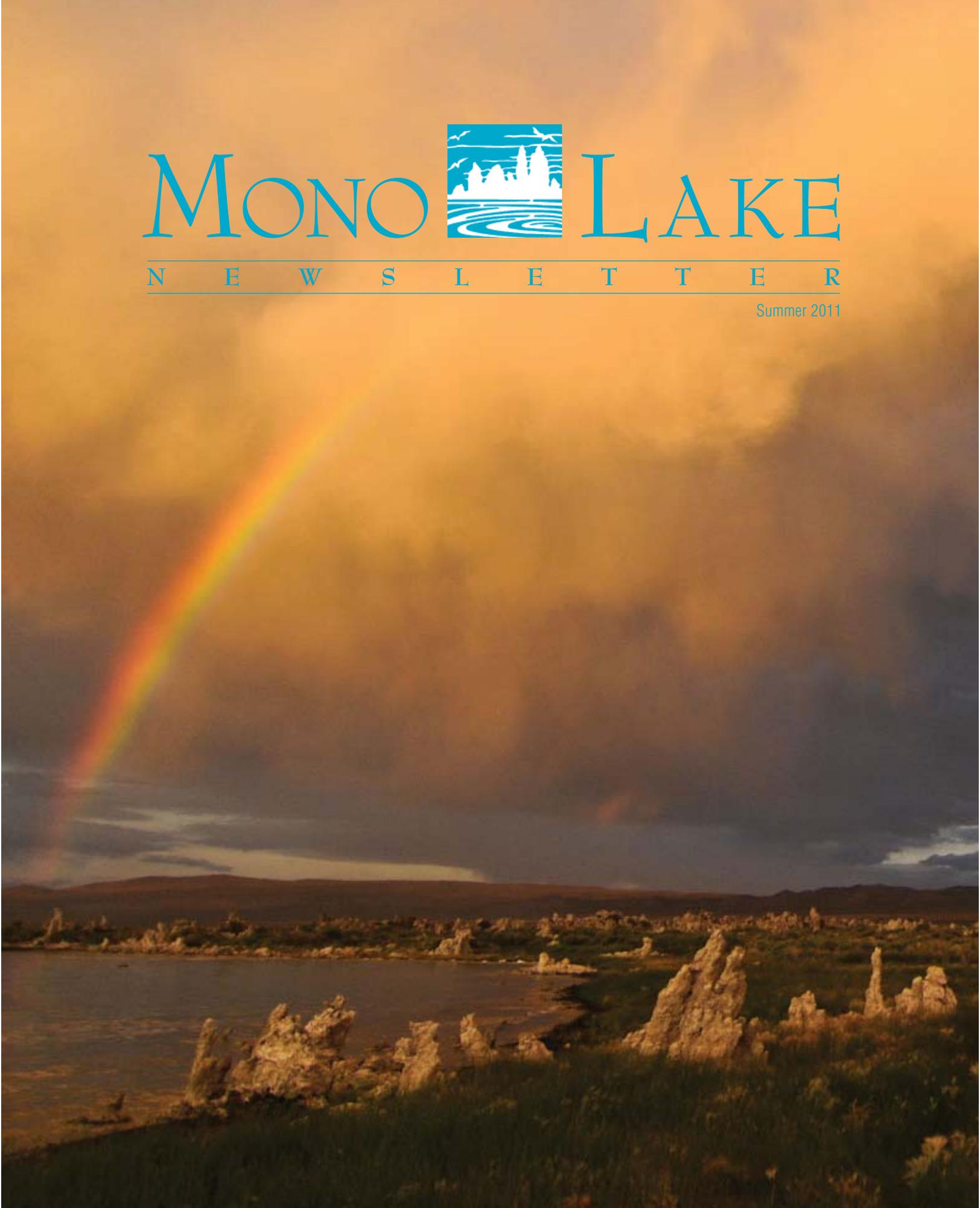


MONO LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Summer 2011



[Mono on state park closure list](#)

[New Mono Lake film](#)

[Pipeline for Mill Creek](#)

[Mono Basin map](#)

One of my favorite things to do, after editing the *Newsletter*, of course, is to help with fundraisers for the students at the Lee Vining Schools. Right now we're developing a cookbook of recipes from our local chefs, both famous and hidden. When out for a walk yesterday I came up with a recipe of a different sort....

