

MONO LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Winter~Spring 2005



Today is the first in five that Hwy 395 has been open both to the north and south of Lee Vining after severe winter storms. It's hard for many people to imagine what that really means—no driving, no mail, no restocking of the shelves at the Mono Market. When you're not shoveling, you're carefully watching the snowflakes fall while drying your gloves for the next round.

Around town teams of able-backed shovelers join plows to tackle the roofs and driveways of neighbors and friends. In the occasional break in the frozen deluge we rush for skis and snowshoes to get a glimpse of the lake—barely pausing when crossing the unusually quiet road. Sometimes you make it out there only to be shrouded in poconip, the ice fog that glistens in the air hanging right before your eyes. Other times you find you've seized just the right moment, and glide out into the stunningly quiet world of white and unbelievable blue. Most often, however, you make it out the door just when a big gust of wind filled with determined snowflakes turns you right back to the stash of hot chocolate by the stove.

The old timers smile and nod knowingly—this is how it always used to be, they say. Listening to their tales of big winters past, one can see how this much snow can define a town.

Skiing out unplowed Hwy 120 to the east, the only traffic equipped enough to travel here is that of rabbits, coyotes, and juncos. Climbing up the Mono Craters to catch a glimpse of the lake, I turn to find it staring right back at me. Of course, I think, this landscape too, is defined by snow. To me, it looks like the whole Mono Basin is smiling and nodding knowingly.

Like the snowpack, this Newsletter is a combined Winter & Spring issue, and will have to last through the spring runoff. Accordingly, we've packed it full of interesting updates and stories that will hopefully get you through the winter, wherever yours may be.

—Arya Degenhardt, Communications Director



COVER PHOTO BY GEOFF MCQUILKIN
ARYA DEGENHARDT

A snowy view of Mono Lake, Black Point, and the Bodie Hills from the base of the Mono Craters.

Mono Lake Committee Mission

The Mono Lake Committee is a non-profit 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.



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MONO LAKE
NEWSLETTER

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Land Trade Still the Best Option to Stop Lakeside Subdivision

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

Resort home development is currently threatening 120 acres of natural area on Mono Lake's west shore and the federal protections signed into law by Ronald Reagan twenty years ago.

As the new year arrives, the developer is still threatening to construct a 38-home subdivision. A land trade is still the best solution, as it would result in the property going into protected public ownership. Disputes about the value of the land continue to be the main stumbling block to a successful land trade.

Forest Service Makes New Offer

In December the US Forest Service sought to break the logjam by offering to go to court jointly with the developer to seek an independent, third-party valuation of the property. In such an arrangement, the Forest Service would honor whatever dollar value the court sets for the land, and the developer would commit to selling the property at that price. So far, there has been no official response to the offer from the developer.

Mono County in the Crossfire

The out-of-the-area developer, New Cities Land Company, has indicated plans to force Mono County planning officials and supervisors into the hot seat on this issue. New Cities has completed almost all of the paperwork necessary to seek county approval for subdividing the 120-acre parcel.

If New Cities completes the application, it will be asking Mono County to disregard the federal protections that overlay this property and 80,000 other acres surrounding Mono Lake. Allowing a subdivision is an entirely discretionary act for the county, so whether local officials are willing to undermine the Scenic Area remains to be seen.

It is clear that it will be a long, expensive road to any final decision. The Mono Lake Committee anticipates lawsuits under the California Environmental Quality Act at a minimum; with Mono Lake's high level of environmental importance, other legal action is likely as well.

A broad array of questions and problems face the development project should it proceed. Many of the 38 homes proposed for the property will be highly visible from the Scenic Highway corridor. Water supply may be challenging to obtain, and safe waste disposal on the steep site may prove difficult as

well. A perennial stream flows through the property and is thought to provide habitat for the endangered mountain beaver; endangered willow flycatchers may also use the area. Steep slopes raise the question of avalanche hazards.



Property development plans overlaid onto an aerial photo of the site.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DWP. OVERLAY BY BARTSHE MILLER

The project's cost to Mono County is another issue. While a subdivision would produce new tax revenue, it would also bring new costs for the county to provide services. Perhaps more significantly, a precedent with this project could erode natural area and community protections throughout the county. The construction of so many homes away from existing towns violates Mono County's General Plan direction to "Provide for the

orderly growth of Mono Basin communities in a manner that retains the small town character ... and protects the area's scenic, recreational, and natural resources."

Community Questions

The proposed project also raises major community questions for Mono Basin residents. The proposed homes would almost equal the number of homes in Lee Vining and, if occupied year-round, would increase the area population by an astonishing 20–30%. Questions of community integrity, demand on local services, and growth-inducing impacts are numerous. Additionally, the proposal is simply unfair to residents and business owners who have adapted to live within the Scenic Area guidelines over the past 20 years.

A Top Committee Priority

Whatever the challenges ahead, this issue is a top priority for the Mono Lake Committee. The Committee's goal is to keep the protections established by the Scenic Area 20 years ago in place on the property—meaning subdivision is prohibited. Committee staff are talking frequently with local, state, and nationally elected officials about this issue, working with media to raise public awareness, working with the Forest Service and the landowner to find solutions, and working with attorneys to prepare for the fights that may lie ahead. Committee members will play a critical role as strong public pressure will be the deciding factor in the resolution of this issue. ❖

Geoff McQuilkin is the Committee's Co-Executive Director of Operations. He recently dug a skylight in the cave of snow that currently covers the window to his office.



SANTIAGO ESCHUCERIA

The Lake and the ‘Hood

by Jane Braxton Little

Mono Lake is a magnificent landmark for all who care about conservation. The return to health of this austere, hauntingly beautiful basin offers hope that dedication and good science can protect the landscapes we treasure.

But the lessons of Mono Lake go beyond the victory the rising waters represent. It is here that environmentalists pioneered a process rejecting the traditional politics of tradeoff. In their 16-year David-versus-Goliath battle with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP), the Mono Lake Committee insisted on saving the Mono ecosystem without harming another system. How they did that is as inspiring as the streams rushing down hillsides to fill the lake.

The environmentalists knew from the start their fight was with Los Angeles’ water bureaucracy, not its residents. They always recognized the city’s need for water. What they did not know when they made this commitment is that their most enthusiastic allies would come from inner-city activists and the children of East LA—that this disenfranchised community

would become the standard bearer for Mono Lake. Equally ignored by traditional politics, the rural conservation community joined hands with urban barrios over water.

Today they share a modern-day watershed linked by a man-made aqueduct, not a natural stream channel.

Equally ignored by traditional politics, the rural conservation community joined hands with urban barrios over water. Today they share a modern-day watershed....

It would have been easy to treat Los Angeles as a villain. The 350-mile aqueduct diverting water from Mono Lake’s feeder streams was part of a grandiose scheme to benefit the burgeoning metropolis. City officials employed stealth, deception, and ruthless power to acquire the water rights eventually used to drain Owens Lake, and they

were bent on wiping out Mono Lake, too. From William Mulholland to the water czars that followed him into the 1990s, Los Angeles officials held the unshakable conviction that the city’s domestic and industrial needs for water were of far greater value than any agricultural usage. The value of a natural resource was not even discussed.

The Mono Lake Committee fought back in a series of

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lawsuits, but it remained committed to more than saving the lake. From the start these activists looked for solutions that would reconcile the need for water at the lake and in Los Angeles. Although the aqueduct was built to enrich the city at the expense of the lake, the Committee viewed it as an inextricable link between two communities, one very rural, the other ultra urban.

Various court decisions ordering protections for the lake and its feeder streams culminated in 1994, when the California State Water Resources Control Board ordered Los Angeles to reduce its water diversions until the lake level returns to a surface elevation of 6,392 feet. Years earlier, however, Mono Lake Committee Executive Director Martha Davis had laid the groundwork for turning the orders into real water. Her goal was to develop conservation programs in Los Angeles that would replace the water the courts ordered returned to Mono Lake. Her efforts contributed to state legislation allocating \$35 million to Los Angeles for water conservation and recycling.

How that money hit the city's streets is part of the karma radiated by Davis and the Committee's approach to problem solving. Primed by a three-year drought, the DWP was ready to use the state funds to test a pilot program distributing low-flush toilets, and to hire community groups to do it. Whether or not the inclusive "we're in this together" philosophy of the Mono Lake Committee was a direct influence on this decision, it was a remarkable choice. And DWP topped it by hiring Elsa Lopez, an inner-city activist, to coordinate the toilet distribution program in her neighborhood.

Lopez and her grassroots group, Mothers of East LA, Santa Isabel, sent neighborhood youth door-to-door extolling the benefits of the ultra-low-flushers, which cut water use to a third of the old ones. That's 5,000 gallons a year that could stay in Mono Lake, these neophyte conservationists said. Soon East LA had several hundred new low-flush toilets installed every week. DWP officials were impressed with the program's success. But what happened next stunned them.



An Outward Bound Adventures group visiting the northernmost reach of the LA Aqueduct, where some of their drinking water comes from.



Southern California high school Olympic Academy getting perspective on the Mono Basin from the top of Panum Crater.

Lopez understood the educational benefits of experiencing lessons hands-on. She worked with the Mono Lake Committee to send a group of Los Angeles youth to Mono Lake for five days of camping, hiking, and swimming. It was the first time for many of them to see living fish in a stream and a river that doesn't have concrete sides. Once home, the kids carried their real-life vision of Mono Lake to their parents, teachers, and neighbors. In two months the number of low-flush toilets was triple the number distributed the previous seven months.

The link between Mono Lake and their lives in Los Angeles is intangible for most of these campers, but one may have spoken for all when he said, "Mono's better than Magic Mountain. Mono's part of the 'hood.'" This enthusiasm has contributed to an astonishing conservation record: Los Angeles has cut its water usage by 15 percent and held its demand for water to 1970 levels despite a 30 percent population increase.

The relationship the Mono Lake Committee now enjoys with Los Angeles is a tentative alliance that will be tested when the lake level reaches the 6,392-foot elevation goal, triggering a State Water Board review of future water diversion. These discussions will also test the grassroots urban constituency the Committee has developed and its commitment to Mono Lake.

What will matter then is what has always mattered as much as Mono Lake: working toward solutions that benefit everyone. The Mono Lake Committee has taught us a way to save the places we love without trading them for someone else's beloved spot. It has taught us the value of unlikely alliances. It has given us a process for hope. ❖

Jane Braxton Little, a freelance journalist based in Plumas County, California, has been covering water and other natural resource issues since escaping to the Sierra Nevada with a Harvard MA in Japanese cultural history. She has won numerous professional awards for investigative, consumer, and environmental affairs reporting. Her writing and photographs have appeared in over 40 national publications, including Audubon, American Forests, High Country News, The Los Angeles Times, and Utne Reader.

