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Heavy Snowfall and Poconip Fog in the Mono Basin

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For Immediate Release

If you like snow, the little town of Lee Vining was the place to be between December 28th and January 5th. During this nine day period 51 inches of snow accumulated: the heaviest amounts for the last 15 years. During the 72 hours between January 2nd and 5th, 23 inches of snow fell in Lee Vining, compared to 7 inches in the town of Mammoth Lakes. Lee Vining and Mammoth woke up to equal amounts of snow on Dec. 28th, unusual in that Mammoth usually receives far more snow than the town of Lee Vining, which sits in a “rain shadow”, an area on the lee side of the Sierra Nevada that receives less moisture than the higher peaks on the west side and the Sierra crest. Lee Vining has already received 13.83 inches of precipitation in the form of melted snow and rain this year, higher than the annual average of 13 inches.

The Mono Lake Committee is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Cooperative Observer in Lee Vining. Along with unusual weather phenomena, daily weather conditions are submitted by Committee staff. NOAA

takes this information and either posts it on the National Weather Service (NWS) web site—<http://weather.gov>, or broadcasts it over the radio. Repeated broadcasts of the latest weather information are aired every four to six minutes and are routinely revised every one to three hours or more if needed. During severe weather, the NWS will interrupt the routine weather broadcasts and substitute special warning messages. These messages will typically activate specially designed receivers and the Emergency Alert System (EAS), used by commercial broadcasters, to warn the public of any impending hazards.

NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts are made on one of seven high-band FM frequencies ranging from 162.40 to 162.55 megahertz (MHZ). In 2003, a receiving and sending antenna was installed on Conway Summit, just north of Mono Lake. Most local radio and television stations will relay NWS forecasts and warnings, particularly during news programs and/or when the EAS is activated. Complete information about NOAA Weather Radio can be found on the Internet at <http://weather.gov/nwr>.

Lee Vining is located in the Eastern Sierra where dangerous weather conditions can occur at any time. The Mono Lake Committee plays a vital role in getting current and changing weather conditions to NOAA so that the traveling public or those people planning on visiting the Mono Basin can get updated weather conditions and plan their trips accordingly.

The Mono Lake Committee has reported some unique weather conditions over the years, including occasional heavier snowfall amounts than Mammoth Lakes, and the icy shroud of the “poconip”—a dense fog that develops over Mono Lake, named by the indigenous Kutzadika^a Paiute people. Days go by, sometimes weeks, when Mono Lake is completely hidden from view and temperatures remain well below freezing. It is a surreal

experience, celebrated by some and vilified by others, causing many sun-starved residents to seek the warm sun and blue skies above the fog.

Fog is not the only unusual weather that occurs at Mono Lake. During the 48 hours of December 1st and 2nd, the Mono Lake Committee reported five inches of new snow, making Lee Vining and June Lake the only places in the state to report measurable precipitation. When there is a low pressure convergence over Mono Lake, there is growing evidence that the lake appears to enhance precipitation. When temperatures are low enough, this can result in snow. These snowfalls can be beautiful—very light and crystalline with little water content.

Beautiful scenery can be created by the fog and freezing temperatures. Spectacular layers of rime—a delicate ice coating, cover everything during the poconip invasion, making it look like Mother Nature visited overnight and sugar frosted the entire landscape. Those visitors lucky enough to have cameras and who are willing to dare the bone-chilling cold of the fog can come away with unforgettable images of the Mono Basin.

If you're curious about the poconip, give the Mono Lake Committee a call at 760-647-6595 or log onto the Website for live weather data and Webcam images of Mono Lake and Lee Vining at www.monolake.org.

Captions for “Poconip” press release

Photo #1: Mono Lake and the town of Lee Vining lie beneath this veil of “poconip” fog. This view is from Conway Summit. Highway 395 is seen disappearing into the thick fog bank. Photo by Douglas Dunaway

Photo #2: The poconip fog covers everything with a crystalline layer of rime. This tree and house look like they have been coated with powdered sugar. Photo by Douglas Dunaway

Photo #3: The western shoreline of Mono Lake with rime covered willows. Mono Lake is out there somewhere. Photo by Douglas Dunaway

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Photos of the Mono Lake area and the text of this press release are available for download from www.monolake.org/press

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The Mono Lake Committee is a nonprofit citizens' group dedicated to protecting and restoring the Mono Basin ecosystem, educating the public about Mono Lake and the impacts on the environment of excessive water use, and promoting cooperative solutions that protect Mono Lake and meet real water needs without transferring environmental problems to other areas.