

MONO LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Spring 2007

Every so often someone will ask, “why is the Mono Lake Committee still around? Isn’t Mono Lake saved?” I wish everyone who asks that question could visit our office in spring.

Take this week, for example. Geoff traveled to Sacramento where he met up with Betsy to talk with our state senator and assemblyman about Mono Lake policy issues. Lisa was hashing out the details of the clarifications letter, a joint project with DWP, for the Water Board. Bartshe put the final touches on the Mono Basin Field Station for the summer scientific research crews. Erika was readying the Committee’s internship program—hiring and setting up training. I’ve been pulling together this issue of the Mono Lake *Newsletter*.

Ellen has been learning the mail and membership ropes. Greg was keeping tabs on all things hydrological in anticipation of the runoff season. Clare was training Emily on policy issues ranging from EPA dust regulations to land ownership. Santiago and Herley Jim were scheduling Los Angeles community groups to participate in this summer’s Outdoor Experiences program. Elin was gathering the final materials for the all-new education wall in the Information Center & Bookstore. Brett and Laura were ordering the newest books and Mono Lake goods in preparation for Tioga Pass’ opening, and Donnette was getting the bills paid.

All of this, and then news arrives that the Cunninghams re-purchased their 112-acre property alongside Mono Lake with the intention to subdivide for resort homes! Stand anywhere in the office and the energy is palpable.

There is no singular answer to why the Mono Lake Committee still here. Every morning Committee staff come to work focused on what’s best for Mono Lake. We’re here because of you, the 15,000 members and friends who trust us to do just that—for you, for us, for future generations. We are inspired by the conviction and dedication of the Mono Lake Committee membership, by Mono Lake, and by the idea that we’re doing the right thing. I hope you’ll see this in the pages that follow. And we all hope that you’ll see it on your next visit to Mono Lake.

Come quick, the birds are already singing!

—Arya Degenhardt, Communications Director



COVER PHOTO: WOOLLYBEAR CATERPILLAR, CHRIS MCCREEDY

GREG REIS

A cheeky chipmunk spotted just east of Mono Lake.

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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Cunningham buys back in

Property reverts back to developer in 11th hour

by Clare Cragan

The already lengthy story of the 112-acre property in the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area has just begun a new chapter: the Cunningham family owns the property once again after two years of Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA) ownership. A letter sent by their realtor confirms their intent to attempt to subdivide it for a resort home development. Not only is subdivision of the steep, scenic hillside a bad idea, but such an action would also be a direct violation of the federal law protecting Scenic Area lands surrounding Mono Lake.

The Forest Service has already denied the development proposal, but the Cunninghams and their realtor seem determined to gamble that they can ignore the ruling. A strong response from the Mono Lake Committee will be necessary to stop this poorly conceived proposal from permanently scarring Mono Lake.

Cunningham CliffsNotes

MMSA originally purchased the property from Bill and Robin Cunningham in March 2005 in preparation for an eventual land trade to the Forest Service. The sale agreement included an option for the Cunninghams to repurchase the property for the original selling price of \$3 million—a price tag well above the Forest Service appraisal. The repurchase option expired exactly two years from the date of sale, and the Cunninghams notified MMSA of their intention to repurchase the property just one day shy of the option's expiration.

Having already paid a premium for the property, MMSA

wasn't ready to pay an additional \$2.85 million for the land—an amount that, according to the contract, would have precluded the Cunninghams' buy back action. Attempts to negotiate a more modest supplemental payment, including proposals by MMSA just hours before the close of escrow, were rebuffed by the Cunninghams.

Rusty Gregory, CEO of Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, said the following: "MMSA is very disappointed that it couldn't come to an agreement with Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham on a price that would have made their repurchase of the 112 acres of land we bought from them two years ago unnecessary. We remain interested in acquiring the property for Forest Service trade purposes and continue to be committed to seeing that this and other land in the Mono Basin Scenic Area remains undeveloped."

Private property development within the Scenic Area is overseen by two concurrent regulatory bodies: Mono County and the Forest Service. For the past 20 years private property owners have brought their development plans to both agencies for approval. The Cunninghams are the first landowners planning to ignore the Forest Service in an attempt to move forward with an illegal development proposal.

The Mono Lake Committee supports the congressionally designated Scenic Area and the rules that were set in place to preserve it. Should the Cunninghams proceed with illegal development plans they will most certainly face litigation and strong public opposition. Stay tuned as the story unfolds. ❖

Governor appoints Fran Spivy-Weber to State Water Board

by Geoff McQuilkin

In a sign of California's commitment to progressive water policy, Governor Schwarzenegger appointed Frances Spivy-Weber to the State Water Resources Control Board (Water Board) in late February. Fran previously served as the Committee's Co-Executive Director from 1997 until last September.

We took a moment to catch up with Fran when we got the great news. "I am honored by this appointment to the Water Board," she said, "and I am looking forward to working on some of the most important issues facing California today."

Fran brings to the Water Board her experience in seeking out people with divergent views to protect California's environment and its citizens. She reflected that, "The Mono Lake Committee and Los Angeles did this by replacing water left for Mono Lake and its streams and wetlands with

conservation and water recycling in the city. Today Angelinos use no more water than they did 25 years ago and the Mono Basin environment is rebounding."

Fran recognizes the challenges facing the Water Board, including "increased urbanization which will affect water quality and wildlife habitats, and climate change which will affect how we manage water." However, she said, "I am optimistic about our being able to fashion workable approaches to these problems."

The Water Board consists of five appointed individuals who are responsible for overseeing all water rights within the state and for protecting water quality throughout California. We congratulate and look forward to her work with the Water Board.

Field notes: California Gull research

by Kristie Nelson

Editor's note: California Gull research has taken place at Mono Lake since 1979. Today, PRBO Conservation Science (founded as the Point Reyes Bird Observatory in 1965) conducts the research with support from the Mono Lake Committee. Here, Project Leader Kristie Nelson describes the project and a blustery day out on the lake, when she and a team of hearty volunteers became true "Monophiles."

May 28, 2006, Mono Lake, California. The wind has been howling all day. Tricia Wilson, Ann Griener, Matt Brady, Ryan Terrill, and I sip hot chocolate after a memorable day of nest counting at the California Gull colony. May can be a temperamental month in the Mono Basin, and the nest count unfortunately coincided with one heck of a spring storm. Our efforts to count nests this day had quickly become restricted to the relatively sheltered islets behind and in the lee of Negit Island.

By afternoon, due to the wind and difficult boating conditions, there was little else we could do but head back to our base camp on Krakatoa Islet and hunker down. We peeled off our guano- and paint-stained clothing and huddled in the "office," a small four-sided structure built by pioneering biologists out of old scrap wood. It sits within the fake volcano that gives our small home-base islet its name.

Although it rattled and shook, I had utmost confidence in our drafty hut. This unique field station has been standing faithfully since 1952, when it was built as part of a movie set and subsequently abandoned. Aside from losing an ever-increasing amount of *papier mâché* (the costume given to this wooden skeleton to make it resemble a volcano) each year, the structure itself seems as solid as ever. It stoically stands

after all these decades despite its exposed location and the tremendous winds.



The California Gull breeding colony at Mono Lake, which averages roughly 48,500 breeding adults, is the species' second largest. Each year a handful of biologists and a score of volunteers have visited the colony to monitor the population size and reproductive success of the birds.

To determine population size, every nest at the lake is counted in late May. The team spreads out in a line, armed with thumb clickers and diluted water-soluble paint to mark the ground near each nest (to avoid double counting), and makes a sweep over the colony.

Reproductive success is measured primarily by determining the fledging rate. In early July we visit the colony and band chicks within sample plots. In August after the gulls have fledged and departed, we return a third time to the islets where chicks were banded to search for any dead chicks with bands. The number found dead is subtracted from the total number banded to yield the proportion that fledged.

The objectives of this ongoing study are to measure the gulls' year-to-year variation in population size and reproductive success as they relate to changing Mono Lake levels and conditions.

What has been discovered?

Results have shown that the annual population size can fluctuate by as much as 45% or more. In an effort to understand what factors cause such variability, researchers Peter Wrege, David Shuford, David Winkler, and Robert

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Krakatoa Islet, the humble summer headquarters for the California Gull Research Project study crew.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN HITE

Status of restoration in the Mono Basin

A new annual report is established to guide Mono's recovery

by Lisa Cutting



ORIG NEWS

Mono's lake level gauge reflected in the glassy waters of the cold winter months.

After two years of field visits, technical analysis, legal review, and much collaborative discussion, the Mono Lake Committee and the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) have jointly submitted a comprehensive Status of Restoration Compliance Report to the State Water Resources Control Board (Water Board). This report succinctly summarizes the status of all the required restoration activities in the Mono Basin. Both parties view the document as an essential tool to be used in guiding restoration into the future.

The Status of Restoration Compliance Report details the status of DWP's restoration obligations as mandated by the Water Board under Decision 1631 and Orders 98-05 and 98-07. In the report all required tasks are now categorized as either *ongoing, complete, in progress, incomplete, or deferred*. While the Decision and the Orders continue to serve as the legal mandate and strict road map, the Status of Restoration Compliance Report will serve as a guide to help all parties understand the current status of the restoration efforts and navigate more easily through the remaining legal requirements.

The Water Board Decision and subsequent restoration orders

In 1994 the Water Board's precedent-setting Decision 1631 (D1631) established strict limits for Mono Lake water diversions allowable by DWP. D1631 also set a target lake level for Mono Lake, established minimum flows and annual peak flows that DWP must deliver to the creeks, and ordered DWP to develop and implement restoration plans to repair over 50 years of damage caused by excessive water diversions by the city of Los Angeles.

The Water Board decision was the culmination of years of legal and political work by the Committee seeking to protect Mono Lake. Rather than appeal the requirements, DWP agreed with the Committee to abide by the terms of the

decision in good faith.

