

# Another Victory for Mono Lake

## *Mono Lake Shoulder Widening Project Suspended*

by Jen Nissenbaum

**A**s we head into this New Year, all Mono Lake supporters have reason to celebrate. The natural resources along Mono Lake's west shore—the willows and aspen, the small perennial streams, and the scenic views—are no longer threatened by a large-scale highway project! During the October 2004 Mono County Local Transportation Commission (LTC) meeting, the Commissioners voted unanimously to suspend the Caltrans Mono Lake Shoulder Widening Project (Project) until January, while exploring several options for reallocating the Project's funds.

None of the options currently under consideration by the LTC include either of the build alternatives presented in the Project's draft Environmental Impact Report, which was released last year.

The Project's original plans included widening and straightening 3.1 miles of Highway 395 adjacent to Mono Lake, within the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area. The Mono Lake Committee worked with Caltrans for over three years to develop a project that would minimize environmental impacts along this scenic highway corridor. But the draft Environmental Impact Report released in October 2003 was a disappointment and would have resulted in numerous significant environmental impacts within the Scenic Area.

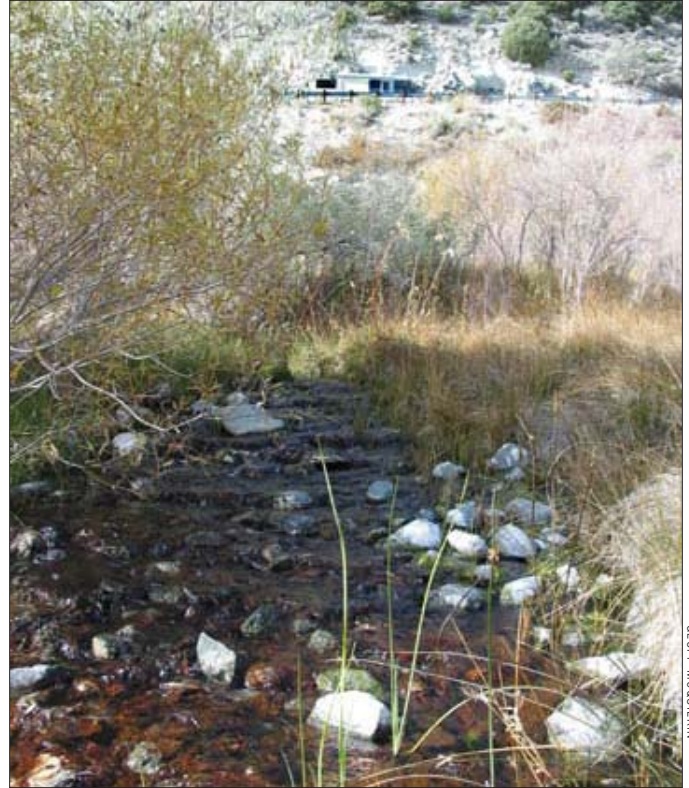
After taking into account all the public comments received—thank you Mono Lake Committee members!—and the local community concerns, the LTC decided to suspend the Project. This decision demonstrates their clear commitment to maximizing the benefits of transportation dollars spent in Mono County while at the same time balancing those benefits with natural resource protection.

### **Where Will the Money Go?**

There are currently 8.3 million dollars programmed for the Project for the 2007/8 fiscal year. The LTC commissioners are carefully considering the options available for reallocating the Project's funds. At the October LTC meeting, Mono County staff provided the following options for the Commissioners to begin considering:

- Shifting the funds to a different Mono County project;
- Reprogramming the funds to a project within the region;
- Splitting the funds between a Mono County project and a regional project;
- Using the funds for a new project in the immediate project area; and,
- Choosing specific project components from the existing project plan to propose a scaled-down project.

The Committee has already been involved in discussions working to shape a scaled-down, acceptable-impact project—if



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*This spring below Hwy 395 along Mono Lake is one of the many resources saved in the suspension of Caltrans' Shoulder Widening Project.*

the LTC selects that proposed option. Specific project components that have been discussed include improving the Old Marina turnoff, paving the existing pull-outs, replacing the existing guardrails, test rockfall treatments, and adding a new scenic vista pullout at the north end of the project area. Whatever option is chosen, the Committee is committed to remaining involved in developing and reviewing any highway plans within the Mono Basin.

### **Thank-you to Mono Lake Supporters**

Mono Lake supporters have remained engaged in this highway project for the past few years—by writing letters, attending meetings, and sharing ideas—and this has contributed tremendously to the protection of Mono Lake's west shore. Thank you to everyone for your ongoing dedication to Mono Lake and the Mono Basin ecosystem. The Committee will continue to provide updated information in *The Mono Lake Newsletter* and online at [www.monolake.org](http://www.monolake.org) as decisions are made for the Project's funds. ❖

*Jen Nissenbaum is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Coordinator. She and her dog Miller have enjoyed the early snowfall and are excited about the prospects of a big winter!*