in 1984 by the federal government to protect geologic, ecologic, cultural, natural, scenic, and other natural resources in the basin while allowing recreational, scientific, and other activities consistent with this

goal. It includes 77,000 acres of land within the basin. The Scenic Area Visitor Center provides general information about the area and offers interpretive displays that explain the cultural and natural history of the basin.

Together the State Reserve and Forest Service Scenic Area offer broad protection for the lake and the basin. The two collaborate on resource management and interpretive tours (the latter in conjunction with Mono Lake Committee staff). Combined, the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve and the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area draw an average of 250,000 visitors per year and generate an estimated \$4 million in revenue for local businesses.