In 1998, after additional proceedings, the Water Board issued Orders 98-05 and 98-07. It is these two orders that identify the specific restoration actions and monitoring that DWP must complete in order to meet its restoration obligations in the Mono Basin. Even though some interim restoration had already taken place prior to D1631 and Orders 98-05 and 98-07, the majority of the restoration activities began in earnest in 1998.

What is restoration?

Restoration is the act of bringing something back into existence or use, or back to an original state. In the case of the Mono Basin's once-lush creeks that were desiccated by 50 years of excessive water diversions, restoration actions that were approved by the Water Board focus on re-establishing natural processes and historic conditions, rather than recreating the exact landscape that existed prior to the diversions.

The goal of the restoration plans is to reestablish the habitat conditions and ecological processes that will enable the lake and streams to essentially restore themselves over time. Because the system had been so badly damaged, the Water Board also ordered some activities that would "jump start" the ecological processes and these include planting trees, opening plugged stream channels, and instituting an interagency prescribed burn program in lake-fringing areas.

Prediversion conditions and the damage caused by excessive water diversions

Before the turn of the 20th century, all water in the Mono Basin flowed into Mono Lake. The lake's unique saline ecosystem of brine shrimp and alkali flies combined with diverse habitat types such as islands, protected lagoons, and lake-fringing springs and wetlands supported millions of migratory waterbirds.

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Upstream of the lake, Mono's tributary creeks descend from the Sierra crest through the arid Great Basin landscape, supporting lush bottomlands in the stream floodplain. These "wooded wetlands" contained multistoried cottonwood forests, multiple deep meandering stream channels, backwater ponds, and wet meadows.

In 1941, DWP began diverting four of Mono Lake's five tributary streams for urban water use in the city of Los Angeles. By 1990, Mono Lake had dropped 45 vertical feet, doubled in salinity, and lost a number of significant freshwater habitats, such as delta marshes and brackish lagoons. Tributary



Lee Vining Creek rushing with high flows, spring 2006.

streams dried up and stabilizing streamside vegetation died. Periodic floods during high runoff years then degraded the stream channels further causing downcutting and channel abandonment, which lowered the water table even more. As a result, the lush cottonwood forests that once thrived in the stream's floodplain died. Rush Creek, once known throughout the state as a "Blue Ribbon" world-class trout stream lost its entire trout population when flows ceased to exist.

Water Board Decision 1631: restoration components

In 1994—after a series of lengthy court battles and public outcry—the Water Board issued Decision 1631. Orders 98-05 and 98-07 followed within four years and the restoration plan for Mono Lake and its tributary streams was finalized and under way.

These restoration plans focus on three specific areas: restoring Mono Lake to an ecologically sound lake level elevation, restoring the tributary streams, and restoring waterfowl habitat.

The target lake level set by the Water Board is 6391 feet above sea level. This target represents a level at which Mono Lake's ecosystem—alkali fly, brine shrimp, and California Gull populations—will be stable, and at which shallow

flooding will significantly reduce the toxic dust storms on the eastern shore of the lake.

Hydrological models developed at the time of the decision predicted that the lake could reach its target level by 2014. The wildcard is climate variability, which could increase the amount of time the lake will take to reach its target level. Because some water will continue to be diverted to Los Angeles, the Mono Basin will never be completely restored to its original state. Mono Lake will still be 25 feet lower than its prediversion level, the streams will carry less flow than they once did, and the former cottonwood-willow riparian forests will still be maturing.

What restoration activities have been completed?

The following requirements are some of the restoration activities that DWP has completed as outlined in the initial Status of Restoration Compliance Report submitted to the Water Board this past January:

- Dirt roads located in stream floodplains have been physically closed to vehicle access.
- Large woody debris has been placed in the creeks in order to provide aquatic habitat complexity.
- Improvements have been made to the Lee Vining Creek diversion facility to allow for stream sediment to pass through and to ensure that the appropriate prescribed flows are delivered downstream.
- DWP has physically reopened some of the side channels on Rush Creek that had been plugged by high flow events. Other side channels to be opened remain on the list and are currently being evaluated.
- Creek areas have been revegetated with Jeffrey pines.
- The Rush Creek Return Ditch—the way water is conveyed from Grant Lake Reservoir to Rush Creek—was rehabilitated and is now operating at its full capacity of 380 cubic feet per second (cfs). This allows for stream restoration flows to be delivered to Rush Creek in normal years. Wetter year stream restoration flows require augmentation from Lee Vining Creek or spills from Grant Lake reservoir (see Rush Creek box).

Ongoing monitoring and other actions

DWP conducts annual monitoring of restoration progress in order to chart its course to successfully fulfilling its requirements under the Water Board orders for restoration. Every year a comprehensive compliance report summarizing restoration activities and detailing the scientific monitoring results is produced by DWP and submitted to the Water Board and other interested parties. DWP's monitoring includes actions such as:

- Lake level measurements
- Vegetation studies at key sites around the lake

- Aerial photography of the streams and lakeshore
- Geomorphic monitoring of stream channels
- Vegetation mapping of entire stream corridors
- Fish population studies
- Waterfowl surveys

Other ongoing actions include:

- Maintaining road closures in the Rush and Lee Vining Creek floodplains
- Managing for proper flow amounts—base flow, winter flow, and the high spring runoff stream restoration flow
- Maintaining proper ramping rates when changing flows from one rate to another
- Exporting the appropriate water amount which is determined by Mono Lake's level
- Forecasting the runoff year type which determines stream restoration flow magnitude
- Salt cedar (tamarisk) eradication

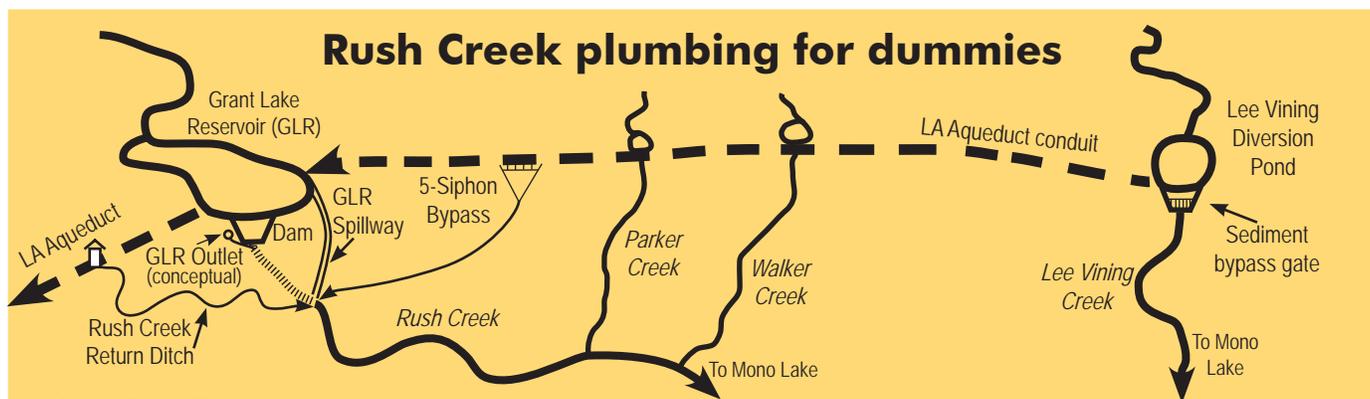
What still needs to be done?

Decision 1631, the restoration orders, and now the annual

Status of Restoration Compliance Report all lay out a clear road map for DWP to follow to complete the outstanding restoration activities. Some of the outstanding actions include:

- Stream scientist recommended stream restoration flows—establishing magnitude and duration
- Development, approval, and finalization of termination criteria for all four creeks
- Sediment bypass for Parker and Walker Creek diversion facilities
- Evaluation of the effects on Lee Vining Creek of Rush Creek augmentation for diversions of up to 150 cfs through the Lee Vining Creek conduit (see box below)
- Testing the 5-Siphon Bypass facility and its physical ability to convey diversions of up to 150 cfs as part of the Lee Vining Creek augmentation process (see box below)
- Analyze and assess the feasibility of rewatering the remaining side channels as identified
- Continue to assess the need to revegetate specific areas of the Rush Creek floodplain

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Grant Lake Reservoir is the water storage facility that serves as the diversion point for the Los Angeles Aqueduct. From this location water is either stored, sent south to Los Angeles, or released into the Rush Creek Return Ditch.

Rush Creek Return Ditch is the water facility that conveys water from Grant Lake Reservoir to Rush Creek. It was rehabilitated in 2002 and tested in 2004 and now reliably operates at its full capacity of 380 cfs. Normal year stream restoration flows can be delivered using the Rush Creek Return Ditch.

Lee Vining Creek Augmentation is the process of diverting some Lee Vining Creek water through the aqueduct conduit to supplement Rush Creek flows. The stream scientists are still evaluating this process for its effect on Lee Vining Creek's peak flows and evaluating the operational reliability of the 5-Siphon Bypass system.

5-Siphon Bypass is an outlet with a spillway along the aqueduct conduit that releases the augmented flows from Lee Vining Creek down a concrete apron. Water then travels through a ditch to the confluence of the Rush Creek Return Ditch and lower Rush Creek. The estimated capacity of the

5-Siphon Bypass is 150 cfs but has only been tested to 117 cfs. Wet-normal and wet year stream restoration flows are achieved with the use of this facility.

Grant Lake Reservoir Spillway is another way that annual stream restoration flows can be delivered to Rush Creek. Water spilling over the top of the spillway is one way to achieve the required high flows but is problematic for several reasons. One, the additional flow amount and duration are not easily controlled (Southern California Edison operates a hydropower plant upstream and their operational water use varies). Two, spilling water is only possible when the reservoir is at a high level at the beginning of the runoff year.

Grant Lake Reservoir Outlet is a solution that at the time of the hearings the Mono Lake Committee and others argued would be the only reliable way to deliver the required high stream restoration flows into lower Rush Creek. The high price tag of the outlet project prompted the Water Board to allow DWP to attempt other methods of delivering the high flows. Stream scientists and DWP are still experimenting and the Grant Lake Reservoir Outlet remains an option.

