

Walker Lake, Nevada

A new frontier for the public trust doctrine?

by Gary Nelson

In the idealistic and formative years of the Mono Lake Committee an early mission statement began, “Our purpose: to preserve the scenic, wildlife, and scientific values of Mono and other Great Basin Lakes” (see Fall 1978 *Newsletter*). In the context of its time, this far-reaching statement of purpose seems to represent the very height of audacity, coming as it did from an organization whose staff members were living in an Aspen grove on the eastern slope of the Sierra. Actually this goal transcended youthful idealism to show an understanding that Mono Lake is part of a larger whole, a single link in a chain of avian food sources stretching across the arid Great Basin.

It soon became apparent that saving Mono Lake alone would be an overwhelming task in itself and the Committee’s mission statement changed to reflect a close focus upon the Mono Basin.

While Mono Lake’s prospects steadily improved through the succeeding decades, the terminal lake of the neighboring drainage to the north was faring much worse. Just 40 miles northeast of Mono’s shore, across the state line in Nevada, lies Walker Lake.

A remnant of Pleistocene Lake



Photo by Jeff Darlington

Walker River Paiute leaders casting coins into Walker Lake at the Symposium, a symbolic gesture in hopes that the lake will be able to buy itself what it needs—water.

Lahontan, Walker Lake is one of only six freshwater terminal lakes in the world, supporting a native fishery of tui chub, Lahontan cutthroat trout and Tahoe sucker, as well as numerous bird species including Eared and Western Grebes, Snowy Plovers, Common Loons, Great Blue Herons, American White Pelicans, and Double-crested Cormorants.

Upstream diversions of the Walker

River for agriculture have caused Walker Lake to drop drastically. As is the case with Mono or any other terminal lake, a dropping lake level means that less fresh water is available to dilute the salts and other chemicals, or total dissolved solids (TDS) within the lake water.

By 1994, as Mono Lake supporters celebrated the California Water Board

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Walker Lake Symposium 2000

by Jeff Darlington

The Walker Lake Symposium was held on Oct. 12–13, 2000, sponsored by the Walker Lake Working Group (WLWG).

The Mono Lake Committee had a strong presence at the Symposium. Committee staff members guided canoe tours, and Committee Board Member Martha Davis gave the evening keynote address.

In front of a diverse crowd of government representatives, Walker River Paiute Tribe members, water managers,

scientists, ranchers, fishermen, environmentalists, and local businessmen, Martha Davis related the Mono Lake story. She stressed that while the public trust battle is fought in the courts, the way to forge a lasting victory is to facilitate cooperation and collaboration among the various water users.

“Hopefully the lessons we learned in protecting Mono Lake can work for Walker Lake as well,” Martha said.

The Symposium also featured a rehy-

dration ceremony and native Paiute blessing at the lakeshore, similar to the Committee’s annual Restoration Days activities. The WLWG hopes to make the symposium an annual event that, along with their yearly loon tours, draws more public attention to Walker Lake and the difficult water issues it faces.

For more information on Walker Lake, contact the WLWG at P.O. Box 867, Hawthorne, NV 89415, (775) 945-8243, shirlou@famtree.hawthorne.nv.us.