An Inside Look at the Outdoor Experiences Program

by Elin Ljung

“I am not going in that water.”

“Do we have to get our hands wet?”

“Why are we looking at bugs? Bugs are gross.”

These were some of the comments I heard down at lower Lee Vining Creek on a late August afternoon as a group of kids from Pasadena dubiously considered the cold water flowing toward Mono Lake. As part of the Mono Lake Committee’s Outdoor Experiences (OE) Program, these kids had come to spend five days in the

Mono Basin, five days full of hiking, spending time together, and learning about where their water comes from. Kristie Reddick, OE Co-Coordinator, reassured the kids that they didn’t have to get wet if they didn’t want to.

“Here, I’ll go in first, and you can watch me. Carlos, will you help me get the bug hotel out of the water?” The kids watched with looks of curiosity and disbelief as Kristie waded right into the creek. With Carlos’ help from shore, she pulled a mesh bag full of leaves out of the water and brought it, dripping, back to the group.

“That’s a bug hotel?” asked Fattavia doubtfully, wrinkling her nose at the soggy mess.

“It sure is,” said Kristie, “Invertebrates that live in the water like to hide in old decaying leaves that gather along the sides of the stream. Let’s see if any of these guys want to come out.” She placed the leaf pack into a white plastic tray with some water at the bottom, and instantly, several little creepy crawlies scrambled out of the leaves. The kids bent over the tray eagerly to see.

“Whoa, cool! You caught lots of them!”

“They’re fast!”

“What are they called?”

Kristie passed around small aquatic invertebrate field guides. “Well, let’s find out,” she said. After separating out an invertebrate for everyone’s individual tray, she told them to look closely at their bug and then try to match it with the pictures in the field guide. “Notice things like the shape of its body, how many breathing tubes it has...”

“Mine has a house!” squealed Jessica, flipping through her



Outdoor Experiences Coordinator Kristie Reddick examines bugs from Lee Vining Creek with the Southern California community group NATHA.

field guide. “I think it’s a caddisfly!”

“You’re right,” Kristie told her, and then turned her attention to Carlos and Fattavia, who were deliberating about the differences between a stonefly and a mayfly. For half an hour the kids were absorbed in identifying their bugs. They peppered Kristie with questions, traded their invertebrates for new ones from the leaf pack, and helped each other when they were stumped. They had forgotten about the dirt and the hot sun and getting

their hands wet—those bugs were fascinating.

Carlos, Fattavia, and Jessica were part of a group of kids that had come up to the Mono Basin to participate in the Outdoor Experiences Program, a part of the Mono Lake Committee’s work that remained nearly invisible to me during my time as an intern last summer. Co-Coordinators Santiago Escruceria and Kristie Reddick spent most of their time out at Cain Ranch, the OE headquarters, and only popped into the main office in Lee Vining a few times each week. In order to get a better idea of how the program worked, I had a chance to tag along with Kristie, Santiago, and Herley Jim Bowling, the program’s Southern California-based coordinator, for the NATHA (Neighbors Acting Together Helping All) group that visited in mid-August.

After all the kids had piled out of the van and the food had been unloaded into fridges and cupboards, Santiago called everyone into the living room for the opening circle. Each of the six kids held a large blue plastic cup full of water, which they set down carefully as Santiago welcomed the group to the Mono Basin and went over the week’s schedule. The kids’ eyes widened at the mention of a night hike (without flashlights!), canoeing out on Mono Lake, and a hike up in Yosemite that would take all day. They would also be sleeping outside in the front yard during their stay! Several kids looked a little nervous—I could tell that this was something new.

Santiago began to go over the rules for the week. “One of the first rules here at Cain Ranch is to drink a lot of water,” he said. “We want you to try to drink six to eight cups of water

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Drinking lots of water in the Mono Basin is a crucial lesson made fun with games and contests as a part of the OE Program.

every day, and we'll all start right now. Everybody, pick up your cup and drink all that water!" As we all downed our glasses of water, Angel asked, "Why do we have to drink so much water?" George, sitting next to him, added, "Yeah, at home I just drink soda."

"Well, when you're in the Mono Basin, you're in the desert, which is very dry," Santiago explained. "You also came up many feet in elevation from Pasadena to here, so you are closer to the sun! It's important to drink a lot of water because it will keep you healthy while you visit this hot and dry place." Some kids nodded, while others looked as if they wanted a Coke instead. Santiago and Herley Jim went on to ask the kids how they could tell if they were getting dehydrated.

"Do you get a headache?" asked Angel.

"And sometimes you feel sick?" added Fernanda in a shy voice.

"Yes, those are both signs that you need to drink more water," Santiago nodded. "If any of you feel a headache or like you are getting sick, come and tell me or Kristie or Herley Jim. Also if your lips feel chapped, that can mean you need more water as well."

As we went over the other rules and talked about the activities for the next day, I could see many of the kids get less nervous and more excited about their Mono Basin visit.

"Hey, do you guys want to catch some bugs yourselves?" Kristie asked when all the invertebrates from the leaf packs had been identified. The kids carried their trays down to the creek and carefully tipped their bugs back into the water. They followed Kristie downstream a ways to where the creek opened up into a wide, cobbly channel. "All you need to do is pick up a nice big rock from underwater and look underneath it," Kristie said. "Jessica, do you want to help me?" Jessica waded out to stand next to Kristie in the water, and they lifted a smooth mossy rock from the creek bed.

All of a sudden, Jessica shrieked and dropped the rock back into the water. "I felt something move!" she said, grinning at Kristie and wiping her hands nervously on her pants. "Did you? That was

probably one of the same invertebrates we just looked at from the leaf packs," Kristie explained. "Let's try again." This time, they were able to find a stonefly scurrying around on the rock, and brought it over to show Carlos and Fattavia.

After a few tries of turning over the rocks she could reach from shore, Fattavia's foot slipped into the water. At first she looked mortified and pulled it out, but then shrugged and waded all the way in. "Now I don't have to worry about getting wet," she noted. "I'm already wet!"

As the kids inspected rock after rock, a four-wheeler drove down to the edge of the creek and paused before roaring across in a cloud of spray and exhaust. Jessica looked at Herley Jim in horror and asked, "Can he do that?" Herley Jim told her that yes, that four-wheeler was allowed to cross the creek, even though it hurt the animals living in the water. "Hey!" Jessica shouted at the disappearing vehicle, "You're killing all our bugs!"

Carlos stuck to the shore and looked around under the willows. "Kristie!" he called, "I want to find a leech. How can I find a leech?" Kristie waded over to him and the two of them examined the rocks carefully until she spotted one. "Do you see that little worm?" she asked him. He squinted at the rock, but then his eyes widened as he saw the leech. "Huh. It's smaller than I thought it would be," he said.

Kristie left Carlos to his own leech hunting and waded over to me, grimacing. "My feet are numb," she remarked, and then said, "Aren't they doing well?" They certainly were. These city kids who, just an hour earlier, had been skeptical about getting their hands wet, were now absorbed in discovering the creek on their own. I knew that once they went back to Pasadena, all of them would remember looking for bugs in the creek on a summer afternoon, or hiking through the forest at night, or canoeing on Mono Lake, or scaling the face of Lumbert Dome way up in the mountains. They would remember their Outdoor Experiences week with the Mono Lake Committee for years to come. ❖

Elin Ljung was a Summer Intern with the Mono Lake Committee in 2004. She is currently finishing up her senior year at St. Olaf College in Minnesota while dreaming of Mono Lake.



Another Victory for Mono Lake

Mono Lake Shoulder Widening Project Suspended

by Jen Nissenbaum

As 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.

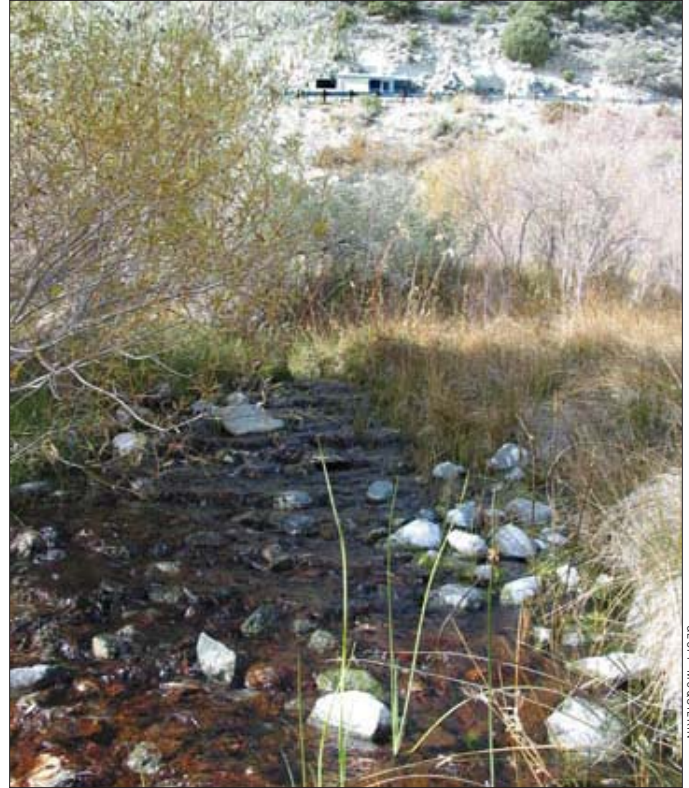
After taking into account all the public comments received—thank you Mono Lake Committee members!—and the local community concerns, the LTC decided to suspend the Project. This decision demonstrates their clear commitment to maximizing the benefits of transportation dollars spent in Mono County while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



GEORGE MCCULLIKIN

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 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!

DWP Weighs In On Mill Creek Settlement

The Department Asserts Its Mill Creek Water Right—Mill Creek To Benefit

by Lisa Cutting

In a December letter submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) provided comment on the planned Lundy Hydroelectric Project Settlement Agreement. The letter expresses DWP's desire to protect its Mill Creek water right and keep its allocated water in Mill Creek to benefit both Mill Creek and Mono Lake. Although DWP has not been involved in the ongoing settlement negotiations and is not a signatory to the settlement agreement, it has expressed both support for the process and the resulting outcome.



Mill Creek, December 2004.

1900s, DWP had plans to extend its existing aqueduct system north to include Mill Creek water in the total amount exported from the Mono Basin to the City of Los Angeles. Due to high cost, plans were aborted, but its water right has remained intact. Through the years DWP has continued to use that water to irrigate their lands, supporting grazing practices and maintaining scenic, historic landscapes.