- Assess need for fish screens on all irrigation diversion structures
- Stream monitoring for 8–10 years to inform peak flow evaluation and recommendations including the need for a Grant Lake Reservoir outlet (see Rush Creek box).

Another joint letter in the works: clarifications letter

As DWP and the Committee have evaluated and discussed the various restoration components outlined by the Water Board, each party at times interprets the order differently. Through the years this has given rise to disagreements and has hindered efforts to coordinate efficiently.

While the Water Board provided detailed direction on how restoration was to proceed, given restoration's inherent complexities and unforeseen developments, seeking clarification of certain components is necessary at this time.

DWP and the Committee have begun working on another joint letter seeking direction on the various requirements or procedures that are not clear, and this letter will be submitted to the Water Board for clarification. Having these items clarified by the Water Board will allow the restoration program to move forward in an efficient and effective manner.

Termination criteria

In some ways, the Mono Basin restoration as envisioned by the Water Board and scientists may not be “done” in our lifetimes. At the time of the decision, it was estimated that it would take 20 years for Mono Lake to rise to its target level of 6391 feet. The streams will take even longer to fully recuperate. While riparian vegetation is coming back along the formerly dry channels, the cottonwood seedlings along the streambanks will take 50 years to mature. Rebuilding the floodplain and restoring natural channel morphology will take decades.

Although restoration will take a long time, DWP's obligations under the Water Board order may be satisfied much sooner. The restoration orders specify certain “termination criteria” which are essentially pre-diversion conditions that when achieved, allow for the termination of the monitoring program. Not all of them will be achievable, however, once these requirements are fulfilled to the Water Board's satisfaction DWP will be relieved of its detailed monitoring obligations.

How is the Committee involved?

The Committee is often characterized as the “watchdog” for restoration. Our role is to assure that the goals set by the

Zen and the art of ... restoration maintenance

Most people understand restoring a car or restoring a historic home—but restoring an ecosystem? How does that happen?

Let's pretend you have a 1963 Volkswagen Microbus that you want to restore. To make the analogy fit more closely to restoring the Mono Basin, let's say that 25 of your closest friends and family are going to help, along with various “experts”—body repair technicians, mechanics, and upholsterers. And of course there are the engine guides and the original manuals that lay out what the vehicle looked like when it first rolled off the showroom floor back in Germany.

So you start your project and soon realize that what you thought was a fairly straightforward way to proceed has multiple levels of complications. Everyone has an opinion and a vision. Do we really need to find an original rearview mirror or can we just hang this piece of mirror from a bungee cord? And what about staying true to the original engine? Maybe we want to go faster than 20 miles per hour up Tioga Pass? A six volt battery—can I even get one of those anymore? You can

see that things can get complicated fairly quickly.

However, restoring a complex lake and stream ecosystem is a lot more complicated given the dynamic, living variables in play. You can't just stop the lake, streams, and water flow in time and put them up on the blocks. And you certainly can't just leave the parts lying around your driveway, annoying your neighbors to no end. With an ecosystem the variables are always changing and all those changes affect the system in a multitude of ways. Often a seemingly-good action has an affect that for the short-term is not moving toward the desired goal. Or for the short-term it harms something that has become established in the transitional phase of things. Which biological component has more value? How do you decide?

The fact is, the Microbus will never be the vehicle that rolled off the showroom floor. Time has passed. Damage has been done. But we can have a functioning vehicle and it can be beautiful. Heck, we can even throw the surf board on top and feel that it's pretty darn close to how it used to be.

Restoration truly is part science and part art.



Water Board are achieved and that the restoration projects undertaken by DWP are the best they can be. We are often out in the field and use on-the-ground observations to provide input and feedback to DWP and the stream scientists.

The Committee and its consultants also work closely with DWP in the restoration process. We attend bi-annual restoration meetings convened by DWP to report on their restoration and monitoring activities. Stream scientists also provide updates on their work and the meetings are often used to discuss and explore the complexities of a particular restoration action.

Representatives from DWP, the Water Board, and other parties involved with the original court proceedings attend the meetings.

The Committee routinely analyzes data and decisions to ensure that information is correct and that actions adhere to the Water Board orders. Examples of this work include: reviewing and analyzing stream hydrographs; determining when the “peak” will occur so that the streams are not inadvertently diverted; and monitoring daily aqueduct reports to make sure the creeks are receiving the flow of water required.

All of the parties agreed early on that restoration in the Mono Basin would operate under an adaptive management strategy. Adaptive management is an approach used to address uncertainty by viewing management actions as experiments derived from hypotheses, conducting extensive monitoring,

evaluating the results, and then determining if the management and underlying assumptions need to be changed accordingly.

Adaptive management actions often require deviation from the orders and therefore approval from the Water Board. The Committee must then gain an understanding of the scientists’ goals and their rationale for the proposed experiment and then weigh it against the intent of the orders. The knowledge gained is often critical to future restoration decisions and actions.

Restoration continues to move forward

Restoration in the Mono Basin continues to move forward despite this year’s below-average snowfall and the resulting runoff (see *Streamwatch*, page 14). Although this challenge will presumably cause a slight delay in the lake and stream recovery, these fluctuations were factored into the model and restoration is still on track. We take these important steps knowing that someday Mono Lake and the Mono Basin will be healthy and will be an example of people living in balance with nature. ❖



Looking down the Rush Creek delta out to Mono Lake and Paoha Island.

ARNA DEENARATI

Lisa Cutting is the Committee’s Eastern Sierra

Policy Director. Yes, her fascination with restoration really did begin with a 1963 VW Microbus, but she found it impossible to pay for college, surf daily, and earn enough money to maintain the bus’ ‘form and function.’ It eventually became someone else’s restoration project.

Changes in the landscape, changes in personnel

It’s not just the lake and streams that are changing. As the restoration process moves forward, 13 years after D1631, key individuals are transitioning to other responsibilities. While in some ways they will no doubt always be connected to Mono Lake, their formal involvement is ending.

Jim Canaday, Senior Environmental Scientist in the Division of Water Rights of the State Water Resources Control Board will be retiring this summer after 24 years of service. Beginning in 1989 Jim volunteered to work on the Mono Lake case and has been working with the parties throughout this process. Through the years, Jim has served as the liaison to the Water Board, explaining the details of proposed actions and advising on the various complicated issues for review and decisions. Jim has been instrumental in analyzing and synthesizing the complicated scientific information related to

Mono’s damage, restoration, and ultimate health.

Dr. Mark Hanna of the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power is transitioning out of the Eastern Sierra Environmental Issues group and will be working on Los Angeles storm water runoff issues in the Watershed Management group. Mark has been directly involved with Mono Basin restoration for four years and much has been accomplished under his leadership and influence.

Through the years many people have been involved with protecting Mono Lake and the restoration process. Although people will come and go as this process continues into the future, one thing is certain—the Mono Lake Committee will always be here to ensure that the Water Board Decision is upheld and restoration proceeds according to plan.

Shedding some light on science

New windows for the Mono Basin Field Station

by Bartshé Miller

This will be a brighter year for researchers staying at the Mono Basin Field Station. New windows were recently installed, which finalizes the interior remodel of the main Field Station building.

The windows were made possible thanks to a generous gift from former Mono Lake Committee Co-Executive Director, Frances Spivy-Weber and her husband, Michael Weber. The old, drafty, single-pane windows have been replaced by new, double-paned sliding windows that will help light up the working world of scientists and researchers for years to come.

The new windows also reduce noise, increase energy efficiency, and trim utility bills—helping to stretch research dollars just a little further. This recent improvement is one of many the Mono Lake Committee is initiating to create more comfortable, efficient, and green facilities supporting scientific inquiry in the Mono Basin.

If you fix it, they will come

Basic housing and infrastructure to support scientific research is limited in the Eastern Sierra, and practically absent in the Mono Basin. The closest neighboring research facility is the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory, a 45-minute drive south.

Before the Mono Basin Field Station in Lee Vining was established, visiting researchers had to compete for scarce and expensive housing, and establish their own basic infrastructure—a serious obstacle with limited funding and time in the field. Today, the Mono Basin Field Station provides reasonably-priced accommodation for scientists, basic support like wireless internet, equipment storage, access to the Mono Lake Research Library, a freezer for field samples, and convenient access to educational forums.

Small town, big science

During the last three decades researchers have been observing, probing, and collecting beyond the doorsteps of Lee Vining. They have contributed to a wealth of scientific work ranging from the first ecological study at Mono Lake to NASA's astrobiological sampling to PRBO Conservation Science's Eastern Sierra riparian songbird population monitoring. Over the years you may have spotted those researchers darting among tufa towers, plying the waters of Mono Lake, or tramping up and down the brushy corridors of Rush Creek. These days, you might catch them coming and going from the Mono Basin Field

Station in Lee Vining as well. Long days in the field are a job requirement for most visiting scientists, but so are a full stomach, a good night's sleep, and a reliable internet connection.

Are you interested in helping or finding out more about the Mono Basin Field Station? Give us a call or stop by this summer and ask for a tour. Contact Education Director Bartshé Miller (bartshe@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595. ❖

Bartshé is the Committee's Education Director. The dry winter he predicted (as he seems to do every year) allowed for winter bike rides to work.



Left: In August 2006, biologists Quresh Latif, Chris McCreedy, and Colin Woolley eat breakfast by the light of the old Field Station dining room window. Below: The Field Station dining room lit by its larger, more efficient, and brighter new windows in March 2007.



EINLIJUNG, ARW, DEGENHARDT



Avian influenza fact sheet

PRBO Conservation Science

Editor's note: In the past few years the Committee has fielded an increased number of questions regarding avian flu and concerning Mono Lake's location on the Pacific Flyway as well as the bird research being conducted in the area. To date there have been no documented incidents of birds or humans with avian flu in the United States. We thank PRBO Conservation Science, a trustworthy source of bird research information, for this fact sheet.