Recipe for a perfect summer activity at Mono Lake:

- 1 warm day with numerous cumulous clouds marching across the blue sky
- 1 high elevation glassy-surfaced saline lake surrounded on all sides by steep mountains or rolling desert hills (Mono Lake)
- 8 trillion brine shrimp and a dollop of alkali flies
- 1 flock California Gulls
- 1 set adventurous friends
- 1 swimsuit, towel, pair flip flops
- 1 shower or freshwater lake or creek equivalent

Get yourself to Navy Beach for easy access to Mono Lake. Don swimsuit and flip flops and carry towel to the shoreline. Run through alkali flies for fun. Walk into Mono Lake until water reaches your belly button. This next move takes some getting used to, but is a technique worth perfecting: calmly lean back as if sitting in a chair and let your feet rise to the surface in front of you without submerging your face. Float. Admire plentiful brine shrimp, gulls overhead. Once satisfied or chilly, extract yourself from lake and admire scenery while drying off. Note: white salty film on skin is normal, and part of the experience. After you are satisfactorily relaxed, head for your rinse-off option.

As this *Newsletter* goes to press we're grappling with the disheartening news that the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve is on the list of state parks to be closed. There are letters to be written, there is pressure on officials to be applied, and legal strategies to be implemented in order to save our favorite places, and to support the work of the rangers charged with their care. And, there is a big, beautiful, lake that still welcomes adventurous souls. Give us a call before you change your plans, and we'll give you the scoop. Now clip out this recipe and get your ingredients ready.

—Arya Degenhardt, Communications Director



COVER, FROM THE MONO LAKE STORY BY JONAH MATHEWSON, BRISTLECONEMEDIA.COM

GEORGE MCQUILKIN

The Mono Lake Story in production in Los Angeles. Developed over the last year, the Mono Lake Committee's new film is now showing in the Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining.

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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State plans to close Mono Lake state park

Analysis of legislature's guidelines confirms closure makes no economic sense

Your action today needed for Mono Lake

by Morgan Lindsay & Geoffrey McQuilkin

Just before press time, California State Parks director Ruth Coleman announced a long list of parks proposed to be closed, including Mono Lake and 25 percent of the state park system. It makes no sense, economic or otherwise, to close the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve. Action by Mono Lake friends will be critical to reversing this short-sighted plan. To keep up with the fast-developing situation, be sure to check the Mono Lake website for the latest news.

Decades of crippling cuts to the state park system have intensified in recent years with tens of millions of dollars in budget reductions in 2009 and 2010. Then last November the failure of Proposition 21—the State Park and Wildlife Conservation Fund Act—left California's state parks without an alternative to over-appropriated general fund monies.

The shocking closure news comes after months of anticipation to see how Governor Brown's latest plan for \$22 million in cuts to state parks over the next two years would affect the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve. Nearby Bodie State Historic Park is not on the closure list.

In preparation for this worst-case scenario, the Committee analyzed 11 factors the California legislature developed for determining which parks should be closed. Not one of the factors could verifiably be used to justify closing the Reserve

Speak up for Mono Lake!

Your help is needed to keep Mono Lake open.

monolake.org/action

at Mono Lake. We sent our results to Coleman and Governor Brown, but it appears the strong voice of the public will be needed to weigh in on Mono Lake's behalf.

The top five reasons not to close the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve are:

1. No savings left to find

Closing the Reserve will not save California the money it so desperately needs because there are no cuts left to make. Of the two park staff assigned to the Reserve, the seasonal interpretive specialist is funded entirely by the non-profit Bodie Foundation and the law enforcement ranger is assigned to cover shortages at nearby Bodie State Historic Park more than 90 percent of the year. So closing the Reserve would not create any savings from staff cuts. Closure of the Reserve would also shut down the 40-person volunteer program and eliminate income from boating concessionaires and special use permit fees.