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DWP's Action Timely As Settlement Process Draws To A Close

DWP's clarifications to FERC by way of this recent letter couldn't have come at a more opportune time. The current settlement only addresses FERC relicensing issues and is not the comprehensive settlement on which the parties had hoped to agree. The near-complete settlement includes a specified amount of water to be released from Lundy Reservoir, a rehabilitated return ditch, and an annual water management planning process, but the document does not address water rights and the lawful delivery of those rights.

DWP's letter clarifies for FERC and the settlement parties exactly what its intentions are related to its Mill Creek water rights. This is significant in that DWP has approximately one-half of the decreed rights on Mill Creek.

Parties to the Mill Creek Settlement

Even though FERC had set a final settlement deadline of June 2004 (see Fall 2004 *Newsletter*) that deadline was extended because such significant progress had been made on the draft settlement. Presumed signatories to the negotiated settlement are the United States Forest Service, Southern California Edison, American Rivers, CalTrout, Bureau of Land Management, California Department of Fish and Game, and the Mono Lake Committee. Two parties from the original settlement process—Mono County and People For Mono Basin Preservation—opted to not participate in the final, limited settlement.

DWP's Water Right

Under the 1914 Mill Creek water rights decree, DWP has rights to approximately 40 cubic feet per second of water. In the early

History of DWP's Involvement with the FERC Settlement

When the settlement parties first convened to begin this most recent series of negotiations in February of 2001, DWP was at the table. It became clear almost immediately that the process would be long and arduous. DWP opted to significantly limit its involvement in the negotiation process. DWP did however continue to receive updates, and at times was asked to clarify certain operating assumptions that the parties were working through.

DWP made it clear from the start that if the parties were able to reach a negotiated settlement, it would support that decision provided the agreement did not compromise its water rights and interests in the Mono Basin. DWP's letter to FERC does just that—supports the negotiated settlement outcome while reinforcing its interests and protecting its Mill Creek water right.

Water: A Critical Component to Restoring Mill Creek

As the Mill Creek settlement document continues to be refined, signed, and submitted to FERC for review and acceptance, the reality of Mill Creek returning to a healthy cottonwood-willow riparian habitat appears more and more certain. DWP's assertion that "it is the City of Los Angeles' desire that its Mill Creek rights be devoted to the environmentally beneficial use of inflow to Mono Lake to the greatest extent possible" and that DWP "believes that release of Southern California Edison's hydropower tailwater down Mill Creek, provides the greatest efficiency in achieving this goal" ensures that as the settlement agreement moves forward, Mill Creek will begin to see the flows necessary to begin the restoration process. ❖

Lisa Cutting is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director. This winter she's spent more time in the gym helping out the Lee Vining Lady Tigers with basketball than on her skis.

Statewide Policy Updates

by Frances Spivy-Weber

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Update

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy officially became a state agency on January 1, 2005, with a mandate to bring new resources to the Sierra-Cascade region for conservation, cultural and historic preservation, economic development, and natural disaster prevention. Now the challenges and opportunities begin!

First, it will be important to have 13 voting members who are willing to work in a collaborative process with public and private organizations and individuals from the Sierra and statewide. Six County Supervisors will be selected by March 2, 2004 by the Boards of Supervisors in each of six subregions. Mono's subregion includes Mono, Inyo, and Alpine Counties, and Byng Hunt from Mono County is interested in taking a leadership role. The Governor will appoint five members, and the Senate and Assembly will each appoint one public member—all to represent statewide interests. These appointments should be made by March, as well.

One of the first tasks for the Conservancy will be to choose a headquarters location and to hire staff. This could happen before July 1, but no one should be surprised if the Conservancy waits to implement actions that cost money until after the 2005/2006 budget is in place. The Mono Lake Committee is particularly interested in the Conservancy having a strong virtual technology budget for its subregions in order to overcome the communications challenges of distance and seasonal barriers. The Committee is also part of a larger group of organizations that will help the Conservancy secure funds for planning, operations, and projects.

The Sierra Fund recently honored the Mono Lake Committee with an award for its role in creating the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. The Committee shared the stage with the Sierra Nevada Alliance, Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council, Sierra Business

Council, Planning and Conservation League, Trust for Public Land, Assemblymen John Laird and Tim Leslie, and Governor Schwarzenegger.

State Legislature Confirms State Parks Authority Over Mono Lake Waters

At the end of the legislative session, Governor Schwarzenegger signed into law two bills that contained language confirming the authority of the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve over Mono Lake's waters.

SB1104 added the following statement to Section 5045 of the Public Resources Code: "The reserve shall include, and the [State Parks] department shall manage, all resources within the reserve's boundaries, including the waters of Mono Lake."

AB2104 made it clear that State Park's authority would not affect the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's existing authority by stating that State Parks would not have authority over any of the following: "the instream flow requirements of the tributaries to Mono Lake; the water surface elevation of Mono Lake; the water production, diversion, storage, and conveyance activities of the City of Los Angeles; and the determination of water quality standards for Mono Lake."

This important legislative language puts to rest the improbable claim, made by a few individuals last year, that the State Reserve which protects the lake does not include the waters of Mono Lake itself. The Committee commends Senator Byron Sher and Assemblywoman Jackie Goldberg for their leadership in clarifying the intent of the legislature when it created the Reserve 22 years ago. ❖

Fran is the Committee's Co-Executive Director for Policy. She lives in the best of two worlds—a block from the beach in Los Angeles and only minutes from Mono Lake in Lee Vining.

California Water Policy Conference Award

The Public Officials for Water and Environmental Reform, or POWER, gave Frances Spivy-Weber their Carla Bard Advocacy Award at the California Water Policy Conference in November, 2004. The annual award is given in memory of Carla Bard, a former chair of the State Water Resources Control Board. Bard was a witty, sometimes outrageous advocate for the environment, and the award honors individuals who go beyond the call of duty in their work at a local level. This year's conference and awards focused on the work of people and organizations that support environmental justice while advancing California water programs and projects.

Frances Spivy-Weber, Co-Executive Director of Policy for the Mono Lake Committee, received the recognition because of her personal commitment to working with community orga-

nizations in Los Angeles to promote water conservation. Since 1992, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has employed community organizations like the Asian American Drug Abuse Program and the Korean Youth and Community Center to market and distribute low-flow toilets in the City's neighborhoods. Many of these groups also participate each summer in the Mono Lake Committee's Outdoor Experiences program at Mono Lake. In addition, Fran meets regularly with community groups to explore new job possibilities in water conservation for inner city groups, and this networking has led to many solid alliances.

The Carla Bard Award is indeed an honor for Fran and the Mono Lake Committee.

State Water Board Members Tour the Mono Basin

by Lisa Cutting

This past October three members of the California State Water Resources Control Board traveled over to the Mono Basin to catch up on Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's (DWP) most recent restoration activities. State Water Board chair Arthur Baggett, Jr. and board members Nancy Sutley and Gary Carlton spent the day in the field with Water Board staff, representatives from DWP, and the Mono Lake Committee.

As the group toured Mono Lake and its tributary streams, the day afforded numerous opportunities for representatives of the three groups to interact and discuss ongoing restoration issues. It is always time well spent for State Water Board members to see Mono Lake—either as an introduction for new members or an update for continuing members—as its importance in shaping California water policy continues to influence decisions made throughout the state.

New Diversion Facility Guarantees Flows

The highlight of the tour was the work in progress on the

new Lee Vining Creek Sediment Bypass Facility. The previous diversion structure was problematic in that sediment was not able to be passed downstream, and once these sediments accumulated in the pond, they had to be dredged out. Additionally, the structure was built in the 1940s when DWP's main objective was exporting water, not maintaining minimum stream flows in the creek. In recent years, keeping the minimum flows calibrated correctly was often a challenging venture especially during spring runoff when weather fluctuations could significantly alter flow amounts (see Fall 2004 *Newsletter*).

But as DWP engineers explained to the group, the new facility allows for sediment to flow through the system. It can also set a flow for the creek and force the conduit transporting water exports to fluctuate. Perhaps most importantly, the system can be operated remotely from DWP's office in Bishop. From the Committee's perspective, these improvements insure optimal operation of Lee Vining Creek, and almost guarantee that the creek will not experience any stream flow violations in years to come. ❖

Mono Basin Forest Service Visitor Center —Closed for the Winter—

by Jen Nissenbaum

The impacts of large budget shortfalls in the Inyo National Forest have trickled down to the Mono Basin and the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Visitor Center has closed for the winter. The closure went into effect in mid-November. The Forest Service has indicated that it will reopen in early spring, although an exact date has not yet been decided.

“Closing the visitor center is a sad thing for us, no one feels good about it,” said Nancy Upham, Public Affairs Officer for the Inyo National Forest. “Right now, the Forest Service is looking at every cost saving measure because we need to cut costs immediately by a significant amount.” All of the cost-cutting measures are a result of a recent attempt to balance the Inyo National Forest's 2005 Fiscal Year budget.

Upham said that the Forest Service is trying to be as creative as possible—by searching for new sources of sustained funding and by developing new partnerships—in an effort to keep the Visitor Center open year-round in the future. One idea that is



under discussion is to develop a partnership with the National Park Service, where visitors would be able to obtain permits and information about Yosemite at the Mono Basin Visitor Center and in return, the Visitor Center would receive staffing help from the Park Service.

The Mono Basin Visitor Center opened in 1992 and provides an excellent introduction for visitors to the Mono Basin—including

interactive displays, films, rotating exhibits, and interpretive tours during the summer. The Mono Lake Committee's Information Center & Bookstore will remain open throughout the winter season daily from 9:00AM–5:00PM to help visitors.

Helpful Mono Basin Contact Information :

- Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve (760) 647-6331
- Mammoth Forest Service Visitor Center (760) 924-5500
- Bridgeport Ranger Station (760) 932-7070
- Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore (760) 647-6595

Chautauqua: Nothing Ordinary Again

by Bartshé Miller

Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua

June 17-19, 2005

Online registration begins April 15th

www.birdchautauqua.org

The winter solstice has slipped by and with sun-filled hours slowly on the increase you might be wondering what you'll do on the most daylight-packed weekend of the year. Do you have at least a passing interest in birds, music, or subjects eclectic? Do you find yourself mimicking bird calls with the urge to share this unusual talent? Wonder no further, the 4th Annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua is just around the corner!