What is avian influenza?

There are 144 known varieties of avian influenza. Birds are the typical carriers of these viruses, which rarely cross species barriers to humans or even pose a threat to the carriers themselves. The “bird” or “poultry” flu discussed most often is H5N1, a virulent strain that causes high mortality in domestic poultry and was first detected in domestic geese in China in 1996. Primarily a poultry disease, it also affects wild birds, in particular waterfowl that mingle with domestic poultry. Consequently, migratory birds may have a role in its spread, and some may be adversely impacted by this disease. While still uncommon in humans, epidemiologists are paying close attention to H5N1 because of its potential to mutate into easily transmissible forms and the high mortality rate associated with the disease. It has not yet been detected in North America.

Conservation implications

Often overlooked in the face of threats to human health are the potential impacts of H5N1 on wildlife. The virus has already infected numerous waterbirds—e.g., ducks, swans, gulls, cormorants, and shorebirds—and some landbirds. The greatest documented effect has been upon Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*) in China, where up to 10% of the world population of this threatened species has died from H5N1. Impacts also include

misinformed management decisions in some regions to cull wildlife, due to fears of H5N1's spread.

Wildlife applications for studying avian flu

The World Health Organization has recommended actions to reduce the likelihood of a pandemic. These include strengthening national preparedness to reduce opportunities for spread in poultry and improving early-detection systems. Bird monitoring studies help monitor H5N1 spread. Scientists in North America have launched programs to test wild birds, to gain knowledge about the spread of all avian influenza viruses and for early detection of H5N1. PRBO, in collaboration with other researchers, is participating in national efforts in California and Alaska to sample wild birds for avian flu during the bird banding process.

How is avian flu (H5N1) transmitted?

The avian flu H5N1 virus is transmitted through contact with fecal droppings, saliva, and nasal discharge of birds, particularly domestic poultry.

Avian flu H5N1 is currently not easily transmitted to humans, as it preferentially affects the lower respiratory and not the upper respiratory tract. Consequently, since it is not spread easily through coughing or sneezing, human-to-human spread in particular is extremely rare.

H5N1 is much more difficult to transmit to humans than viruses such as the common flu or the common cold. Avian flu H5N1 would need to mutate before it could be transmitted easily from birds to humans, or between humans.

Can I get avian flu (H5N1) from wild birds?

As of today, there is no known case of avian flu being transmitted from living wild birds to people, and there are no reported cases of avian flu in

people—or birds, for that matter—in North America.

People who work closely with wild birds (e.g., biologists, hunters) should nevertheless take precautions to avoid potential contamination.

What you can do

If you feed birds, clean feeders regularly to prevent spread of avian disease and remove feeders if sick birds are ever observed.

If you own poultry, contact your local health department about precautions you can take for your health and that of your birds.

If you hunt: 1) keep your game birds cool, clean and dry; 2) do not eat, drink, or smoke while cleaning them; 3) use latex gloves when handling birds, and properly dispose of them when done; 4) wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol wipes after handling birds; 5) clean all tools and surfaces immediately afterwards. Use hot soapy water, then disinfect with a 10% chlorine bleach solution.

Reporting sick or dead wild birds in California

To report a dead wild bird whose death may be due to H5N1 or another disease, call 1-877-WNV-BIRD. Or report it directly at <http://vector.ucdavis.edu/cfm/deadbird2.cfm>.

To report a group of five or more dead birds, call the California Department of Fish & Game Regional Office at (707) 944-5400.

To report a sick wild bird, call your local wildlife rehabilitation clinic or humane society.

Additional resources

PRBO Conservation Science: www.prbo.org/avianflu or contact Avian Influenza Committee Coordinator Diana Humple at dhumble@prbo.org.

World Health Organization (includes daily updates on human cases): www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/.

Policy updates

by Clare Cragan, Lisa Cutting, and Geoff McQuilkin

Improvements to Old Marina still possible

It appears that California State transportation funds for the Old Marina Rehabilitation Project could be approved in the near future. The project, originally proposed by California Department of Parks & Recreation (State Parks) in November 2004, would enhance the popular lakeshore visitation site by improving the parking area, delineating parking and lakeshore access areas, and adding interpretive information panels. Old Marina's close proximity to Highway 395 attracts thousands of people each year, which means that many visitors will benefit from the proposed improvements.

State Parks completed the application and appropriate environmental review for the project at the end of 2004, but because state funding for this particular program area ran out, the project was placed on hold. Recently State Parks learned that the program area now has money to allocate and so resubmitted the project application. The California Transportation Commission receives recommendations from the Resources Agency and makes the final decision.

These particular funds are allocated from a California transportation distribution called the Environmental Enhancement & Mitigation Program (EEMP) established by the California Legislature in 1989. It offers a total of \$10 million each year for grants to nonprofit organizations as well as local, state, and federal governmental agencies for projects to mitigate the environmental impacts caused by new or modified state transportation facilities. State gasoline tax monies fund the EEMP.

Mill Creek still awaiting FERC decision

Restoration of legal water flows to Mill Creek, Mono Lake's third-largest tributary, is still waiting on action from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). FERC is currently considering a settlement proposal filed by

the Committee, numerous agencies, and Southern California Edison in January 2005. That settlement would relicense the Lundy hydropower plant and rehabilitate the "return ditch" to deliver appropriate water flows to Mill Creek. No word yet on when a decision will be reached.

Mono Basin area Sage Grouse denied listing under the Endangered Species Act

The US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) recently announced that the Mono Basin area Sage Grouse does not warrant listing under the protection of the Endangered Species Act. This decision comes one year after the Stanford Law School Environmental Law Clinic submitted a petition to the agency on behalf of a diverse group of conservation organizations. The decision validated the claim by the petitioners that the Mono Basin area Sage Grouse is in fact genetically distinct from the Greater Sage Grouse species, but USFWS did not believe there was sufficient scientific evidence of habitat threat to list the species.

Smaller state and local efforts continue to protect Sage Grouse populations throughout the west such as the Greater Sage Grouse Conservation Plan, however, support from a federal listing would invigorate the need to implement the measures outlined in the plan. The California Department of Fish & Game will begin researching Sage Grouse populations in Mono County this April.

National Cattleman's Beef Association files lawsuit against the EPA's particulate matter ruling

Dust in the wind? The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) decision to maintain the federal clean air dust (or particulate matter) standard was a victory for Mono Lake, but the battle is not over. Last December the National Cattleman's Beef Association (NCBA) filed a lawsuit against the EPA seeking

to eliminate the dust standard (as was originally proposed). While the new particulate matter ruling already exempts agricultural dust from regulation, the NCBA does not feel this is far-reaching enough, and would like to see the complete elimination of any rural dust standard. The Mono Lake Committee is watching this lawsuit closely. ❖

SoCal water notes

Los Angeles and Southern California have long been invested in recycling water as a local, drought-proof water supply, thanks in large part to the Mono Lake Committee's efforts in the 1990s to identify replacement sources for Mono Lake water.

Now a new level of activity is adding momentum to the use of recycled water. In January, the LA Regional Water Quality Control Board issued a permit for a 10,000 acre-foot increase in reclaimed water use in the Sepulveda Basin. The water will be used for industrial uses and large-scale irrigation, which will free up drinking water for ... drinking! The permit also includes an innovative joint approach to designing monitoring that will include the City, the local water quality regulators, and the public.

In related news, Los Angeles is advocating for new legislation that will encourage simpler permitting for irrigation with recycled water. The legislation, expected to be introduced any day by Assemblyman Jared Huffman, will help LA put reclaimed water into use more quickly.

Lastly, Los Angeles County is establishing an Office of Water Recycling. The new agency will work with DWP and other water agencies to increase recycled water use. Their conservative goal is to increase reclaimed water use by 166,200 acre-feet by 2030, offsetting enough drinking water use to supply 1.3 million people.

Meet the Board of Directors

The Mono Lake Committee Board of Directors talk about their personal connections to Mono Lake

The Committee's Board of Directors is an experienced group of individuals from varied disciplines—bringing a diversity of expertise to the organization. The Board provides everything from big-picture visioning to on-the-ground assistance with programs. What do they value about Mono Lake so much that it motivates them to put time and energy into the Mono Lake Committee? In the Winter 2007 *Newsletter* we introduced four of the eight members of the Board; now we hear from Andrea, David, Rick, and Sherryl. For more from the Board and Mono Lake Committee staff, as well as a place to post your own Mono Lake values, visit www.monolake.org/valueblog.

Andrea Lawrence, Mammoth Lakes



I was raised in the wilds of Vermont, and from that experience I feel that the deepest part of me is touched by nature.

I remember coming to Lee Vining in 1968, eating at Nicely's, and reading the story about Mono Lake on the back of the menu. I thought: someone should do something about this situation. And we have—it

was a moment in time waiting to happen.

It's the remarkable space that gets to me—all that huge open space and solitude. It gets me every time I see it, and it strikes at the core of my being.

David Kanner, Redwood City



I value both Mono Lake and the people connected to it. It is a meaningful place to people, and a symbol of conservation—an example of how things should be done.

I rode in the 1985 Bike-A-Thon, and I still have close relationships with people from it—people who connected through appreciating Mono Lake.

Being involved with the staff and Board is a chance to work with people who inspire me through their dedication—to Mono Lake, to the bigger ideals that it represents, and beyond economic or personal gain. The Mono Lake Committee is made up of people who are doing the real work of caring for the earth for the right reasons.

Rick Lehman, Sacramento



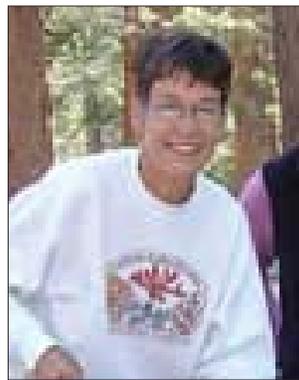
In an interesting twist of fate, I fell in love with Mono Lake 30 years ago on a State Assembly trip sponsored by DWP.

