

Mono Research Group reunites for 30-year reunion

1976 Ecological Study now available online

by Greg Reis

In 1976, a dozen undergraduate students used a National Science Foundation grant to conduct the first comprehensive ecological study of Mono Lake. In June 1977 the UC Davis Institute of Ecology published their report, “An Ecological Study of Mono Lake, California.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID WINKLER

The Mono Research Group, 1976.

This pivotal report drew attention to the catastrophic ecological impacts of Mono Lake’s falling level, which was due to diversions of water from its tributary streams by the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP).

The student who edited the report, David Winkler, walked across the newly formed land bridge to Negit Island in November 1977, and felt compelled to do something before the next gull breeding season. He energized David Gaines, who wrote the introduction to the report, and Sally Judy, another UC Davis student who would eventually marry Gaines. Compelled by the evidence of Mono Lake’s eventual demise at the hands of excessive water diversions, these young scientists and friends formed the Mono Lake

Committee in the name of saving Mono Lake in 1978 with Gaines leading the organization through thick and thin. The rest is history—the study inspired the movement that led to the historic Mono Lake victory, and continues to be the inspiration for the ongoing work of the Mono Lake Committee today.

This past summer, thirty years after the study, David Winkler, now a professor of ornithology at Cornell University, organized a reunion of the original crew. All twelve participants were reunited on July 15, 2006, at the very same campsite they used in 1976. They held a potluck dinner at Mono Lake County Park with Committee staff, friends, and scientists currently working in the Mono Basin. They also recreated a group shot taken during their first summer, below.

It is particularly exciting that after 30 years there is still so much research going on in the Mono Basin that the Committee’s new Mono Basin Field Station is packed with student researchers furthering the legacy started by this original group. See page 8 for more on the Field Station.

See www.monobasinresearch.org/onlinereports/1976study/ for the original ecological study, photos, and a link to a recent *San Francisco Chronicle* feature on the research group. ❖



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The Mono Research Group reunion 30 years later, left to right, top to bottom: S. Elliot Burch, Gayle L. Dana, Christine P. Weigen, H. Keith Otsuki, Connie Lovejoy, F. Brett Engstrom, Jeff Robins, Thomas Wainwright, Robert M. Loeffler, David W. Winkler, Jefferson B. Burch, David B. Herbst.