Mark your calendar for June 17-19, 2005. This year's event will feature more of the same Chautauqua goodness—interesting field trips, engaging workshops, scintillating music, and the world famous Chautauqua bird calling contest. Presenters and leaders include (as of this January deadline): Jon Dunn, Dr. Dave Herbst, Ann Howald, Burleigh Lockwood, David Lukas, Peter Metropulos, Ane Carla Rovetta, Rich Stallcup, Erik Westerlund, Dr. David Winkler, and many more to follow.

The weekend's attendance benefits scientific research through the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua Research Grant. Science may seem like it's under siege across the nation, but its roots are still growing around Mono Lake. The Mono Basin is one of the most intensively studied natural areas in California. Research includes early surveys by Joseph Grinnell in 1915, the pioneering birding/conservation work of David Gaines and David Winkler in the late 1970s, and continues today with biologists from PRBO Conservation Science among others.

In 2004 the Mono Basin Bird Chautau-

qua Research Grant helped fund the Mono Basin Willow Flycatcher Project. Begun in 2003, the Willow Flycatcher Project gathers demographic data on an increasing population of the State's endangered Willow Flycatcher on Rush Creek. Chris McCreedy, the project's principal investigator, will be at the Chautauqua to share some of the exciting news about the return of Willow Flycatchers on Rush Creek.

Online registration begins April 15,



TREE SWALLOWS COURTESY OF ALLAN DEER

2005. Check for complete Chautauqua details online at www.birdchautauqua.org.

Call the Mono Lake Committee at (760) 647-6595 for more information and to find out how to register by fax or mail.

The Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua ... not your ordinary bird festival! ❖

Sip your way to a good cause!

2nd Annual

Mono Lake Wine Flight

Honoring the science and senior scientists that helped save Mono Lake

June 18, 2005

The Mono Inn at Mono Lake

4:00-6:30PM

Brief presentations by: Dr. David Herbst • Dave Shuford
Dr. Scott Stine • Peter Vorster & Dr. David Winkler

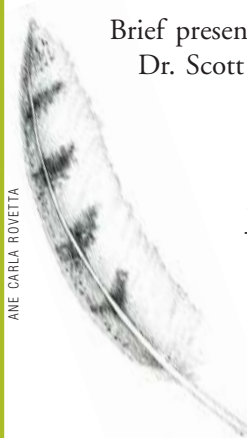
Silent Auction

Fine wine provided by Barefoot,
J.Lohr, and Muir-Hanna Wineries

\$50 per person

Space is limited, please call the Mono Lake Committee
at (760) 647-6595 for reservations

Proceeds benefit the new Mono Basin Field Station



ANE CARLA ROVETTA

Scientific Research in the Mono Basin

News from the Mono Basin Field Station and Beyond

We're happy to report that the quiet of winter only goes as far as the front door of the up-and-running Mono Basin Field Station here in Lee Vining. With research projects in various stages of data gathering, data entering, and report writing, the full Field Station is a testament to the ongoing vitality of scientific research in the Mono Basin. And as demonstrated by Sean Boyd, of the Canadian Wildlife Service, there is much research from afar as well. Visit www.monobasinresearch.org for more on science in the Mono Basin!

Eared Grebe counts on Mono Lake

Sean Boyd, Ph.D. Research Scientist, Canadian Wildlife Service

During the summer of 1995, I radio-marked Eared Grebes (*Podiceps nigricolis*) in south-central British Columbia, in part to determine how many molted on Mono Lake. In October of the same year, I detected about half of the marked birds at Mono Lake, and when I repeated this work again in 1996 the same pattern emerged.

While listening for radio signals during the aerial telemetry surveys I experimented with vertical photography to estimate grebe abundance and arrived at a protocol that produced an accurate total count with minimum variance. I used this protocol for 6 years (1996–2001) and California Department of Fish and Game continued the surveys in 2004. The radio-telemetry work in 1996 suggested that counted totals could be increased by 15–20% to account for submerged birds (See box). This means that there were almost 2 million grebes on

Mono Lake in October 1997.

The 1998 decrease to only 0.9 million birds corresponded to a post-el nino year (winter 1997) in which tens or perhaps even hundreds of thousands of grebes perished in the Gulf of California.

By combining the Mono Lake total with that from Great Salt Lake (together these lakes support more than 95% of all North American Eared Grebes), the entire continental population can be tracked across years.

The October 2004 count was the lowest to date, and the reason for such a low count is unknown at this time. ❖

1996: 1.7 million

1997: 1.8 million

1998: 0.9 million

1999: 1.3 million

2000: 1.8 million

2001: 1.4 million

2004: 0.8 million

Numbers of Eared Grebes on Mono Lake, accounting for submerged birds.

Ecology of Greater Sage-grouse in Mono County

Melissa A. Farinha, United States Geological Survey

Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) are similar to quail and other grouse species (known collectively as gallinaceous birds), in their basic morphology and life history characteristics. Their primary mode of transportation is walking rather than flight, they have precocial young (meaning they leave the nest immediately after hatching), and they nest on the ground. However, unlike most other gallinaceous birds, Greater Sage-grouse tend to be longer-lived and have a lower reproductive rate. They are considered to be a sagebrush obligate species, requiring large areas of healthy sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.) for forage and cover. One of the most outstanding characteristics of the Greater Sage-grouse is the spring-time gathering and mating struts of the males on traditional strutting grounds, also known as leks.

We initiated our project in the spring of 2003 to gain a better understanding of the basic ecology of Greater Sage-grouse occurring in Mono County. The information we gather is shared with management agencies to improve conservation efforts for Sage Grouse in the region. Five study areas were established in Mono County based on previous knowledge of breeding populations. During the spring and fall, Greater Sage-grouse are caught and fitted with a small necklace-style radio-transmitter that is then used to monitor each marked individual. While birds are temporarily captured, several body measure-

ments are taken as well as a blood sample for contribution to genetic analyses. Locations of birds are taken year-round on a weekly schedule. There are now over 6,000 bird location points in our database, and 72 nests with associated habitat characteristics and outcomes recorded. Extensive vegetation samplings have been performed to characterize nesting and brood-rearing habitats. Currently we are in the process of collecting data on wintering habitats and movement patterns.

One of the goals of the study is to look at the home ranges and seasonal movements of the Greater Sage-grouse in the five study areas. Some of the preliminary analyses show there is little to no movement between the study areas, indicating that these populations are isolated to varying degrees. Additionally, snow depth dictates timing of movements to wintering grounds.

One of the more interesting wintertime behaviors we have encountered is the use of snow burrows. Burrows help to conserve energy required for thermoregulation in extreme winter conditions and provide cover from predators.

Much thanks to our partners in this project: California Department of Fish and Game, BLM, USFWS, LADWP, USFS Inyo and Toiyabe Forests, University of Nevada, Reno, Quail Unlimited, the Mono Lake Committee, and especially to the pilots of CDFG for their great support. ❖

Streamwatch

Lake-effect Snow; Low Reservoir Levels

by Greg Reis

On December 2nd, Lee Vining awoke to 5 inches of new snow. Thanks to this lake-effect snow from Mono Lake, the Mono Basin was the only place in the state that recorded precipitation that day!

Also that day, Jim Canaday from the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) held a meeting in Lee Vining to discuss the low levels of Grant Lake Reservoir. Present at the meeting were California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), Southern California Edison, US Forest Service, Mono County, the Mono County Fisheries Commission, CalTrout, the Grant Lake Reservoir marina operator, and the Mono Lake Committee.

It was great to have all these parties together in the same room to gain a mutual understanding of how water management affects each interest. It is clear that everyone wants to work together to maintain a high reservoir level while still meeting all the other needs.

Past problems with managing water efficiently have been rectified, but the reservoir will be very low next year unless we have more wet weather. The reservoir likely will be close to its minimum operating level around April 1st: the lowest it has been since 1994. A low reservoir level reduces Rush Creek flows, increases water temperatures in Rush Creek and the Upper Owens River, and

obstructs the operation of the Grant Lake Marina. The marina has had difficulty operating during the last two summers.

Fortunately this has been a wet start to the snowy season. Cold winter storms closed Tioga Pass for the season on October 17th, the earliest it has closed since 1949. The fall storms kept coming, we had 1/3 of our seasonal average snowpack by early November, and the snowpack remained above average through December. But plenty of snowfall is still needed before March for Mono Lake and Grant Lake Reservoir to rise this year. ❖

Lakewatch

Only 3/4 Million Eared Grebes on Mono Lake This Year

by Greg Reis

Just like Grant Lake Reservoir, Mono Lake has been dropping this year too—1.2 feet between April and December, with most of the drop happening after July 1st—the same as every summer since 2000. It will likely rise as much as a foot by April 1, 2005 from the November low of 6380.6. If we have continued dry-normal years, at the current rate of fall Mono Lake won't drop below 6380 on April 1st for at least two more years, causing reduced DWP water exports only after that.

This is starting to look less likely, as we're experiencing extremely wet weather as we go to press (see photo).

There have been no counts of Eared Grebes on Mono Lake for the past two years, and Joe Jehl,

Smithsonian Research Associate and long-time Mono Lake researcher, has been urging the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) to resume the counts, which they did in 2004. In mid-October DFG shot digital aerial photos of Mono Lake, and Sean Boyd, with the Canadian Wildlife Service, counted the birds on the photos. He came up with 665,300 grebes on the lake surface, which adds up to about 765,100 when adjusted for diving birds. This is the lowest number counted in recent years, even lower than the El Nino year of 1998. See the article on page 13 for more details on the Eared Grebe counts.

While an outbreak of Avian Cholera killed 30,000 Eared Grebes at Great Salt Lake, the other major fall staging area in



82 inches of snow fell in Lee Vining between December 27 and January 11th. Do you recognize this place? It's the weather station and apple tree between the Committee office buildings.

North America, there has been no evidence of a large die-off here at Mono. One possible reason for low numbers in mid-October is an early migration in this year, but Jehl is looking for more answers. ❖

Greg Reis is the Committee's Information Specialist. He's already been spotted snow-shoeing the Creek Trail in knee-deep powder this winter.

6417

6392

6381

6372

Prediversion lake level, 1941

Target lake level

Current lake level

Historic low, 1982

Mono Basin Journal

A Roundup of Quiet Happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



GEOFF MCQUILKIN

That the weather is most likely calm as you read this newsletter does not negate the fact that I write these words while thinly sheltered from a raging winter snowstorm of 80-mile-per-hour winds, just returned from snowshoeing across fencetops, the eaves of my house at waist level as I pushed across deeply stacked and drifted snow.