Mono Lake sells itself—once you get people to see it, they're hooked. It's an absolutely unique part of the American landscape, and is unlike anything else I've ever seen. This alone

makes it well worth saving, and it is our responsibility to protect the resource for all people.

In today's world, filled with big cities and highways and congestion, we need the unique peace and serenity of Mono Lake.

Sherryl Taylor, Mammoth Lakes



I believe that experiencing Mono Lake and other wild places inspires awe and respect for the natural world.

I believe in the importance for people of all ages to learn about the Mono Basin from passionate and knowledgeable teachers (especially Mono Lake Committee staff and Mono Basin docents), from

effective publications, and purposeful events. These are the people who will help determine the future of the Mono Basin. And I believe that a "good news" story like Mono Lake's can encourage and inspire action to protect other wild places and conserve natural resources.

Streamwatch

Wet year, wet year, dry

by Greg Reis

Runoff in 2005 and 2006 averaged over 150%. Two back-to-back years have averaged over 150% only three other times since DWP began keeping records in 1940: 1995–96, 1983–84, and 1982–83.

At the other end of the runoff spectrum, 2007 is looking dry. As of February 1, Lee Vining precipitation and high country snowpack both stood at 43% of average. As of March 1, the snow survey stood at 67% of average. DWP issued a preliminary runoff forecast of 59% for the 2007 Runoff Year (April 1, 2007–March 31, 2008). The Mono Basin hasn't experienced a year under 60% of average since 1990, when runoff was 49% (the 3rd driest year on record).

However, February ended with a series of very wet storms, which brought precipitation up to 52% of average. February and March can be quite wet, as we learned in February 1998 when

the Gem Pass snowpack went from 60% to 100% of the seasonal average in less than two weeks.

In March 2001, the snowpack increased from 60% to 78% in one week. In March 2002 the snowpack went from 72% to 84% in one week. And of course there was the “Miracle March” of 1991 when snowpack went from 20% to 85% in only one month! Precipitation, snowpack, and runoff percentages are rarely equal.

But without a miracle, there is a very real possibility that we will have a dry

year—the first one (officially defined as less than 68.5% of average runoff) since 1994. If so, this would be the first time under the Water Board Order that no peak flows are required in the streams and also the first time Parker and Walker Creeks are diverted.

Coming on the heels of back-to-back wet years exceeding 150% of average—the 6th and 7th wettest years on record—it might be the best time for a dry year, when groundwater, reservoir, and lake levels are still high, and our recovering ecosystems can best handle it. ❖

Help water trees!

Due to dry-year predictions the Committee is seeking volunteers this summer to help water Jeffrey pine seedlings planted along Rush Creek last year—seedlings that, due to a high water table, didn't need watering all summer until last fall. This summer we want to make sure they get established, and they will need water every week or two starting in May. If you would like to volunteer your help, please contact Greg Reis (greg@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595.

Lakewatch

Weird winter weather

by Greg Reis

Mono Lake's winter lake level fluctuations are controlled more by precipitation and evaporation than by runoff in the streams, and this was still the case during the weird winter of 2006–07.

While our winter weather is almost never “average,” we can call this winter weird for several reasons. For starters, we had higher winds than usual in December, and Caltrans' Warren Bench weather station might have set a new state record on December 26 when it recorded a 208 mile-per-hour gust. And in more wind news, on February

21, a gusty day, a dust devil picked up a heavy wooden picnic table in front of the Committee Bookstore and flipped it over.

A relatively dry December and January followed a dry fall due to a mild El Niño (warm tropical Pacific waters) that weakened rapidly and became a La Niña (cold tropical Pacific waters) by February. This created a “perfect storm” of dry weather. Winter storms traveled north of the Mono Basin, or split apart to the west and south, but they rarely made it across the high, windswept, rocky crest between Yosemite and Mono Lake.

In January, a month in which only 19% of average precipitation fell in Lee Vining, there was a cold snap that plunged temperatures to negative numbers not seen in ten years. The ice buildup in the creeks and on lakes, including around the western edge of

Mono Lake, was astonishing!

At one point, the ice buildup was so great along the shores of Mono Lake that it destroyed two of the three lake level gauges maintained by DWP to keep track of the lake's elevation. The remaining gauge indicates that the lake rose a tenth of a foot per month from December through February, which is typical for a dry year—it usually rises more in wetter years. At the beginning of March the lake level stood at 6384.7 feet above sea level, 1.8 feet higher than last year. ❖

Greg Reis is the Committee's Information Specialist. He recently became “Uncle Greg,” and plans to visit his new niece in April.

6417'

Prediversion lake level, 1941

6391'

Target lake level

6384.7'

Current lake level

6372'

Historic low, 1982

Mono Basin Journal

A Roundup of Quiet Happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



ARVA DEINHARDT

The temperatures were cold, poconip ice fog drifted across the lake, the days were short, and yet this winter was missing that most common component: snow. A little bit here and there, sure, but more often a promised storm split, stalled, or slid away elsewhere in the state. Or dropped a smattering of rain that washed away the lingering snowflakes on the ground.

That did lead, though, to interesting conditions. A walk along the lakeshore was as easy as summertime. The creeks turned to pillows and streams of cascading ice, all the more visible for their contrast to the warm colors of the bare willows and rose that line their banks. Frozen lakes, usually buried beneath drifting dunes of snow, provided ice skating opportunities week after week.

Down at Mono Lake, the cold temperatures produced unusual ice shows. Every winter there are times when a thin skim of ice forms along the west shore, floating above the lake's briny waters. Typically it lasts a few days, then the

winds of an incoming storm churn the surface and the lake lies clear and ice-free again.

This year was different. Remove the storms from the equation and the ice stayed, growing in extent just a bit every night. The ice patterns on the west shore, sometimes obscuring where land and lake meet, reached out toward Negit Island before giving way to open water. Then one day a gentle wind-free storm arrived leaving the lake ice undisturbed and dropping a few flakes of snow as well. A new layer cake look resulted: land, ice, snow, ice, lake, all in sweeping patterns spread wide between tufa and shoreline grasses. Is it really possible to have snow on the lake but so little on land? Yes indeed, once again proving that the Mono Basin will always convert the season's conditions into something uniquely interesting.❖

Geoff is the Committee's Executive Director. He has been making frequent rounds to LA, Sacramento, and the Bay Area to meet with California water policy movers and shakers.

Benchmarks



July 16, 2006: A rushing Lee Vining Creek tumbles down open stream channels.



PHOTOS BY GREG REIS

January 14, 2007: Lee Vining Creek flows over "anchor ice" that formed during a 10-year low in temperatures.



Only in Lee Vining

... where you can't take what drives through town too seriously

76 Ball falls

After over 50 years of standing watch over Lee Vining, the venerable orange rotating ball at the Channel 76 gas station succumbed to high winds in early January, plummeting 35 feet from the top of its pole. Lisa Cutting, the Committee's Policy Director, was on her way to an evening meeting when she saw the wobbling ball fall, shattering on the pavement near the pumps.

There are no plans to replace the 76 ball, which rotated during business hours. Shelley Channel, owner of the gas station, said that Lee Vining's 76 ball may well have been the only remaining rotating ball left in the state of California, since most cities no longer allow rotating signs. Channel said that the recently-departed ball was the third replacement, high winds having laid two previous 76 balls low.

Nostalgia for the 76 ball runs deep—it was one of the locally-fabled “Seven Wonders of Lee Vining” and, given that it was a gas station advertisement, seems to have held a surprisingly warm spot in many hearts. Information Specialist Greg Reis, who ran home to research the peak gust that did the ball in, was inspired to write the following haiku:



The beloved 76 ball made it through many a winter before succumbing to wind.

Brilliant orange ball
Fifty-five mile per hour
Gust sent it tumbling

Although the 76 Station will soon change to Shell, the 76 ball will certainly live on in local memory.



Unusual species visits Lee Vining

Lee Vining may be far away from major metropolitan areas, but let it not be said that we don't have a unique perspective on what goes on in the rest of the state by virtue of our highway vantage point. Each citizen of Lee Vining can rattle off their own personal list of unique, funny, and downright odd passers-by—from sets for Superbowl commercials to the exodus of vehicles from Burning Man, from souped-up classic cars to folks on horseback.

In January, a rare species of fish was sighted in Lee Vining. This particular fish needed no water, was much larger than any typical Mono Basin species, and was entirely made of steel by sculptor Ed McBride of Ridgecrest. Having just spent the weekend at the Safari Club International's 35th Annual Hunters' Convention in Reno, Nevada, the fish looked like it had been hooked by a giant lure in order to secure it to a trailer for the ride home.

The Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore provided its chauffeur with a pit stop, and Policy Coordinator Clare Cragan seized the moment to pose for posterity.



Steer horns on my Subaru

Depending on your perspective, Lee Vining is either Subaru country or 4x4 truck country, and while there is some crossover and everyone gets along quite well, you can pretty much guess whether it's a Mono Lake Committee potluck or a meeting of the local E Clampus Vitus chapter going on just by looking at the cars parked outside.

Retail Operations Manager Brett Pyle found a surprisingly insightful song along these lines one night while surfing radio stations. On *Boot Liquor Radio*, billed as “Americana roots music for cowhands, cowpokes, and cowtippers” became an instant hit when the Bob Aldo song “Steer Horns On My Subaru” came on. Bob sings, “Down at the health food store, there's Subarus galore, and when I walk out the door I can't find my car. But since I put them steer horns on, all my lost car blues are gone.”

Days later, after the whole Committee staff had a chance to hear the song, what pulls up in front of the Bookstore but a set of steer horns tied to a Toyota Camry. ❖

—Elin Ljung and Arya Degenhardt, two Lee Vining residents who absolutely love the town.



Catch and release? Clare Cragan steals a moment with a steel fish.