More importantly, the Reserve is an economic engine for Lee Vining's tourism-based economy and state parks in general are a financial windfall for the state of California, generating over two dollars in tourist-driven tax revenue for every dollar spent to keep them open.

2. Mono Lake is significant statewide and beyond

The Reserve is one of 29 top parks out of 278 in California recognized for its exceptional natural resources. The California legislature created the Reserve in 1981 to protect and provide for public access to Mono Lake's "captivating tufa spires and world-renowned ecological resources." The Reserve is also recognized as a globally significant Important Bird Area and a



ARIA DEGENHARDT

The Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve is run with significant support from volunteers. If the Reserve is shut down the boardwalk at County Park and other sites around the Mono Basin would be closed to visitors.

Continued on page 18

Can DWP deliver high flows?

Mother Nature cooperates with a wet year

by Lisa Cutting

There is much excitement about the fact that the Mono Basin snowpack hit 169% of average this winter. One outcome is that Rush Creek is slated to receive peak runoff flows of 650 cubic feet per second (cfs)—a magnitude that is both rare and critical to habitat restoration.

However, it is not clear if the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power's (DWP) dated aqueduct infrastructure can physically allow the required water to pass downstream for this important restoration opportunity. The Mono Lake Committee is keeping a close watch on this year's aqueduct operations and continuing to advocate for an aqueduct system that can function for Mono Basin streams as well as it does for exports to Los Angeles.

High flow delivery system constrains Rush Creek recovery

In contrast to the lower winter baseflows that Rush and Lee Vining creeks have been receiving for the past two winters, the State Water Board-appointed Stream Scientists prescribed much higher spring runoff flows in their 2010 Synthesis Report. In fact, the prescribed peak flow for a wet year—which is this season's year type (see *Streamwatch* on page 12)—is 650 cfs, a full 200 cfs above the previous peak flow requirement. DWP plans to test the feasibility of delivering the new prescribed flows this year, but that test will be a challenge.

Peak runoff flows are a critical component of stream

restoration recovery efforts. On Rush Creek in particular, delivering mandated flow requirements has been problematic even under lower flow requirements. The antiquated aqueduct system has some significant limitations, which means that a complex combination of Grant Lake Reservoir spill plus released flows is currently the only way to meet the flow requirement.

Additionally, ensuring that a spill from Grant Lake Reservoir happens is complicated. Southern California Edison operates a hydroelectric facility in the upper Rush Creek watershed. Their license and operational schedule is often not in sync with the natural hydrograph that the flow requirements are trying to mimic. For Grant to spill, two things are needed—a high reservoir level at the beginning of the spring runoff season and a steady inflow of water equal to (or greater than) the desired spill amount.

