

# Mono County Board acts to rescind R00-12

by Craig Roecker

The Mono County Board of Supervisors took decisive action in May to rescind resolution R00-12 after more than a year on the books. In a 4–1 vote, the Board eliminated the former resolution that contained language clearly, though perhaps inadvertently, calling for the elimination of the land base of the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve, a key environmental protection at Mono Lake.

Public concern over the impacts of R00-12—and over 2,300 letters from members of the Mono Lake Committee—raised awareness of the unintended consequences of the resolution. County Supervisors spent extensive time reviewing the concerns of all parties and then laid out a position that underscored

that the Board cannot determine ownership of exposed lakebed. The Committee applauds the Board for taking such reasoned and decisive action.

As previously reported, R00-12 was designed to encourage local property owners and the state to seek an administrative solution to a land use dispute on these lands (see Spring, Summer, and Fall 2000 *Newsletters*). That dispute is still unresolved. At the core of this controversy are the seemingly opposing desires of a few local property owners to expand their commercial ventures and of the State Reserve’s mandate to protect the reserve in “a state of undisturbed integrity.” The Committee is now focusing attention on the need to find a way to protect the lake, assure the integrity of the Reserve, and

work with property owners toward collaborative solutions.

At the May meeting, the usefulness of a specific management plan for the State Reserve was also discussed. The State Reserve operates under clear guidance from the legislature, stating that the purpose of a reserve is “to preserve its native ecological associations, unique faunal or floral characteristics, geological features, and scenic qualities in a condition of undisturbed integrity.”

Although the legislature exempted the State Reserve from creating a more detailed management plan (due to the lack of permanent structures in the reserve), increasing recreation and commercial pressures at the lake suggest that such a plan could be important in the future. 🐾

## Motor boating at Mono?

“After decades of abuse, the second largest lake in California is recovering,” reported KQED’s California Report in June. “However,” it continued, “a local business’ proposal to bring back motorboats has some questioning whether the lake is healthy enough to support tourism again.”

What proposal? To do what with motorboats? Is this really compatible with the values Mono Lake has been protected for?

These are all questions the Mono Lake Committee has been asking as various, yet-to-be-clarified proposals have been put forth this year for increased commercial activity at the lake. Proposals have varied from picnic tables and dance floors on state land, to 150-foot docks berthing 50 non-motorized boats, to a single tour boat with a mooring, to 10 motorized boats with various uses.

The Committee sees five critical concerns raised by these proposals, and

each will need to be addressed:

- 1) Significant ecological impacts of new activities on birds and the lake ecosystem
- 2) Cumulative impacts of multiple, small-size operations
- 3) Loss of solitude, scenic views, and other qualities that make up today’s unique Mono Lake experience
- 4) Departure from the long-standing recreation policy of focusing visitor use at South Tufa and the USFS Visitor Center, leaving the rest of the basin open for individual exploration
- 5) Boating safety, given Mono’s dangerous winds and record of fatalities

No clear proposal is on the table at this time. When such a proposal is made, it will be up to the State Reserve to consider issuing the necessary permits and be sure the California Environmental Quality Act is adequately followed. It is important that a period of public comment be included.

Some local residents fear that such

proposals could lead to more limitations on recreation, including the minimal boating that already occurs on the lake. The KQED report underscores the dilemma: present day boating is modest enough to require no special oversight and raise no special concerns, yet proposals to change the future by commercially capitalizing on boating necessarily bring with them increased oversight, regulation, and public review.

KQED did miss one point: Mono Lake sustains tourism quite well today, with 250,000 visitors annually, contributing \$4 million to the local economy. Current activities such as photography, hiking, and birding are highly popular and compatible with the ecological and scenic protections in place at Mono Lake. Motor boating, it’s worth noting, is easily available on most other Mono County lakes. The question that really must be asked is: are these newly proposed activities appropriate and sustainable at Mono Lake? 🐾