Streamwatch

Now It's Rush Creek's Turn

Lee Vining Creek Experiences Full Diversions for the First Time Since D1631

by Greg Reis

This year is the first year that the full effect of the Water Board Decision is being felt by Lee Vining Creek. Nine years after Decision 1631, for the first time, the maximum amount of water permitted was diverted from Lee Vining Creek. 7,500 acre-feet (AF) was diverted, the most since 2001 when Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) diverted 1,500 AF (of an available 6,500 AF). The average annual flow of Lee Vining Creek is 48,500 AF.

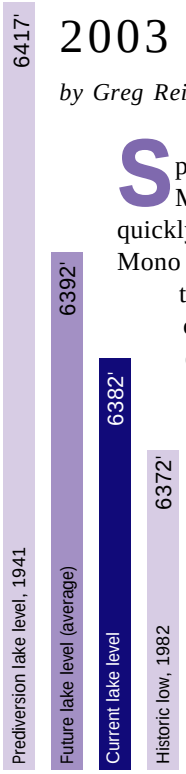
DWP has foregone Lee Vining Creek water in the past for several reasons, but this year, Grant Lake Reservoir needed water for the marina to operate safely, and DWP, with Committee support, diverted the maximum amounts.

An upgrade of the diversion facility slated for this fall is expected to solve the problems DWP has had with keeping minimum flows in the creek. DWP is also required to allow Lee Vining Creek's late spring peak flow to pass downstream. It does not, however, have a model that is able to predict accurately when this peak will be. DWP's model relies on historical peak information, and this year, for example, was quite unusual—little run-off until late in the season and then very high flows. DWP restarted diversions after its predicted peak was reached, but the Committee convinced them to stop diversions a few days later near the real peak and Lee Vining Creek got most of this important surge of water. The Committee has offered to work with DWP on a model that will use current, real time data to predict flows during the peak flow period. We are also urging them to allocate more staff time to collecting data and being able to act on it, particularly since Lee Vining diversions will increase in the years to come.

The good news is that lower Lee Vining Creek has received most of its natural flow during the last nine years. The recovery of the riparian forest appears to be going well. Cottonwood seedlings and saplings are everywhere in the Lee Vining Creek bottomlands compared to the Rush Creek bottomlands. High peak flows and high water tables are partially responsible.

Now it is Rush Creek's turn. The facilities are in place that will allow higher flows to be released from Grant Lake Reservoir. The greater diversions from Lee Vining Creek will mean Rush Creek won't bear the entire burden of water exports. Grant Lake Reservoir will be higher and there will be a greater chance of high flows going over the spillway more often. It is exciting to think of the recovery we are about to see on Rush Creek over the next few years. ❖

Lakewatch



2003 Runoff Higher Than Predicted

by Greg Reis

Spring runoff peaked sharply at the end of May, as unusually hot weather melted snow quickly, filling reservoirs and coursing down Mono Basin streams at magnitudes far exceeding those predicted. Mono Lake rose one-tenth of a foot in one week while high flows were entering the lake, and maintained the highstand for about two weeks. But the flows quickly receded and the hot weather ensured that evaporation would exceed inflow, causing the lake to lose that tenth of a foot by the end of June.

Thanks to the rapid runoff, on June 21st Grant Lake Reservoir reached a level that allowed the marina to operate safely—and continued filling with so much water, that if the reservoir had been maintained at a higher level during the last few years, it would have brought it to within three feet of spilling (it is now 15 feet from spilling).

As mentioned in the Spring 2003 *Newsletter*, Mono Lake would be ¼ foot lower if Grant Lake had been managed higher since 2000. The runoff caught by Grant Lake Reservoir so far this year, if released, would add up to another ¼ foot rise in Mono Lake.

Based upon a runoff forecast of 74% of average this year, DWP predicts Mono Lake to drop ½ foot to 6382.0 feet by April 1, 2004. The Committee believes that forecast is low due to the extremely wet April and May. As of mid-August it looks like runoff will be close to 80% of average. This could mean Mono Lake ends up as much as a tenth of a foot higher than predicted by DWP (assuming average climate). ❖

Greg Reis is the Committee's Information Specialist. He climbed Boundary and Montgomery peaks this summer—Montgomery being 7th on his personal highest-peaks list!