

New trail to Mono Lake

by Emily Prud'homme

One of the best ways to experience Mono Lake is to walk along the shoreline, where you can smell the briny water, hear the chattering of gulls, and feel the breeze on your face. There will soon be a new way to do this, with trail construction beginning this summer between the Scenic Area Visitor Center and the Old Marina area on the western shore of Mono Lake.

The new trail will provide a scenic, 1.3-mile route winding down from the Visitor Center to the lake. The trail will pass an ice-age tufa formation known locally as Ice House Tufa, cross old lakeshores, link with the David Gaines Memorial Boardwalk, and end up at Old Marina.

California State Parks and the US Forest Service are the primary agencies developing the trail, which also crosses Los Angeles Department of Water & Power land. The Mono Lake Committee has supported the trail concept and is working closely with the agencies to assure that design and construction of the trail are done in the best manner possible for Mono Lake.

Trail construction

The trail construction will include the closing of several adjacent portions of dirt road. The closed sections will be mechanically re-graded to conform with the surrounding landscape, and it is expected to take several years for these areas to fully revegetate. Crews will chip all the brush removed during construction, combine it with native seed mix, and sow the rehabilitated roadbeds.

Concerns about the wetland bird habitat in the area to the east of Old Marina have been addressed through changes in the route of the trail. The existence of an established trail combined with new interpretive panels should minimize the creation of additional user-trails in this sensitive area.

ADA accessibility

With State Parks funding, a portion of the route will be an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible trail. The trail will variously use boardwalk and crushed gravel to create a surface sturdy enough for wheelchairs. The ADA improvements will begin at Old Marina and extend past the Gaines Boardwalk, which will also be upgraded.

One of the design issues the Committee is addressing with the agencies is the relationship between this new trail segment and the rising lake. While the Gaines Boardwalk will be rebuilt to allow easy removal of sections as the lake rises, it is important that the entire near-lake section of trail include such planning to avoid future inundation.



Committee staff ground-checking plans for the new trail.

Trail timeline and volunteer opportunities

Construction will start in late June and continue into the fall and the trail should be fully open for public use in late fall 2008. During construction, these areas will still be accessible by foot, as long as crews are not active in the area. Volunteers can help—please join us on a restoration project this summer or fall! Contact Policy Coordinator Emily Prud'homme (emily@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595. ❖

Emily Prud'homme is the Committee's Policy Coordinator. She recently visited the Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge where she discovered a newfound love for pupfish.

Old Marina renovation

In 2004, State Parks completed planning work for a comprehensive renovation of the Old Marina visitor site, including significant improvements to accommodate the rising lake and revamped interpretive materials. In 2007 funds were secured for the project, but unfortunately they have not yet been allocated, which has held up the project. This year, however, State Parks will coordinate with the trail construction and make some of the planned improvements. New interpretive materials will also be completed, and a new, ADA accessible restroom will be installed. The Mono Lake Committee is working with State Parks to procure funds to ensure that the full Old Marina rehabilitation eventually takes place, including the much-needed redesign of the parking area in anticipation of Mono Lake's rising level.