Indeed, what better time to write? One could not travel for any reason; tonight the highway is closed from Bishop to Nevada. Town, but seven miles away, is as remote as Hawaii; word is that in whiteout conditions the plows can no longer find the road and there is simply no traversing the route that I so casually drive on other days. The doors rattle, mysterious thumps come from the roof, and I wonder how quickly the

room would fill with snow should a window break open.

When morning arrives the air, exhausted by the night's exertions, is totally calm. We venture outside to see what work the wind has achieved. Houses nearby have retained their rooftops, happily, but all that blowing snow must have gone somewhere. Then we find it: the street is shoulder deep in wind packed snow, as solid as a sand dune and contoured to match. A block away, dogs run above the tops of cars and children slide down the snow-dune slopes. Later, the plows will come and be defeated by the dense drifts. For now, we skip over snowstakes to visit neighbors, reminded of the simple, ultimately unbeatable, power of wind and water. ❖



BARISHE MILLER

Poconip shrouds the islands as sunshine breaks through winter storms to reveal a landscape of snow.

Can Hetch Hetchy Learn from Mono Lake?

By Kimberly Rollins

Editor's Note: There's quite a buzz about efforts to restore the Hetch Hetchy Valley, where a respectable portion of the Bay Area gets and stores its water. Can the lessons learned at Mono Lake, where a balance was struck between the needs of people and the environment, be applied at Hetch Hetchy too?

Long before David Gaines and the Mono Lake Committee fought to save Mono Lake from going dry, the naturalist John Muir and the Sierra Club waged another battle. Theirs was an attempt to save Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park from being filled with water to provide a reservoir for San Francisco.

In 1913, Congress ignored the fervent pleas to conserve Hetch Hetchy and passed the Raker Bill, which allowed the valley to be flooded. In 1923, the O'Shaughnessy Dam was completed, Hetch Hetchy Valley was submerged under 300 feet of water, and some of the cleanest water in the country was transported, by gravity, 160 miles to the Bay Area.

Although nearly 100 years have passed, the issue of whether Hetch Hetchy Valley should remain a reservoir for the Bay Area or whether it should be restored is still a poignant subject.

In 1987, Don Hodel, Secretary of the Interior, suggested removing the dam and restoring Hetch Hetchy. However, ardent opposition blocked studies from ever being conducted to see the feasibility of restoring Hetch Hetchy.

In 1999, several environmental groups organized to form a non-profit, Restore Hetch Hetchy, which concentrates solely on restoring the submerged valley.

Recently, proponents of restoring the valley have reason for renewed optimism due to a report released by Environmental Defense titled "Paradise Regained." The study says a similar supply, storage, and quality of water can be maintained if the water is stored elsewhere.

The authors claim that 96 percent of San Francisco's share of the Tuolumne River can be caught further downstream in the Don Pedro Reservoir in Stanislaus County. The study has been released at a pertinent time since San Francisco Public Utilities Commission has plans for a \$3.6 billion overhaul to the Hetch Hetchy water system. According to the report, the water system could be changed for \$500 million to \$1.6 billion. Environmental Defense says this report is a starting point for discussion.

"'Dam the Hetch Hetchy?'" (Muir) famously declared. 'As well dam for water tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man.' The battle over Hetch Hetchy marked the beginning of a new era: as the forces behind unfettered development clashed with conservationists, the environmental movement was born."

As this Newsletter goes to press, updates and new developments continue to take place. Keep up with the news and discussions on Hetch Hetchy online at www.hetchhetchy.org. ❖

Just Add Water, Stir, and Instant Owens Lake!

by Mike Prather, Outreach Coordinator, Owens Valley Committee

Editor's note: We often get the question: What's going on with Owen's Lake? Here is an update from the Owens Valley Committee.

Although not that simple, the addition of significant amounts of water at Owens Lake for dust control continues one of the largest wildlife resurrections in the west. It was not the intention of Los Angeles to create new habitat that has lured tens of thousands of migrating shorebirds back to Owens. It was not their plan to foster the largest inland snowy plover nesting site in California. But because of the Clean Air Act the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) is trickling water on square miles of the dry surface of Owens Lake in order to control the extremely hazardous regional PM-10 dust particle emissions. This in turn grows algae which nourishes seething masses of flies and set the table for the return of the birds.

By the December 31, 2006 deadline for clean air at Owens Lake there will be approximately 25 square miles of shallow flooding for dust control. Much of this recreates the historic shallow lake food stopover that Owens Lake was before it was dried up in the 1920s. However, the current policy of Los Angeles is that water is for dust and not necessarily for birds. Current methods of dust control may be changed to methods

that don't use water, such as gravel, or that use less water and have less wildlife value such as managed vegetation.

As part of its permits for dust control Los Angeles was required to mitigate loss of habitat by creating and dedicating in perpetuity 1,000 acres of shorebird habitat where water would serve the dual purpose of dust control and wildlife enhancement. DWP has submitted a habitat management plan for this area to the California Department of Fish and Game. In addition, further permitting has required up to 1,000 more acres of habitat for shorebirds to also be dedicated in perpetuity. All of this is a good start on the road to a final resolution of how much of the habitat created for dust control should be managed for the dual purpose of dust and wildlife in perpetuity. May the birds as well as the dust settle on Owens Lake.

Postscript: The Sierra Club has filed a CEQA lawsuit on the Lower Owens River Project (LORP) Environmental Impact Report arguing that the LORP will dry up the outflow of the delta onto Owens Lake. This area is a known habitat location for migrating and nesting shorebirds and for waterfowl. It is hoped that this area can be defended or that an equivalent area can be found in the nearby dust control zones.

Dreams Do Come True: Mono Lake's New Ranger

by Douglas Dunaway

Deana Freeman, the new State Park Ranger for the Mono Basin Scenic Area is no stranger to hard work. Starting in 1990, Deana Freeman worked as a State Parks Aide for eight years, until she became a National Park Ranger for Yellowstone National Park in 1998. Working with large crowds of tourists at Yellowstone gave her the experiences she needed to enter into the State Parks Ranger Academy. Graduating from the State Parks Ranger Academy in May of 1999, Deana dreamed of getting a Ranger position in the Eastern Sierra.

The usual waiting period to get a preferred placement is 15 years, so she was prepared to do her time. Her first tour as a State Park Ranger was four years at the Millerton Lake State Recreation Area, located outside of Fresno on the west side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. After years of dealing with the hectic weekend crowds from the central valley, Deana transferred to the Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. Located on the northern coast above Eureka, this quiet oasis of coastal redwoods was a welcome change of pace, but she still wanted to work in the Eastern Sierra.

After the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve's first Rangers, Dave and Janet

Carle, retired in 2000 and 2004 respectively, Deana's dream of moving to the east side was about to come true. She and four other rangers applied for the position at Mono Lake. She was thrilled when she was offered the position, and on July 1st of 2004, she officially became the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve's second full-time ranger alongside Dave Marquart, seasonal ranger naturalist of 23-years.

One of the first things she did was kayak out to Paoha Island for the day. "I got a great perspective of the entire Tufa State Reserve from the island. With its hot springs, marshy coves, and sand dunes, it was the perfect panoramic viewing point to see all of the Mono Basin." Her first summer here was busy—splitting shifts between Mono Lake and Bodie State Parks because of staffing shortages, she felt a little stretched thin, but happily things have quieted down and Deana is settling into the flow of life at Mono Lake and the little town of Lee Vining. "The town has such a strong sense of community" she said "everyone in Lee Vining, from Dave Marquart and the Carle's, to all the Mono Lake Committee staff have made me feel welcome and comfortable."

An avid hiker and photographer,



JEN NISSENBAUM

Deana Freeman, the new Tufa State Reserve Ranger is a State Peace Officer with full law enforcement abilities.

Deana has no long term plans. When asked for a short response to why she loves it here, she replied "Mono Lake needs a ranger" leaving me with the feeling that she intends to stay here for a long time. ❖

Douglas Dunaway is the Committee's Staff Assistant. He's fully aware that Deana won't look the other way if she sees him speeding on his way home to Bishop.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HAWKINS

Music and Ecology Camp at Mono Lake

Explore Mono Lake through this independent camp run by Cole and Priscilla Hawkins for instrumentalists ages 11–18. There are two camp sessions this year: June 19–25 and August 7–13, 2005 both in the Mono Basin.

Mornings will focus on studying the ecology and natural history of the Mono Basin and Sierra Nevada. Morning activities include horseback riding, hiking in the Sierra, climbing into a volcano, a boat tour on Mono Lake, and optional swimming at a spa or hot spring.

Afternoons will focus on music—playing instruments in coached chamber groups, private lessons, and classes on improvisation, performance, and music listening.

Nights will be occupied with star gazing, jam sessions, slide shows, and learning about local Native Americans.

Camp will conclude with a concert for the public held at the historic Mono Inn.

The cost for camp is \$550 per session, and there are 2 scholarships available. For more information, contact camp organizers Cole and Priscilla Hawkins at (530) 753-1927, and visit <http://members.dcn.org/~chawkins/MUSICandECOLGY.html>.

Committee Attends 9th Annual International Lakes Conference in British Columbia

by Lisa Cutting

Editor's note: While whole world is focusing on the tsunami-related disasters, the Committee staff, too, continue to acknowledge the magnitude of the disaster and support the dedicated relief efforts underway.

Delegates from all over the world representing 23 countries traveled to the headwaters of the Columbia River near Invermere, British Columbia this past September to attend the Ninth Annual Living Lakes Conference. As a founding member of the network, one Committee staff person is sponsored to attend each conference. The two themes of this year's conference were:

- Managing development and growth to ensure wetlands and lakes are healthy and enjoyable for generations to come and
- Recognizing that healthy lakes and wetlands are a part of a vibrant

economic future, and that accountability for environmentally responsible economic activity rests with businesses, along with communities and government.

The five day conference united business leaders, scientists, journalists, and representatives from a variety of non-governmental organizations. Their discussion focused on topics ranging from nature conservation and economic development to corporate social responsibility.

Living Lakes Network Continues to Grow

Living Lakes is an international network and partnership whose mission is to enhance the protection, restoration, and rehabilitation of lakes, wetlands, and other freshwater bodies of the world and their catchment areas. The Living Lakes partnership promotes voluntary interna-

tional collaboration among organizations that carry out projects benefiting lakes, wildlife, and people.

The Living Lakes network was formed in 1998 when the Global Nature Fund rallied six lakes from around the world—Lake Constance bordered by Austria, Switzerland, and Germany; Lake St. Lucia in South Africa; Lake Biwa in Japan; the Nestos Lakes in Greece, the La Nava wetlands in Spain, and Mono Lake. The first conference was held in 1998 at Lake St. Lucia. The location rotates each year to a new site and in 1999 delegates traveled to Mono Lake for the third conference.