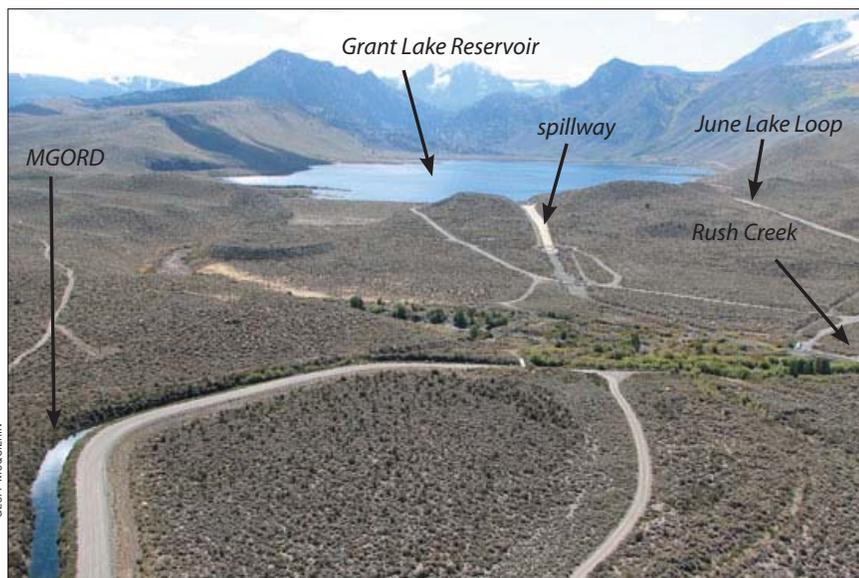
Water conveyance limitations

The Mono Gate One Return Ditch (MGORD) is the water conveyance system that delivers water from Grant Lake Reservoir to Rush Creek. It was built in 1940 and historically served as an aqueduct overflow outlet when the water export system had too much water. Under the 1998 restoration orders, DWP was required to rehabilitate the MGORD to a maximum capacity of 380 cfs and that work was completed in 2002. In 2004 the MGORD was tested at 380 cfs for one day and although it carried the full amount, DWP had concerns about the structural reliability of the ditch when running at full capacity for the duration of the peak flow period.

Since that time it hasn't been clear what the capacity of the MGORD really is—380 cfs (the required capacity ordered by the State Water Board) or 350 cfs (DWP's preferred operational capacity). Regardless of the MGORD capacity, even in the best case scenario, any year type above a normal year (which includes wet-normal, wet, and extreme-wet) currently requires supplemental flow in the form of a spill from Grant Lake Reservoir.

Another testing of the system

This spring DWP is continuing to operate under a Temporary Urgency Change (TUC) order issued from the State Water Board so it can test the recommended flows for Rush and



Grant Lake Reservoir, spillway, and the MGORD—part of the infrastructure critical to the delivery of peak flows to Rush Creek.

Continued on page 20

Stream restoration discussions picking up pace

Implementation requires answering many, many questions

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

The Mono Lake Committee is wading into the process of implementing the science-based restoration prescriptions issued last year for Rush, Lee Vining, Walker, and Parker creeks—and the water is about to get deeper.

The question is how to implement the stream restoration prescriptions, which are based on over a decade of work by independent experts in fisheries and stream geomorphology. Last year's Synthesis Report laid out the requirements in detail (see Summer 2010 *Newsletter*), most notably a set of streamflows that emulate natural flow variation on a daily basis while accommodating water exports by the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) as authorized in the landmark 1994 State Water Board decision on Mono Lake.

Implementation isn't inherently challenging, but it's not going to be easy in the Mono Basin. The aqueduct facilities operated by DWP were designed in the 1930s and weren't built with environmental considerations, such as maintaining stream health, in mind. That means they have problems, such as being physically unable to allow the prescribed spring flows downstream (see page 4).

In the Committee's view it is now time to incorporate consideration of the streams and lake into DWP's physical infrastructure and update the aqueduct for the 21st century. DWP, however, is not entirely in agreement. As a result, an intensive process is underway to develop what we here in the Committee office are calling a Collaborative Aqueduct Modernization & Management Plan (CAMMP).

Take Lee Vining Creek as an example. The Synthesis Report prescribes a new approach to diversions that puts a fixed flow in the stream in the winter and then switches to a naturally varying flow amount in the summer. Diversions are allowed year-round in five-cubic-foot-per-second increments, based on detailed tables indexed to actual stream flow.

So far the Committee, DWP, the Department of Fish &

Game, California Trout, and other parties have agreed that this approach is an improvement over current practice. But it's a precise plan that can't be carried out with the current Lee Vining Creek aqueduct diversion facilities.

The aqueduct facilities operated by DWP were designed in the 1930s and weren't built with environmental considerations, such as maintaining stream health, in mind.

That's where the CAMMP meetings come into play—to explore and answer implementation questions. For example: How will the aqueduct intake be reconstructed at Lee Vining Creek? How can the system be automated? How can data be shared with the public in real time for verification? How can the stream be safeguarded from drying up in the event of sudden unexpected flow changes? How can upstream hydroelectric operations be synchronized with DWP's operation? How fast can construction be completed?