Jellison co-authored a scientific paper (Condor 108:82-96) using the Mono Lake California Gull data spanning 1983–2000. They found four variables to be highly significant in determining the population size in a given year:

1. The potential number of four-year-old gulls returning to Mono Lake to breed for the first time (California Gulls do not become sexually mature until their 4th year; therefore, the reproductive success four years earlier influences a current year's number of new recruits).

2. Winter coastal conditions (where the population largely spends its winters).

3. Brine shrimp concentration at Mono Lake during the time of egg-laying.

4. The mean temperature of the water roughly a month before egg-laying (which influences shrimp emergence).

The last two variables were the most significant in determining the population size, and demonstrate how tightly bound the California Gull population is with that of the availability of brine shrimp.

Which comes first, the shrimp or the egg?

During the egg-laying period, generally in late April, shrimp are virtually the only available food source for the gulls, since alkali flies are not yet out in any appreciable number. Only if the female gull can obtain sufficient food at this time does she have the body reserves needed to lay the energy-rich egg, let alone two or three eggs. Additionally, yearly variation in snowpack and runoff affect brine shrimp through changes in the lake's limnological conditions, thus regional climate patterns indirectly influence the gull population.

The 2006 nesting season results

The total number of nests counted in 2006 on Mono Lake was the fourth lowest in 24 years of monitoring. However, the number of chicks fledged per nest was slightly above the long-term average. The lake also rose a remarkable 1.9 feet over

*Meromixis is the condition in which the lake's annual mixing process does not occur. It is triggered by increased fresher (less dense) water stratifying over the surface of Mono Lake's denser, more salty water. Delayed hatch and reproduction of brine shrimp and low gull productivity have been associated with the onset of previous meromictic periods.

the 2006 nesting season. Although this is good news for the lake and the gull population as a whole, dozens of shore-side nests did become submerged over the course of the season. With continued monitoring we hope to track the redistribution of the population as nesting islets become reduced in size or disappear completely due to the rising lake level.

The value of long-term data

The Mono Lake California Gull Project has become a valuable, long-term data set. With this information biologists can begin to examine larger-scale patterns. For example, how will the gull population continue to respond to meromictic* lake conditions, which may occur more frequently while the lake rises? Will we begin to see patterns associated with climate change and/or its potential affect on timing and amount of snowpack runoff?



My thoughts turn to the gulls, whose incessant cries I still manage to hear between gusts. There are 27,000 (exactly!) nesting on Little Tahiti Islet this year, audible across a channel of water to the north of us, and I can imagine the goings-on. They sit tight on their nests, facing into the wind so as not to ruffle their

feathers, squinting in the snow flurries. Tucked snug and warm beneath each bird is a clutch of one to three eggs. While that storm will long be in my memory of enduring cold wind and challenging navigation, to the gulls it is merely another day.

A gull's mate arrives to relieve the female of incubation duties. They both throw their heads back and then forward in "posture-calling." As she stands the dusting of snow falls off her dry back. Amid the gusts and chill she opens her wings and the wind lifts her above the colony and she wheels off over the foamy, choppy water. The storm will pass. The eggs will hatch, and another season will unfold.❖

Kristie Nelson is a part-time PRBO Conservation Science biologist. When not out monitoring Mono Lake's gulls, she is the caretaker of four dairy goats, 25 chickens, and a vegetable garden in the north Mono Basin.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN HITE

California Gulls still need your help!

Mono Lake Committee, PRBO Conservation Science, and Cornell University have been tracking the health of the California Gull population at Mono Lake since 1979. The California Gull Research Project at Mono Lake is one of the oldest continuous bird research projects in California, and its value as a long term monitoring project increases with each year of data collection. This research is intimately connected to measuring the health of Mono Lake. To help sustain this important project for years to come, please contact Lisa Cutting (lisa@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595.

New roof greets its first spring!

by Elin Ljung

The Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore and staff office building is now sporting a new roof, thanks to many generous donations from members and friends.

The new roof is sturdy corrugated metal in a blue color reminiscent of Mono Lake on a summer day. An efficient crew from Mike Kenny Roofing of Mammoth Lakes spent a week in mid-November quickly peeling off the Committee's old roof and securing the new one—between early winter storms!

The change in roofing heralds the beginning of a new era for the Committee building. The old roof sheltered the founders in the 1970s as they planned a strategy for saving Mono Lake. It covered staff who worked to establish the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve and the Mono Basin Scenic Area in the early 80s, and members and friends rejoiced under the old roof in 1994 when water once again began to flow down the creeks to the lake.

After over 40 years the roof still covered the building, but didn't shelter it very well. Committee staff climbed onto the

roof periodically during the winter to clear snow away from the store's false front, and with every summer rainstorm staff trash cans were called into duty catching drips in the store and offices. With numerous holes, patches, and pieces held together with baling wire and tar, it was time for a change!

The Committee's new roof is most remarkable because of what it does not do: it does not leak, it does not hold snow in heavy piles, and it does not let in the daylight! The roof has shed all the snow from winter storms quickly and safely; no doubt it will do even better in heavier winters to come.

Valuable photo archives, membership records, computer equipment, and store merchandise now stay safely dry under the new roof, and the juncture between the false front and the roof slope no longer drips melting snow into the wall. Most important, Committee staff is protected and can better carry on the work of protecting Mono Lake. This is work that we cannot do alone, and we extend a huge thank you to all the members who sent their support for the roof! ❖

2006 Free Drawing Winners

Congratulations to the following lucky winners of the 2006 Free Drawing!

Footloose Sports ski equipment package: **Roberta Snyder** of Grand Junction, CO. Wilson's Eastside Sports camping equipment package: **Hui Chen** of Sunnyvale. June Mountain ski pass: **John Lapinski** of Beverly Hills. Tamarack Cross Country Ski Center ski pass: **Margaret & Lawrence Woodruff** of Claremont.

Fly fishing vacation: **Thomas & Tonetta Doman** of Mammoth Lakes. Double Eagle Spa & Resort weekend: **Trish Cap** of San Pablo. Sorensen's Resort weekend: **John Cinatl** of Clovis. Lake Tahoe vacation: **Ray Broguiere** of Montebello. Sonoma winery tour: **Eveleen Henry** of Creswell, OR. Mammoth vacation packages: **Dorene Medlin** of Las Vegas, NV and **Mary Moser** of Cardiff.

Friends of the Inyo gift package: **John & Marilyn Shirey** of Sacramento. Yosemite Association Outdoor Adventure: **Craig Thomsen** of Davis. Friends of the River rafting trip: **Gertrude Davis** of Torrance.

Wave Rave snowboard: **Vernon & Mary Lawson** of Shafter. Patagonia vest: **Kimberly Thacker** of Sylmar. Patagonia jacket: **Carmen Frost** of North Hollywood. REI backpacks: **Dr. Tom McGillis** of Ventura and **Bart Sullivan** of South Lake Tahoe. Steven Rosen photograph: **Wendy Woman** of Redway. Edisto Gallery tea basket: **Ellis & Barbara Tubbs** of Woodland Hills. Toggery gift certificates: **Margarita Brice** of Huntington Beach, **Guy Kay** of Saint Helena, and **Harry**

LaCoste of Grants Pass, OR.

Mono Lake: Explorations and Reflections book by Jim Stimson: **Arlene Lee** of Oakland, **Valerie Ryden** of Camarillo, and the **Sierra Club Range of Light Chapter** in Mammoth Lakes. Mono Lake gift pack: **Lucy Clark** of Bakersfield, **Gary & Rita Ray** of Mountain View, and **Jake & Patt Reed** of Trabuco Canyon.

Many thanks to all of the Free Drawing sponsors for their generous donations, which make this fundraising event successful. Look for tickets to enter this year's Free Drawing in the Fall 2007 *Newsletter*!



Observing the time-honored tradition of Committee kids assisting with the Free Drawing, Casey, Sabine, and Ellery join Elin Ljung in pulling the lucky winning tickets from the box.

2007 Field Seminars



TUFA & WILD BARLEY: RICHARD KNEIPP, FIELD SEMINAR INSTRUCTOR

Visions of the Past: First Discoveries

June 9–10

Terri Geissinger

\$130 per person / \$115 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. This unique tour will visit the historic sites of Dogtown, Monoville, the Bodie Bluff (privileged access), Mono Mills, Lundy, and Jordan. You will learn the fascinating history that stretches from the first gold discovery at Dogtown in 1857, to the wild days of Bodie and Lundy, to the Jordan Power Plant tragedy in 1911. The past will come alive as you hear the triumphs and tragedies of the discoverers, the prospectors, and the families who settled here and made the Mono Basin their home. Your guide, Terri Geissinger, is a Bodie State Historic Park Historian, Interpreter, and Guide. She is active in the Mono Basin Historical Society, and has a special talent for making history come alive.

South Shore Kayak

June 10

Stuart Wilkinson & Mono Lake Committee Staff

\$90 per person / \$80 for members

Limited to 12 participants

Late spring reveals snow-capped mountains towering over a glassy 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. This natural history kayak tour will cover a wide variety of topics relating to this unusual Great Basin lake, such as Mono Lake geology, ecology, history, and politics. Expect to see underwater tufa towers, birds, brine shrimp, 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 11th year in a row, and is highly rated by past participants. Space is limited in this popular seminar, so register early!

**Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars fill quickly every year—
register now online at www.monolake.org/seminars!**

www.monolake.org/seminars or (760) 647-6595 to register

Birding the East Side

June 13–15

David Lukas

\$140 per person / \$125 for members

Looking to get a little focused birding in before the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua? This field seminar will concentrate on the identification and ecology of birds in the Mono Basin and local Eastern Sierra. Visit a wide variety of habitats including desert scrub, marsh, riparian forest, 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 explore a number of sites intensively, mixing short leisurely walks with periods of observation and natural history discussion. 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, 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 recently revised *Sierra Nevada Natural History*. He is hard at work on an upcoming field guide to birds of the Sierra Nevada. This seminar begins on a Wednesday morning, leading up to the 6th annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua.