Since 1998 the network has grown significantly from its modest beginning group of six partners to 34 partner lakes spanning the globe (see www.livinglakes.org information).

The Tenth Annual Living Lakes Conference will be held May 2005 at Laguna de Bay in the Philippines. ❖

A Crane's Long Journey

by Sirit Coeppicus, Poyang Lake, China

It is one of the most amazing, naturally occurring phenomena of reliable regularity. Before the cold season commences in Siberia each year, about 2,500 Siberian Cranes (*Grus leucogeranus*) start their journey south towards China. These majestic birds undertake this journey of more than 7,000 km at up to 70 km per hour. Approximately 95% of the world's population of these critically endangered birds spend their winters at the Poyang Lake wetland in southeast China.

Poyang Lake, China's largest freshwater lake, covers an area of 5,000 km² including the surrounding vast wetlands, reedbeds, and marshlands. The wetlands are inhabited by 332 different bird species—of which one sixth are endangered.

Environmental Impacts

Approximately 4,400 people inhabit the area adjacent to Poyang Lake,

causing some severe socio-ecological problems. Fishing and hunting practices of the local farmers negatively influence the ecological function of Poyang Lake wetland. As a result, migrating birds are vulnerable to these human-induced changes in their breeding, stopover, or wintering habitat.

Jiangxi Province has already been successful with the reintroduction of certain fish species and the implementation of a three month fishing ban on Poyang Lake.

Finding Solutions

Poyang Lake is one of 34 lakes of the international Living Lakes Network, initiated in 1998 by the Global Nature Fund (GNF). GNF pursues a sustainable approach, which considers both the improvement of living standards of the people and the conservation of the unique ecosystem. As a



Siberian Cranes lift off at Poyang Lake, China.

non-profit, non-governmental institution GNF organizes and implements trainings and distributes relevant information. Such projects raise the awareness about wetland conservation and restoration, respectively, as well as the situation of the Siberian Crane.

Together with the Chinese organization MRLSD (Mountain-River-Lake Regional Sustainable Development) GNF aims at generating both alternative and sustainable livelihood activities. Consequently, it is not matter of being "craniophilic" but rather a question of being aware of the crucial influence humans have on the Poyang Lake environment. For further information visit: www.globalnature.org and www.livinglakes.org.

2005 Field Seminars



RICK KNEPP

South Shore Kayak

June 11

Stuart Wilkinson and Mono Lake Committee Staff

\$85 per person/ \$75 for members

Late spring reveals snow-capped mountains towering over Mono Lake—a great time to kayak! Join Stuart Wilkinson and a Mono Lake Committee staff member for a guided naturalist expedition along Mono's south shore. Your leaders are well versed in Mono Lake geology, ecology, history, and politics. This natural history kayak tour will cover a wide variety of topics relating to this unusual Great Basin lake. Plan on four to five hours for the tour. Expect to see underwater tufa towers, birds, and lake-bottom springs. Some kayak experience is helpful, but not necessary. Kayaks and safety equipment are provided. This seminar is being offered for the 10th year in a row, and is highly rated by past participants. Please note that this year's kayak seminar is on a Sunday. Space is limited in this popular seminar, so register early!

Birding the East Side

June 15–17

David Lukas and Simone Whitecloud

\$135 per person/ \$120 for members (3-day seminar)

Looking to get a little focused birding in before the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua? This field seminar will concentrate on identification and ecology of birds in the Mono Basin and local Eastern Sierra. We will visit a wide variety of habitats including desert scrub, marshes, riparian forests, and mountain slopes, in search of breeding birds and a few late migrants. With over 300 species having been observed in the Mono Basin, this course will be of great interest to both beginning and more advanced birdwatchers. The class will intensively explore a number of sites, mixing short leisurely walks with periods of observation and natural history discussion, taking time to learn about birds by watching them closely. Generally, walks will be chosen for their accessibility, but participants should be prepared and capable of wandering off-trail in pursuit of special

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register

sightings. David Lukas has led over one hundred birdwatching and natural history programs for the Nature Conservancy, Yosemite Association, Audubon Society, Elderhostel, and other groups. He is the author of *Watchable Birds of the Great Basin*, *Wild Birds of California*, and the revised *Sierra Nevada Natural History*. He is hard at work on an upcoming field guide to birds of the Sierra Nevada. Simone Whitecloud is a Bay Area naturalist with a biology degree from University of San Francisco. In addition to leading many popular classes in the Bay Area, she has conducted research on the birds of the Eastern Sierra for PRBO Conservation Science and co-led bird walks at last year's Chautauqua.

California Gull Research: Chick Banding

July 2-5

Kristie Nelson, PRBO Conservation Science

\$135 per person per day; overnight; meals included

Join a research team directed by PRBO Conservation Science in collecting data on the California Gull rookery at Mono Lake. Gain hands-on experience in field survey techniques while observing how the lake's changing chemistry—due to Mono's recent meromictic conclusion—is affecting gull reproductive success. Your help is needed in continuing this important research. The rare adventure of visiting Mono Lake's spectacular Negit Islets and observing at close quarters the second largest California Gull rookery in North America is for the stout of body and heart. Please call and ask for Bartshé Miller for more information on this unique Mono adventure. No previous research experience required.



ARYA DEGENHARDT

California Gull chick banding in the gull rookery.

Visions of the Past: Bodie and the Mono Basin

July 9-10

Terri Guissing

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

The Mono Basin is filled with curious monuments to a bustling past. Take a journey back in time and discover the fascinating history behind the Mono Basin and the rich Bodie Hills. The past will come alive as you hear stories of the discoverers, the prospectors, and the families that settled here and made the Mono Basin their home. Visit Dogtown, Monoville, Bodie, Mono Mills, stage routes, railroads, gold mines, and the disappearing town of West Portal. Before the fishing and tourists there was mining—from gold to water—and this seminar will focus on the people, the sites, and the stories that persisted long after the gold was gone. Terri Guissing is a Bodie State Historic Park Historian, Interpreter, and Guide. She is active in the Mono Basin Historical Society, and has a talent for making history come alive.

Butterflies of the Mono Basin

July 15-17

Verina Bird and Paul McFarland

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

Join local naturalists Verina Bird and Paul McFarland on an exploration of the butterflies of the Mono Basin. With everything from desert alkali flats to alpine rock gardens, the Mono Basin is an excellent place to get acquainted with these bright splashes of living color. This seminar will focus on using Jeffrey Glassberg's wonderful new field guide *Butterflies through Binoculars* to learn the basics of "butterflying." Identifying host plants, understanding the life cycle of butterflies, migration, habitat preferences, and their relationship to the entire ecosystem will all be covered. Throughout this seminar, we will also be keeping an eye out for other creatures including, but not limited to, dragonflies, damselflies, moths, beetles, and of course, the larger winged creatures that eat them all. Beginning Friday evening with an introductory slide presentation, the group will spend the next two days leisurely exploring the alkali meadows along Mono Lake, fluttering aspen groves, and alpine trails. Last year seminar participants identified over 50 species of butterflies, moths, and dragonflies from the shore of Mono Lake to the headwaters of Lee Vining Creek near Yosemite National Park. Verina and Paul, both Lee Vining residents, have spent the last couple of summers chasing down anything with wings around Mono Lake.

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register

Introduction to High Country Plants and Habitats

July 29–31

Ann Howald

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

This class will explore the mosaic of habitats that make up the Eastern Sierra high country—lush flower-filled meadows fed by meandering streams, sagebrush-covered slopes, forests of hemlock, lodgepole and whitebark pines, subalpine lakes bordered by willows, and flowery rock gardens. The class will focus on sight identification of common trees, shrubs, and wildflowers, but won't neglect any birds, bugs, or critters that come to check the group out. With any luck, you'll be zoomed by hummingbirds defending their patches of paintbrush and columbine, and you'll see noisy Clark's Nutcrackers collecting and storing whitebark pine seed. This weekend's seminar will begin Friday evening with an introduction to the basics of plant identification and a slideshow preview of some of the habitats and plants to be seen during the fieldtrips. Walks will be around the 10,000-foot elevation level with a modest pace over moderate terrain. Ann is a consulting botanist who has taught plant classes in the Eastern Sierra for many years.



BARTISHE MILLER

Davidson's Fritillary (*Fritillaria pinetorum*).

Miwok-Paiute Burden Basketry

August 5–7

Lucy Parker and Julia Parker

\$185 per person/ \$170 for members, \$60 materials fee
primitive group campsite included

During this three-day seminar participants will prepare materials and create a small burden basket. Students will work with willow shoots for the wrap foundation and willow strings for the weaving. A form of twining will be used to make the baskets. Finally you will use a cooked soaproot paste to coat your burden baskets. Traditionally, burden baskets (a favorite Miwok-Paiute style) were large, conical baskets used for gathering acorns and pinenuts.

You are encouraged (but not required) to camp with the group, and evenings will be spent around the campfire with traditional songs and stories. This seminar is designed for weavers of all levels, beginning through advanced. Lucy Parker is a descendent of the Yosemite Miwok, Mono Lake Kutzadika^a, and Kayasha Pomo Peoples. She learned traditional handiwork from her mother, a master basket weaver, and will pass on some of her knowledge in this special three-day/two-night camping seminar. Julia Parker is Lucy's mother and has dedicated her life to learning and teaching basketry as well as continuing the traditions of her people. She is one of the famous basket weavers of California, and the only weaver still practicing who was taught by women that wove in the early 20th century.

The Secret Knowledge of Mono Basin Water

August 6–7

Greg Reis

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

Water is the essence of life and controversy in the Mono Basin. Water in the Mono Basin takes an intriguing journey full of detours, strange passages, and dramatic releases. Join the Mono Lake Committee's Information Specialist Greg Reis for an investigation of the Mono Basin's link in the water cycle, an intriguing maze of humans and natural influences. We'll discuss climate, snowfall, snowmelt, DWP and SCE reservoir operations, the creeks, and the lake, as well as where water goes below ground. On the first day we'll visit the watersheds south of the lake, the conveyances, and the recovering creeks. On the second day we'll take a tour of the north Mono Basin, and learn how the recently signed settlement agreement will help restore Mill Creek. This seminar will focus as much on the management of the water as the natural habitats dependent upon it. Greg has a decade of experience in Mono Basin hydrology and restoration and keeps close track of the secret life of Mono Basin water.

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register



PETER KNAPP

An American Avocet with her young almost camouflaged from view.