In the end there's an additional key question: how do we want to see these new facilities and procedures incorporated into DWP's license from the State Water Board to divert—and restore—Lee Vining Creek?

Overall, the Mono Lake Committee has tallied at least 40 specific prescriptions in the Synthesis Report that the CAMMP process will have to address. While some will be easy, many are interwoven with each other and involve

substantial analysis. That means a lot of homework lies ahead for the Committee team, which includes policy staff with extensive experience with DWP, our hydrology expert with over 30 year's experience in the Mono Basin, and additional engineering, restoration, and fisheries experts.

We are working hard to be sure that, in the end, the CAMMP process results in a 21st century set of aqueduct facilities in the Mono Basin.

That, in turn, will mean that in future years DWP's exports of Mono Basin water will cause the least possible harm to Rush, Lee Vining, Walker, and Parker creeks, as well as to Mono Lake. ❖



Mono Lake Committee staff at the Grant Lake Reservoir spillway.

FERC approves Mill Creek return pipeline

Southern California Edison to make Lundy hydropower plant water-rights-neutral

by Morgan Lindsay

Three decades after federal relicensing of the Lundy hydroelectric plant began, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has granted the approval necessary to ensure Mill Creek's long-term health by respecting all existing water rights.

With headwaters in Lundy Canyon, Mill Creek is the third largest creek in the Mono Basin and once supported a rich trout fishery and miles of multistory riparian forest. Mill Creek's water was never diverted south to Los Angeles, but instead is withdrawn locally to serve hydropower, irrigation, and other local uses. Due to excessive diversions, Mill Creek has frequently run dry, killing fish and trees and severely degrading the creek's natural condition. Now Mill Creek and its damaged wetland forest are a critical opportunity for waterfowl, songbird, and mammal habitat restoration in the Mono Basin.

This past March, FERC issued an order approving Southern California Edison's (SCE) August 2010 application to amend its Lundy hydroelectric project operating license. Under state law, SCE must return all the water used for hydropower generation to Mill Creek unless otherwise called for by a downstream water rights holder. With the FERC order in hand, SCE now has permission to make its hydropower operation water-rights-neutral by upgrading the defunct Mill Creek return ditch with a water-efficient buried pipeline. When complete, net water diversions from

Mill Creek are expected to drop from their current excessive amounts to a more balanced level that is consistent with the established water rights.

Mill's missing water

Over the last 20 years Mill Creek has carried less than half the water it lawfully should have according to the established water rights. Mill Creek's water is diverted first from Lundy Lake Reservoir to the hydropower plant, and then a second time into the Wilson diversion system, a collection of tailrace channels, irrigation ditches, and enlarged washes developed by water diversion patterns over the past century.

Mill Creek's water has historically been prevented from returning to Mill Creek after generating hydropower due to chronic disrepair of the return ditch. Originally built in 1911, the return ditch last carried water from below the hydropower plant back to Mill Creek in 2005 and is now unusable. Even when still in use, the ditch had an insufficient capacity, lost half its flow to the ground, and was used only a few weeks out of every year. Without a feasible way to return the water, nearly all of Mill Creek's water has gone into the Wilson system by default—de-watering Mill Creek and at the same time burying the Black Point marsh under tons of eroded sediment washed down the Wilson system.

As a result, over the last two decades on average only 21 percent of the total Mill Creek flow above Lundy Lake Reservoir has remained in the stream; the rest—79 percent—has been doubly diverted. In contrast, the water rights allow for a diversion to the Wilson system of only 44 percent, meaning Mill Creek should have received 56 percent, more than double what it did receive (see Winter & Spring 2011 *Newsletter*). In recent years the disparity between water allocated to and water delivered to Mill Creek has become even more extreme.

