

Water Policy 2003 Legislation

by Frances Spivy-Weber

The California legislature will be enacting legislation on issues that are important to those of us who want to see water supplies stretched to meet the needs of people, the economy, and the environment. Below are two bills on which I will be keeping close tabs. Given the lead time for the newsletter and the often daily changes in legislative drafts, I cannot be precise about what will be the state of the following bills when you read this. Feel free to contact me (frances@monolake.org) for the latest information, and if action is needed, check the Mono Lake Committee website at www.monolake.org.

Senate Bill (SB) 21, sponsored by Senator Mike Machado, will create the statutory framework for implementing Proposition 50, the \$3.44 billion Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 that California voters approved in November. Senator Machado, Chair of Agriculture and Water Resources Committee and volunteer Chair of the "Yes on Prop 50" Committee, is committed to creating an implementation framework that encourages competition among water agencies and organizations for funding. His goal is to see the project dollars spent as wisely as possible.

There will be money for improving drinking water quality and cleaning up beaches and streams. Prop 50 funds will encourage greater integration at the statewide and regional level. For example, if new landscape watering devices reduce the amount of water used on lawns (conservation), they should also

reduce runoff into streams or storm drains (water quality), reduce green waste, reduce energy consumption and create a water supply reserve that could be used for restoring local habitats or habitats further away like Mono Lake or the Bay Delta. Prop 50 will also make major investments in coastal watersheds and wetlands. Given the state's precarious fiscal situation, SB 21 is the vehicle that will likely allocate most of the money for water issues that will be available over the next two to three years.

Assembly Bill (AB) 306, sponsored by Assemblywoman Christine Kehoe, the Sierra Club, and Natural Resources Defense Council, will mandate water metering in all urban communities by January 1, 2008, and meter-based billing by January 1, 2009. The communities that will be most affected by this bill are Sacramento and other Central Valley communities that have local ordinances that forbid metering or using meters to bill customers. The time has come for this bill, and I am optimistic about its passage. The wild cards are the amendments. The ones I have heard so far are extending the deadlines; offering low-interest loans and grants to agencies where installing meters is not locally cost-effective; and directing the California Public Utilities Commission to allow investor-owned utilities to include the cost of meter installation in their rate base. ❖

Fran is the Committee's Co-Executive Director. She's excited to see migrant birds traveling up the coast past her home in Redondo Beach.

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lar sites and to allow for the contribution of our data set to a national database. This information is then provided to land managers to better inform management actions, by basing them on bird population trends and patterns, or measures of bird population health.

Some results of last year's banding effort at Lee Vining Creek demonstrate two contrasting patterns between migrant and breeding bird populations (Figure 1). Common migrant species include Wilson's and Audubon's Warblers, Hammond's, Dusky, Western and Willow Flycatchers and Swainson's

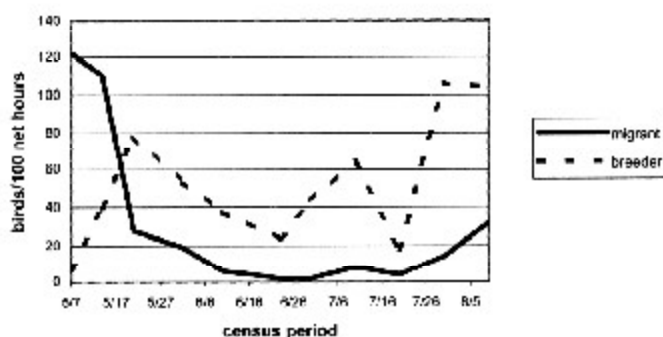


Figure 1. Bird captures at Lee Vining Creek banding station, May 1–August 15, 2002.

Thrushes. Migrant numbers peak in mid-May and drop quickly with a slight rise in numbers again in late summer. This pattern demonstrates the late spring pulse of northbound migrants and the late summer southbound migration. We predict that if we continued to band in late August we would see the trend of migrant numbers continuing to rise as adults and their fledglings head south. The continual capture of at least a few migrant species throughout the breeding season demonstrates late or early migrants, or the dispersal of birds that nest at higher elevations in the Mono Basin into Lee Vining Creek's lower reaches.

Common breeding species include year-round residents Song Sparrows, Bewick's Wrens, and Spotted Towhees and migrant species Yellow Warblers, Green-tailed Towhees, and Bullocks' Orioles. The late-May peak of breeding birds denotes the arrival of migrant birds that stay at Lee Vining Creek to nest and raise young. A sharp increase in early July and again in late July shows the dispersal of family groups and the breaking down of territories as the short breeding season comes to a close.

We look forward to continuing our fourth year of monitoring the recovery of Mono's tributaries in 2003, and will continue to contribute our findings to the larger knowledge base of the Mono Basin's spectacular ecology.