Fall Bird Migration

August 20–21

Dave Shuford

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

The east slope of the Sierra Nevada is a major migration route for birds traveling from northern nesting areas to warm southern habitats. As a result, early autumn is the time of year to see the greatest diversity of landbirds, shorebirds, and waterbirds in the Mono Basin and on Crowley Reservoir. Dave Shuford has been a staff biologist at PRBO Conservation Science for twenty years. He has conducted numerous surveys and research projects in the Mono Basin and beyond and is well acquainted with where to find birds in the Eastern Sierra. This is one of our most popular field seminars so register early for this one!

Identifying High Country Wildflowers

August 12–14

Mark Bagley

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

At the headwaters of Lee Vining Creek there's a rich summer display of wildflowers, shrubs, and trees along cascading creeks, jewel-like lakes, green meadows, and rocky granite slopes. There, amid the towering peaks of the Sierra at the source of Mono Lake's water, learn how to identify this great diversity of plants using Norman Weeden's *A Sierra Nevada Flora*. This is the most complete small field guide to Sierra plants and provides identification keys and plant descriptions that minimize the use of special terminology and are suitable for use by beginners. This weekend's seminar will begin Friday evening with a three-hour hands-on session to introduce the basics of plant identification. Saturday and Sunday will be spent in the field on easily paced short walks (generally less than a mile) at high elevations (generally above 9,000 feet)—with much more time stopping and keying out plants than walking. Mark is a consulting botanist in the Eastern Sierra and Mojave Desert who has been leading field seminars in the Mono Basin since 1988. He is well known among past seminar participants for his easy-going pace and engaging teaching style in the field.

Winging into Autumn

August 27–28

David Lukas and Simone Whitecloud

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

This field seminar will focus on the identification and ecology of both resident and fall migratory birds. This course is appropriate for beginning and more advanced birdwatchers. The birds will ultimately dictate where the class will go, but the plan is to investigate a number of sites, mixing short leisurely walks with periods of observation and discussion, taking time to learn about birds by watching them closely. The natural history and ecology of the bird's habitat will also be discussed. Generally walks will be chosen for their accessibility, but participants should be prepared and capable of wandering off-trail in pursuit of special sightings. David Lukas has led over one hundred birdwatching and natural history programs for the Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, Elderhostel, and other groups. He is the author of *Watchable Birds of the Great Basin*, *Wild Birds of California*, and the revised *Sierra Nevada Natural History*. He is hard at work on an upcoming field guide to birds of the Sierra Nevada. Simone Whitecloud is a Bay Area naturalist with a biology degree from University of San Francisco. In addition to leading many popular classes in the Bay Area, she has conducted research on the birds of the Eastern Sierra for PRBO Conservation Science and co-led bird walks at last year's Chautauqua.

Call (760) 647-6595 to Register

Thin Air and Steep Slopes: Sierra Bighorn Sheep in the Mono Basin

September 10–11

John Wehausen and Karl Chang

\$150 per person/ \$130 for members

The US Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Sierra bighorn sheep as Federally Endangered in 1999. This field seminar will involve discussions of the biology and conservation of these animals with attempts to view them on foot. John Wehausen is a research scientist at White Mountain Research Station in Bishop. He has been investigating various aspects of the Sierra bighorn and working for their conservation since 1974. In the late 1970s he initiated the restoration program that brought bighorn back to the Mono Basin. There is a very good chance of seeing Sierra bighorn sheep in the wild during this seminar, but no guarantee. In the words of one past participant, “this is a High Sierra-safari-salon experience if there ever was one.” Some of the proceeds from this seminar will benefit the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation. This seminar involves strenuous hiking at the 10,000-foot elevation and above.

The Story Behind the Land: Geology of the Mono Basin

September 17–18

Tim Tierney

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

The Mono Basin is a geological showcase, featuring young volcanoes, glaciated landscapes, stark mountains, and strange mineral towers, all set about ancient and saline Mono Lake. Explore this land with geologist Tim Tierney (UC Santa Barbara instructor and author of the Committee’s field guide *Geology of the Mono Basin*) and learn how to recognize the geology, know the reasons behind why things have happened, and what the future may hold. The first day of the seminar will be spent gaining an overview of the area via car and short walks. The second day will focus on thoroughly exploring a few select areas with extended hikes. Cooler fall weather and the first tinge of fall color will highlight the geologic wonders of this popular field seminar. Tim is an excellent teacher and interpreter of the “hard” languages, and has been a popular seminar leader among geology sleuths and laypeople alike.

Reading the Aspen Groves: Arborglyphs and Aspen Natural History

October 1–2

Richard Potashin and Nancy Hadlock

\$125 per person/ \$110 for members

Known for their breathtaking fall color displays and distinctive quaking, aspens border the high meadows of the Glass Mountains and the Mono Basin. A century of sheep grazing brought many Basque sheepherders into these meadows. With their leisure time they left numerous carvings—or arborglyphs—on the aspens. Join the instructors for an enchanting journey into the aspen groves to explore this historic, organic art form and the natural history of the trees themselves. Learn about the numerous wildlife, insects, and birds that are drawn to the groves. During leisurely walks the instructors will discuss the history of the sheep grazing in the Mono Basin, the Basque culture, the cultural significance of the carvings, and efforts to document them. Richard Potashin, aka Alkali Aspenowza, is a long-time Eastern Sierra resident and past Mono Lake Committee intern and canoe guide who has been discovering and documenting aspen carvings for many years. He is currently a Park Ranger at Manzanar National Historic Site. Nancy Hadlock has her BS from the University of Nevada at Reno, her MS from California State University, Sacramento and has worked as an Interpretive Ranger since 1982. She has participated in UNR’s Basque Studies Program and has been a passionate student of Basque culture, history, and stories for over 20 years.



Sierra bighorn sheep.

JOHN WEHAUSEN

Mono-Bodie Fall Photography

October 7-9

Richard Knepp

\$275 per person/ \$250 for members

Autumn in the Mono Basin is one of the greatest photographic experiences in the country. Spectacular foliage and skies combine with exceptional light, presenting ample subject matter for photographers in both color and black and white. And, for the second year, the class will spend Saturday in Bodie, inside some of the buildings! Join accomplished photographer Richard Knepp to explore varied shoreline locations at sunrise and sunset, fall color in nearby canyons, and the old ghost town of Bodie. Beyond his photographic expertise, Rick is intimately familiar with the Eastern Sierra and Mono Lake locale. In Bodie, Rick will be joined by Bodie expert, photographer, and good friend Jill Lachman. Jill has taught photo workshops in Bodie for many years. It is quite a special treat to have the opportunity to photograph inside some of the buildings. Subjects for discussion include composition, exposure techniques, filtration, basic theory of the Zone System, and developing a personal vision. Photographers of all levels are welcome; a fully adjustable camera of any

size or format is suggested. This photographic seminar is offered for the 11th year in a row, with the new Bodie twist continued for 2005!



RICK KNEPP

Field Seminar Registration Information

Call the Mono Lake Committee at (760) 647-6595 and ask for the seminar desk to register. More extensive seminar descriptions are available upon request or online at www.monolake.org.

We accept VISA, MasterCard, and Discover or personal checks payable to the Mono Lake Committee. Sorry, we cannot accept registration by mail or email.

Seminars are limited to fifteen people except where noted. If a seminar receives less than six participants (certain seminars excepted), the seminar will be cancelled two weeks in advance, and full refunds will be given. If you cancel three weeks prior to the seminar start date, we will refund your payment (less a \$10 processing fee). No refunds after that date, but tuition can be applied to another class in 2005.

Participants must sign a liability release form. All seminars operate under permit from the Inyo National Forest.

The Committee works with instructors and field leaders that have received high ratings from past seminar participants. We emphasize a spirit of learning and camaraderie in a magnificent outdoor setting for a reasonable cost.

Proceeds from the Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars benefit research and education in the Mono Basin.

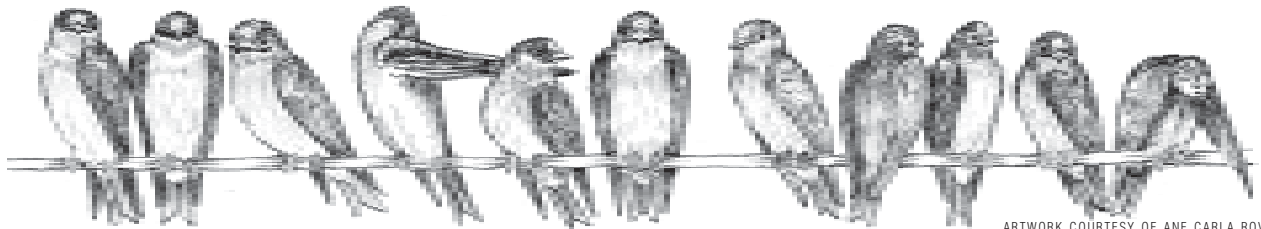
Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars are open to everyone, but Mono Lake Committee members get advance notice and class discounts. If you are not a current member of the Mono Lake Committee, you may receive the discount by joining when you register.

The 4th Annual
Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua
June 17–19, 2005

Online registration begins April 15, 2005

www.birdchautauqua.org

see page 12 for details



ARTWORK COURTESY OF ANE CARLA ROVETTA

NOT YOUR ORDINARY BIRD FESTIVAL

Mono Basin Christmas Bird Count, 2004

by River Gates, PRBO Conservation Science Biologist

On Sunday, December 19th, 2004, twenty-six Eastern Sierra locals enjoyed a spectacularly beautiful day of counting birds in the northwest corner of the Mono Basin. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is an annual international wintering bird census conducted across the Americas. It is sponsored by the National Audubon Society, and is supported locally by the Mono Market, Mono Lake Committee, and PRBO Conservation Science.

The first Mono Basin CBC was initiated by David Gaines in 1977 and since then has been conducted annually, creating a 28-year series of snapshots describing the birds that brave the snowy Mono Basin winters.

Seventy-five species were observed this year, which is comparable to previous years' species total. Highlights included observations of the stealth-like submarine behavior of a single Pied-billed Grebe at the Rush Creek delta. A freshwater loving Common Merganser was spied at the Lee Vining Creek delta with a small group of persistent Least Sandpipers. American Tree Sparrow and Swamp Sparrow, two species of rare wintering sparrows were seen along the north shore, and De Chambeau Ponds along with an adult Bald Eagle perched atop the Krakatoa Field Station. A Northern Shrike, a rare winter visitor from the north, and an adult Northern Goshawk

were observed in the Parker Meadows area. Three species of sapsucker were found in upper Lee Vining Canyon including the common Red-breasted, an unusual Red-naped and even more elusive female Williamson's Sapsucker. Perhaps the most exciting observations of the day were the addition of three new species to the Mono Basin CBC list including a small flock of extremely rare Western Bluebirds, House Finch, and Sora.