Wildflower Macrophotography in the Mono Basin

July 13–15

David Gubernick

\$250 per person / \$225 for members

Limited to 8 participants

Learn to take creative and beautiful close-up images, further develop your artistic vision, and enhance your photographic skills in the warm and supportive learning environment of this workshop for beginning to advanced amateur photographers. The workshop will be conducted in the Mono Basin and upper reaches of the Sierra and includes classroom instruction, demonstrations, and individual coaching in the field that will help you take your photography to the next level. Evenings will be spent discussing and providing feedback on participants' fieldwork as well as prior work (please bring 10–15 examples). Both film and digital cameras are welcome. David Gubernick, Ph.D., is an internationally and nationally published and award-winning nature photographer and workshop leader. He provides fine art prints and stock images for the advertising, corporate, editorial, and home décor markets. His first photography book, *Wildflowers of Monterey County*, was published in 2002 and has been a best-seller, garnering rave reviews. He is currently working on several

other photography books, including one on the wildflowers of the Mono Basin.

Midsummer Birds at Mono Lake

July 13–15

David Lukas

\$140 per person / \$125 for members

It's surprising how many birds can be found in the Mono Basin during the heat of summer. Not only are desert birds conspicuously feeding fledglings or nesting a second time, but high numbers of Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes are also flocking to the shores of Mono Lake. And as a special treat, the birds and wildflowers of the high country are accessible and in full swing. It's a great time to visit the Mono Basin! In this field seminar we will explore far and wide, ranging from lake shore to mountain pass, concentrating on the identification and ecology of birds we encounter along the way. Expect to mix short leisurely walks with periods of observation and natural history discussion—taking time to learn about birds by watching them closely. David Lukas



Juvenile Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*).

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS MCCREERY



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL MCFARLAND

Weidemeyer's Admiral (Limenitis weidemeyerii).

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 recently revised *Sierra Nevada Natural History*. He is hard at work on an upcoming field guide to birds of the Sierra Nevada.

Moths & Butterflies of the Mono Basin

July 20–22

Paul McFarland & Bartshé Miller

\$130 per person / \$115 for members

Join local naturalists Paul McFarland and Bartshé Miller for an exploration of butterflies and moths in the Mono Basin. This seminar will focus on using Jeffrey Glassberg's 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. The group will also spend a night with moths, venturing out to observe a world of *Lepidopterae* not found in daylight. In recent years, participants have 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. Paul McFarland lives in Lee Vining, is the Executive Director of Friends of the Inyo, and has spent the last several summers chasing down anything with wings near Mono Lake. Bartshé Miller is the Mono Lake Committee's Education Director. He has been raising a few moths at home, and has taken to bright lights on moonless summer nights.

Identifying High Country Wildflowers

July 27–29

Mark Bagley

\$140 per person / \$125 for members

At the headwaters of Lee Vining Creek a rich summer display of wildflowers, shrubs, and trees thrive 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 include a hands-on session to introduce the basics of plant identification, and time in the field on a couple of easily paced short walks (generally less than a mile) at high elevations (generally above 9,000 feet above sea level) with much more time stopping and keying out plants than walking. Mark Bagley 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.

Los Angeles Aqueduct Tour

August 4

Greg Reis

\$90 per person / \$80 for members

The Mono Basin extension of the Los Angeles Aqueduct began exporting water 350 miles south to the City of LA in 1941. Join Mono Lake Committee Information Specialist Greg Reis for an investigation of the north end of the aqueduct system. We'll visit all the major aqueduct facilities in the Mono Basin, and learn about the aqueduct's effects on Mono



PHOTO REIS

The Grant Lake reservoir spillway, just days before spilling during the summer of 2006.

Lake, its tributary streams, the Upper Owens River, and land management in the area. We'll also discuss the history of water diversions, the effort to save Mono Lake, and where habitat restoration is headed in the future. Greg is the perfect guide for unraveling the Mono Basin's complex and fascinating plumbing—he has a dozen years of experience in Mono Basin hydrology and restoration and keeps close track of Mono Basin water management.

Introduction to High Country Plants & Habitats

August 10–12

Ann Howald

\$140 per person / \$125 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 pine, 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 see noisy Clark's Nutcrackers collecting and storing whitebark pine seed. This weekend's seminar will include an introduction to the basics of plant identification, a slideshow preview of some of the habitats and plants to be seen during the field trips, and walks around the 10,000-foot elevation level with a modest pace over moderate terrain. Ann Howald is a consulting botanist who has taught plant classes in the Eastern Sierra for many years.

Tule Seedbeater Basketry

August 17–19

Lucy Parker & Julia Parker

\$185 per person / \$170 for members

\$80 materials fee

Primitive group campsite included (please, no pets)

During this three-day seminar participants will prepare materials and create a small Paiute basket, similar to a traditional work basket used for gathering pine nuts, berries, and other foods. This seminar is designed for weavers of all levels, beginning through advanced. You are encouraged (but not required) to camp with the group, and evenings will be spent around the campfire with traditional songs and stories. Lucy Parker is a descendent of the Yosemite Miwok, Mono Lake Kutzadika^a, and Kayasha Pomo peoples. She learned traditional handiwork from her mother Julia, a master basket weaver, and will pass on some of her knowledge in this special three-day/two-night camping seminar. Julia Parker has



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM CARANO

A participant weaving in the Basketry seminar.

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 who wove in the early 20th century.

Fall Bird Migration

August 18–19

Dave Shuford

\$140 per person / \$125 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 land birds, shorebirds, and water birds in the Mono Basin and on Crowley Lake reservoir. Dave Shuford has been a staff biologist at PRBO Conservation Science for 20 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!

Birding the Mono Basin: Season's Change

August 24–26

David Wimpfheimer

\$140 per person / \$125 for members

Late summer is a great time to see and enjoy birds in the Mono Basin. Most of the breeding birds are still present in diverse habitats near the lake and up to the higher meadows and forests; their numbers are also swelled by thousands of phalaropes and other shorebirds visiting Mono Lake. In sagebrush meadows and riparian and montane forests we will

focus on the identification, behavior and ecology of corvids, flycatchers, vireos, warblers, and other passerines. This weekend's seminar will begin Friday evening with a slideshow preview of what we will see during the field trips. David Wimpfheimer has been educating and interpreting for over twenty years, for groups such as Point Reyes Field Seminars, San Francisco Bay Whale Watching, Elderhostel, and various Audubon chapters. His seasoned focus and knowledge make for an enjoyable and educational outing!

Living on the Edge: Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep in the Mono Basin

September 8-9

John Wehausen

\$150 per person / \$130 for members

The US Fish & Wildlife Service listed the Sierra bighorn sheep as Federally Endangered in 1999. This field seminar will involve discussions of the fascinating biology of these animals, their relationship with other mammals (including mountain lions and humans), and the conservation of Sierra bighorn in the field. Past participants saw bighorn five out of the last six years—there is a very good chance of seeing Sierra bighorn sheep in the wild during this seminar, but no guarantee. John Wehausen is a research scientist at the White Mountain Research Station in Bishop who 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. Some of the proceeds from this seminar will benefit the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation. *Please be aware that this seminar involves very strenuous hiking at the 10,000-foot elevation and above.*

Visions of the Past: Bodie, Masonic, & Aurora

September 15-16

Terri Geissinger

\$130 per person / \$115 for members

This guided tour is for folks who love history, enjoy the outdoors, and don't mind miles of dirt roads. In the beautiful Bodie Hills, all within 20 miles, lie three ghost towns. Their stories are filled with pioneer families, prospectors, muleskinners, heroes, and gunslingers. As you tour the town and the cemetery of Bodie, once the second-largest city in California, you will hear the fascinating stories of those who lived here and the ones who never left. Today Bodie is the largest unrestored ghost town in the west with over 170 buildings remaining. Next visit the rock cabins and foundations of Masonic, where nearly 500 people resided in a beautiful canyon, mining gold with great hope and eventually producing \$600,000. The last stop is Aurora, once a bustling



PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDSEY BRAUN

Fly fishing the meandering waters of upper Lee Vining Creek.

town of 8,000 souls in the 1860s, which now rests forever in peace amongst the sagebrush and pinyon pine. Your guide Terri Geissinger is a Bodie State Historic Park Historian, Interpreter, and Guide. She is active in the Mono Basin Historical Society, and has a special talent for making history come alive.

Fly Fishing in the Mono Basin

September 22-23

Peter Pumphrey & Roberta Lagomarsini

\$130 per person / \$115 for members

Learn the basics of fly fishing in the Mono Basin's beautiful landscape! This introductory seminar will begin by covering the basics: the equipment involved, the varieties of flies and their uses, and basic casting technique. The class will then move to one of the Basin's many streams to consider trout habitat and habits, characteristics of a healthy stream environment, reading the water, fly presentation, and catch and release. On Sunday the class will move to another streamside location to work on refining the techniques from the day before. There will be time spent at high altitude (over 9,000 feet above sea level), and most of the two days will be spent on foot. Equipment is available for those who are not already engaged in the sport. Peter Pumphrey and Roberta Lagomarsini are guides licensed by the State of California

and have been teaching basic fly fishing for over ten years. They will de-mystify fly fishing and provide a relaxed atmosphere in which to begin what can become a lifelong adventure in the outdoors.

Mono-Bodie Fall Photography

October 5-7

Richard Knepp

\$275 per person / \$255 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 fourth year, the class will spend Saturday at Bodie, inside some of the buildings—a very special treat! 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, where Rick will be joined by Bodie expert, photographer, and good friend Jill Lachman. 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 13th year in a row, with the Bodie twist continued for 2007!