As the early winter sun dropped below the Sierran crest, counters gathered together at the Mono Basin Field Station to christen the new field station with a potluck meal, the traditional swapping of stories from the day's adventures, and a compilation of the list of magnificent birds encountered. Many thanks to all the participants and supporters who made the 28th Annual Mono Basin Christmas Bird Count a success! ❖



COURTESY OF DEBBIE HOUSE

Northern Shrike seen on the 2004 CBC.

Foundation Grants are a Welcome Bonus

The Mono Lake Committee is extremely fortunate in its sources of funding. Committee members are the most important support for staff and core programs. The Committee has a diversity of funding sources including a business, the Information Center and Bookstore in Lee Vining, weekend seminars, and canoe tours in the summer. But whenever the Committee gets a foundation grant—large or small—it is thrilling, because it often means money to do something extra special.

The Committee is grateful to the following foundations and agencies for the funding they provided in 2004 for a wide range of Mono Lake Committee activities:

- Anonymous, \$500,000 for establishing an endowment for the Committee's policy and education work in Southern California.
- State of California CALFED Water Quality Program, \$250,000, most of which will be used by others in 2004 and 2005 to develop a plan for allocating state funds to water quality projects in Southern California. Poor water quality will limit water supplies in the future, and implementing projects and programs now to reduce this limitation will enhance the Mono Lake Committee's water conservation and recycling campaign to protect and restore Mono Lake and the Mono Basin ecosystem.
- Preserving Wild California, a program of the Resources Legacy Fund Foundation, \$52,000 for exploring new ways to increase the Committee's and the region's capacity to protect the natural resources of the region. One outstanding outcome is a new volunteer program; another is an Eastern Sierra Environmental Roundtable that bring organizations together regularly to share both issue and operations information.
- Arntz Family Foundation, \$10,000 to help the Committee's Outdoor Experiences Program reach out to inner city youth in Northern California.
- Richard Grand Foundation, \$10,000 for California Gull research and Mono Basin restoration.
- Entertainment Industry Foundation, \$12,000 to develop programs with Los Angeles area nature centers to give inner city youth who participate in Outdoor Experiences a way to continue learning about nature and the environment.
- West and Central Basins Water District, \$5,400 for strengthening the partnership between Outdoor Experiences and Los Angeles County nature centers.
- Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, \$3,000 for more media coverage of water conservation opportunities in Southern California.
- Scott Evans Foundation, \$1,000 for the Committee's new volunteer program. ❖

Staff Migrations

by Geoff McQuilkin

Sneaking out just before the early snow fell, many of the seasonal staff stuck around last fall to keep the store running smoothly and to finish-up important projects. With Tioga Pass closed and traffic slowing down significantly, it's the time of year when, if you stop in the store, the staff will most likely run up to meet you with excitement and tell you you're the first person to come in all day.

Canoe Coordinator Aariel Rowan had a great second summer leading canoe programs. We're pretty sure she's missing the glassy waters and quiet Mono Lake mornings, but she's moved on to a great job with the US Geological Survey over in the Bay Area, and they're lucky to have her.

Outdoor Experiences Coordinator Kristie Reddick finished up a great season with the OE Program, and she's now got the Eastern Sierra bug ... pun intended. Kristie is working with Mono Lake research group member and all around bug guru Dave Herbst down at the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory just a stones throw from here.

Birding Intern Alison Young has migrated south for the winter—to Baja! She'll be investigating lots of birds down

there, where her hands won't be frozen to her binoculars! Check out some of Alison's bird profiles online at www.monolake.org/birdcounts/.

Intern Erin Brandt worked on the revision of the Creek Trail Guide (look for the updated version soon!) right up until the day she took off for warmer stomping grounds. Erin is in Grand Canyon country doing what she loves—sharing special places with people as an interpretive guide.

Intern Kim Rollins, whose name you may recognize from multiple articles in the recent issues of the *Newsletter*, was cranking out articles up until her departure for Baja and beyond. Kim's thorough research and efficient writing were extremely helpful this summer and fall.

Our sincere thanks go out to all of the seasonal staff from the summer of 2004. We were constantly impressed by your enthusiasm and the high caliber of your work—we'll miss you!

And with wide arms, and lots of projects to be done, we welcome back Douglas Dunaway as Staff Assistant. Douglas' strong work ethic and commitment to a job well done are more than welcome around the office and with the Committee staff. ❖



From the Mailbag

News from Members and Friends

by Erika Obedzinski

The Mono Lake Committee's Name Trade Policy

Occasionally, the Mono Lake Committee trades its membership list with other nonprofit organizations. This practice greatly reduces the expenses involved in the ongoing recruitment of new members, which is essential for the Committee's long-term stability, and in turn, for the long-term protection of Mono Lake. Some members have already requested their name not be traded by checking the "Please do not trade my name" box that appears on most of our mailings— if you have done this, we have marked this in our records. If you prefer that your name not be traded, and have not already let us know, we will gladly honor your request. Please contact our Membership Coordinator, Erika Obedzinski at erika@monolake.org or (760) 647-6595. Thank you!

In Memory

Edith & Mortimer Gaines gave a contribution in celebration and memory of **David Gaines**. **Carol Mathews**, of Walnut Creek, gave a gift in loving memory of **Robert Mathews**. **Beverly McCurdy** made a donation in memory of long time Mono Lake supporter **Bruce McCurdy**. Gifts in memory of **Jane**

Standifer Owens were given by **Elizabeth Coonan**, of San Mateo, **Mr. & Mrs. Alfred Lunardi**, also of San Mateo, and **Mrs. Ann Witter**, of San Francisco. **Yvonne Penny**, of Santa Clarita, gave a gift in memory of **Daniel Harslem**, who loved Mono Lake.

In Honor

Linda Lipari, of Santa Clara gave a gift in honor of **Jean Kesler**. **Jeanne Walter**, of Bishop made a donation in honor of the union of **Carol Kennedy & Michael Dostraw**. **Cheryl A. Wilson**, of Jenks, OK made a donation in honor of her father.

2004 Free Drawing Winners

Frank & Patricia Dieli of Santa Barbara won the Ansel Adams Signed Lithograph from the Mono Inn Restaurant and the Ansel Adams Galleries. **Cecil Frasier** of Hanford won the Deluxe Camping Package from Wilson's Eastside Sports. **Clyde Underwood** of Baldwin Park won the Mammoth Vacation Package from the Cinnamon Bear Inn, The Mono Inn, Nicely's Restaurant, and the Mammoth Lakes Ice Creamery. **Paul Bettelheim** of Lafayette won the Salomon Ski Package from Footloose Sports. **Susan Collins** of Fresno won the Weekend for Two from

Rainbow Tarns Bed and Breakfast, Base Camp Café, the Mono Market, and the Mammoth Lakes Ice Creamery. **Ron Bierma** of Torrance won the two-night stay at the Double Eagle Resort and Spa.

George & Barbara Wright of Los Alamitos won the Yosemite Association Seminar. **Timothy P. Maroney** of Mechanicsville, **Richard Dodson** of Walnut Creek, **Carol Fleck** of Whittier, and **C. Bernhardt** of Burbank all won Synchronilla jackets from Patagonia.

Eugenia R. Schneider of Ridgecrest, won the watercolor by Nicola Voorhees. **Craig Masi** of Westminster won the stained glass dragonfly by Douglas and Cindy Dunaway. **Richard & Sharon Rockel** of Bridgeport won the beaded necklace by Anne Bredon. **Michael Harding** of Los Altos won a ceramic serving bowl from Trefry Pottery.

Debra A. Robison of San Clemente, **Douglas Clarke** of Spring Creek, NV, and **Michael Franzblau** of Los Angeles all won Committee Gift Packs.

A.A. & R.E. Strauss of Irvine, **Jeffrey John Kermode** of Trabuco Canyon, and **Scott Ramage** of Malibu all won Jim Stimson's "Mono Lake: Explorations and Reflections" coffee table book.

Congratulations, and Thank You! ❖

The 24th Annual Tioga Pass Run Benefits Mono Lake

By Kimberly Rollins

On September 12, 2004, 34 intrepid individuals embarked on a 12.4-mile run that started in front of the Mono Lake Committee Information Center, at 6,781 feet above sea level, and ended at the Tioga Pass entrance station to Yosemite National Park, at 9,945 feet above sea level.

Committee interns Alison Young, Erin Brandt, and Kim Rollins provided support for the day's runners. All of the runners agreed that this was the windi-

est race they had ever experienced, but in spite of the added challenge, all of them finished, including the Committee's Communications Director, Arya Degenhardt.

Of the 34 participants, eight were women. Jeff Kozak had the fastest time with 1:46:36 and Kathy Farley had the fastest female time finishing in 2:16:18, and 15th place overall. Everyone completed the run within 3:15, an impressive finish to the difficult run.

All of the money raised at the race was donated to the Mono Lake Committee.

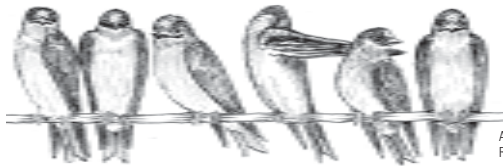
The 25th Tioga Pass Run will take place in 2005. The organizers would like to contact all of the past runners to participate. If anyone is interested in running the 2005 Tioga Pass Run, contact Kathie at (760) 965-6742 or PO Box G Benton, CA 93512.

The Committee would like to thank Kathie and all of the Tioga Pass Run runners for their support of Mono Lake.

The 4th Annual
**Mono Basin Bird
Chautauqua**
June 17-19, 2005

Online registration begins
April 15, 2005

www.birdchautauqua.org



ANE CARLA
ROVETTA

Wine Flight 2005

Join us for a festive afternoon of wine tasting
during the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua



Saturday June 18th 4-6:30pm
\$50 per person
At the Mono Inn at Mono Lake



Space is limited, reserve tickets now!
Call (760) 647-6595 for details
and reservations.



AND CARLA
ROVETTA

Calling All Bike-A-Thon Riders for a Reunion Ride!



Contact Bike-A-Thoners David Kanner dtkanner@yahoo.com or
Brent Coeur-Baron bcblaw@pacbell.net

Volunteer for Mono Lake!



Volunteer Training Classes take place at
Mono Lake on May 25 & 26, June 1 & 2, 8 & 9

For information contact Frances Spivy-Weber at
frances@monolake.org or (310) 316-0041.



**MONO LAKE
COMMITTEE**
Highway 395 at Third Street
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