Capturing Autumn on Canvas: Fall Painting in the Mono Basin

October 13-14

John Hewitt

\$150 per person / \$135 for members

The golden aspens, drying grasses, and bright blue skies of fall in the Mono Basin provide a myriad of opportunities for artists to capture the season on canvas. This weekend seminar will explore some of the best fall color locations around Mono Lake, and is designed for beginning through advanced painters who work with watercolors, oils, pastels, or acrylics. The class will spend Saturday painting in the field at locations like Lee Vining Canyon, Lundy Canyon, and County Park, with instructor John Hewitt offering technique tips and critiques of each individual's work. The group will share their work in the evening and regroup on Sunday morning for more fieldwork. John is a nationally-acclaimed watercolorist and former Lee Vining resident who has taught classes and workshops for over 20 years in locations as far afield as the Italian Alps. John is a signature member of many watercolor societies, but he welcomes any medium in his classes. This seminar is the Mono Lake Committee's newest offering, so register early to ensure your spot!

Field Seminar Registration Information

Register online at www.monolake.org/seminars or 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/seminars.

We accept VISA, MasterCard, or Discover only. 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 the seminar will be cancelled two weeks in advance, and full refunds will be issued. If you cancel three weeks prior to the seminar start date, we will refund your payment (less a \$15 processing fee). No refunds after that date, but tuition can be applied to another class in 2007.

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 who 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.

Staff migrations

by Erika Obedzinski

This winter we've had some significant staff migrations that have put us on solid footing heading into spring, ready to continue the Committee's core program work that is so important to protecting Mono Lake.

We said goodbye to **Kirsten Watson**, who helped out part-time this winter at the Membership Desk. Many of you may know Kirsten from the Information Center & Bookstore, where she's been a Retail Assistant for the past two summers. Since Kirsten is a local, we know we'll see her often, and we wish her the best on the news of her engagement to local resident Daniel Flores.

We also bid farewell to our Eastern Sierra Policy Coordinator, **Clare Cragan**, who is moving to the big city of New York! Clare has done excellent work on behalf of Mono Lake, including: coordinating Eastern Sierra Roundtable meetings; mapping out land ownership in the Scenic Area; attending many local meetings on behalf of the Committee; building relationships with agency staff, local residents, and Mono Lake Volunteers; and bringing new ideas to the Committee's summer internship program. We will miss Clare's dedicated work and positive presence in the office, but we wish her well as she heads east. We know Clare will stay in touch and will return soon and often to her favorite lake!

Fortunately, we have found **Emily Prud'homme** to take over the reins as our new Eastern Sierra Policy Coordinator.

Emily is perhaps the first Committee staff member to have lived in a community smaller than Lee Vining—she previously ran a science education camp in the remote Clarno Basin, Oregon. Emily's background in conservation, science, and education will allow her to jump right into the Mono Basin's ever-present policy work. She fell in love with Mono Lake during a visit with her geography field methods class from UC Davis, and she has been coming back ever since. We knew she would be a good fit when she told us the names of her 13-year-old cats: Inyo and Mono!

We are also very happy to have found our new Membership Coordinator, **Ellen King**. Ellen also has a well-founded love for Mono Lake—she and her husband Duncan have been members and visitors to the area for over twenty years. Ellen's aptitude for detail work (she worked for many years for Agilent Technologies and Hewlett Packard as a reference librarian) and passion for the Committee's mission make her the perfect person for the Membership Desk. Your donations and membership records will be in good hands with Ellen and we are delighted to welcome both her and Emily to our staff. ❖

Erika Obedzinski is the Committee's Office Director. She has been having fun managing all of the names that begin with "E" in the office. It's not quite as challenging as her crosswords, but sometimes it is a bit of a puzzle!

Mono Lake Volunteer Program starts May 23, 2007

The Mono Lake Volunteer Program, now in its 4th year, is a joint initiative sponsored by the US Forest Service, California State Parks, and the Mono Lake Committee, with additional support from the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association.

Volunteer training consists of six half-day field sessions on Wednesdays and Thursdays from May 23 through June 7 that focus on exploring visitor areas around the Mono Basin. There is no charge for the training, but participants agree to volunteer for at least eight hours each month from June through September.

Core volunteer jobs include roving at South Tufa or Panum Crater, staffing a bird-watching station at the State Reserve boardwalk, and answering questions at the Forest Service Visitor Center. With additional training, volunteers may also lead tours and school groups at South Tufa and Panum Crater and give patio talks at the Forest Service Visitor Center. To best benefit Mono Lake, participants choose jobs to suit their own interests, while also matching the needs of the agencies and organizations involved.

Some Mono Lake Committee members have expressed an interest in volunteering for a shorter block of time during the summer. One-on-one training may be arranged, but a

commitment of at least a week of time at the lake is needed.

Janet Carle, retired State Reserve Ranger, conducts the training. She also organizes fun and informative volunteer training events throughout the year with Mono Basin experts. Janet's knowledge, enthusiasm, and dedication to the program are an important part of its success.

The Mono Lake Volunteer program has been extremely beneficial to Mono Lake: in 2006, volunteers contributed over 800 hours. Thank you volunteers!

If you are interested in the 2007 volunteer class please contact Erika Obedzinski (erika@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595 or Janet Carle at (760) 647-6431.



The 2006 Mono Lake Volunteers and agency staff.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JANET CARLE



From the mailbag

News from members and friends

by Ellen King

“Life is what happens when you are busy making other plans.” That quote, attributed to John Lennon, aptly describes my journey to the Mono Basin. Two years ago I was working as a corporate librarian in a high tech company in Palo Alto, considering “retirement” in the summer of 2007 after 20 years with the company. Eighteen months ago I learned that I would soon be laid off. One year ago I was adjusting to the prospect of soon being unemployed, and wondering what on earth I would do next. And now I’m in Lee Vining, learning about mailing lists, database codes, and life here at the end of winter.

I suppose it was fate. After all, I’ve been a member of the Committee since 1992, and I’ve loved the lake ever since I first saw it ten years before that. My husband Duncan and I bought land here several years ago, intending to build a home when we retired from our Silicon Valley jobs. And I told friends that my ideal life in the Mono Basin would include working for the Mono Lake Committee.

Last week I visited the site of the Old Marina. As I walked down the boardwalk five Canada Geese, startled by my footsteps, took wing and settled majestically onto the lake several hundred yards offshore. I stayed for a while, drinking in the beauty of the day and the lake, until the cold spring wind overcame the warmth of the sun. As I returned to my car I stopped to read the interpretive sign describing the tufa-coated pumice at the end of the boardwalk. I looked at the accompanying photograph, greatly faded by years of weathering, and realized that there was no water to be seen. The Canada Geese that today were floating in the lake would have been standing on dry land when it was taken. Long Live Mono Lake!

Thank you to all of you who sent contributions in memory or in honor of your friends and loved ones. We appreciate these gifts that help us carry on the work that will keep Mono Lake a special place for many generations.

In Memory

Edith Gaines of Los Angeles made a gift in memory of her son **David Gaines** and his birthday, December 30. David was the founder of the Mono Lake Committee, and his spirit and passion for Mono Lake inspire the Committee’s work to this day.

Dale & Suzanne Burger of San Marino sent a donation in memory of their nephew **Gregory Whitehill**, who loved the Mono Basin. **John Callen** gave in memory of **Thomas N. Callen**.

Kelli Carriger of Chapel Hill, NC gave a gift in memory of **Arjun Khanna**. Several years ago Arjun donated a canoe to the Committee’s fleet in celebration of his daughter, Simran. The canoe continues to sail on Mono Lake today.

Contributions in memory of **Arthur Walker, M.D.** were made by **Tony & Louise Giammona** of San Jose, **Mark**

Moore & Renée Rankin of Campbell, and **Harvey & Wanda Whitehead** of San Jose.

Donations in memory of **Donald Kelly** were made by **Hal & Marguerite Hennacy** of Pasadena and **Clarence & Nancy Becker** of St. Clair Shores, MN.

Yvonne Penny sent a contribution in memory of **Dan Harslem**. **Gretchen Whisenand** of Sebastopol sent a contribution in memory of **Cathie Frank**.

In Honor

Jon & Sara Allred, who live in the Seattle, WA area, gave a gift in honor of Sara’s father, **Howard Webb**. **Michael Beebe**, of Seattle, WA gave a gift in honor of former Mono Lake Committee Intern **Carol Heinz**.

Chris Howard of Walla Walla, WA made a donation in honor of Jon Stutz. **Richard Lauterbach** of Livonia, MI gave a gift in honor of **Edith Lauterbach**.

Jordan Rinker of Corte Madera made a contribution in honor of **Jean Schulz**. **Ronald Rutowski** of

Tempe, AZ gave a gift in honor of **Pat Rutowski & Lauren Mitchell**.

Joy Zimnavoda of Redondo Beach made a contribution in honor of **Janet Carle**. An **anonymous donor** made a contribution in honor of **Alayne Meeks**. ❖

Lee Vining High baseball and softball teams need help!

25 of the 32 students at LVHS play baseball and softball. However, the teams are in dire need of gear—specifically gloves and cleats.

What they lack in gear they make up for in effort and good spirit. Last year—the Lady Tigers softball team’s second year in existence—they were League Champions!

If you’re interested in making a donation to the high school sports program contact Arya (arya@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595.

Keep a lookout for the sixth annual...



Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua

June 15–17, 2007

registration begins April 16, 2007
at www.birdchautauqua.org



Volunteer for Mono Lake!

- training starts May 23 •



for more information contact
Janet Carle • (760) 647-6431 or
Erika Obedzinski • (760) 647-6595

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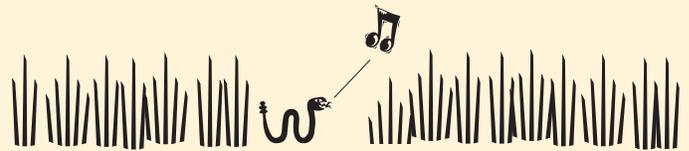
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Music & Ecology Camp at Mono Lake

two sessions: June 17–23, 2007 and
August 12–18, 2007

contact **Cole & Priscilla
Hawkins** at **(530) 753-1927**

www.musicandecology.com



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