Once SCE completes the return pipeline, Mill Creek is expected to retain its full legal water allotment. More than any other measure, increasing Mill Creek's flow will bring life back to a creek that has been hanging by a tenuous thread—receiving just enough water to prevent it from running dry before reaching Mono Lake.



The hundred-year-old Mill Creek return ditch—soon to be a buried pipeline.

Continued on page 7

A long time coming

The restoration of a more natural flow pattern for Mill Creek has been a Mono Lake Committee project for many years. Mill Creek was identified as a critical waterfowl restoration opportunity in the 1994 State Water Board order, but because Mill was not diverted south to Los Angeles, its restoration was not specifically addressed in the same way as Rush and Lee Vining creeks.

The scheduled 30-year Lundy hydroelectric project relicensing began in 1981. However, the Committee did not formally enter the process until 1999 with a request for rehearing of the new FERC license. Among other things, the new license lacked provisions to enable the return of Mill Creek's missing water.

The Committee has worked diligently to find solutions with water rights holders, land owners, and management agencies and was successful in reaching a final settlement agreement in 2005. FERC then ruled in 2007 to allow SCE to amend the new license in order to fulfill its obligations to downstream water rights holders by improving the return ditch. With the final approval of SCE's application this spring, construction of the return pipeline can now proceed as planned (although one water rights holder, Mono County, is unfortunately seeking to halt the project and thus continue the excess Mill Creek diversions, which are delivered to its lands).

Water-rights-neutral

The Committee maintains that adjudicated water rights and water law—not antiquated ditches and pipes—determine how Mill Creek water is allocated.

In the order, FERC was careful to draw the distinction between the FERC-approved construction of the return pipeline to allow for existing water rights holders to receive their established water rights, and the water rights themselves, which are under the authority of the State of California and have, so far, remained uncontested since adjudication in 1914. As such, a water rights holder can only take water out of Mill Creek by formally calling for that right. In order to facilitate future cooperation among Mill Creek water rights holders, the settlement agreement includes a provision for water rights holders and settlement parties to create a water management plan to address seasonal water use requirements and other needs. Mono County, for example, is expected to call for its north Mono Basin water rights for continued fish-rearing use on the Conway Ranch



Mill Creek's water leaving the Lundy hydropower plant.

MORGAN LINDSAY

property, a use which the Committee supports.

Since the new license was issued, SCE has worked closely with the settlement partners to take the final major step in modernizing the Lundy hydroelectric plant. SCE sought to operate the Lundy hydropower facility as water-rights-neutral and the defunct condition of the return ditch was a barrier to that goal. Under SCE's non-consumptive rights, SCE must return all the water used for hydropower generation to the water body of origin (in this case, Mill Creek) unless otherwise called for by a downstream water rights holder. The installation of the return pipeline is a critical infrastructure investment that will upgrade the Lundy hydroelectric project to be an efficient water-rights-neutral facility. With this critical element in place, SCE will be able to reliably generate green power to help meet California's renewable energy goals.

The March FERC order authorizes implementation of SCE's proposal for engineering, permitting, construction, and operation of a modified powerhouse tailrace diversion structure and return water conveyance facility. SCE is expected to move quickly to begin construction of the return pipeline as well as erosion control and revegetation plans, with completion projected for 2013.

Keeping a close eye

One of the most important tasks ahead is monitoring Mill Creek to help document restoration in action. The Committee will continue to track flows in Mill Creek and the Wilson diversion system weekly throughout the summer, with hopes to expand monitoring to track groundwater levels, distribution of peak flows in side channels, and vegetation recruitment

Continued on page 9

Inyo National Forest budget slim for 2011

2012 could be even worse

by Lisa Cutting

News on declining state and federal budgets is commonplace these days and local land management agencies are certainly not immune. Included is the Inyo National Forest, which manages over 150,000 acres in the Mono Basin, including the entire Mono Basin Scenic Area, portions of the Hoover Wilderness Area, and the Ansel Adams Wilderness.

Still etched in our memory is the near shut-down of the federal government in April when land management agencies were poised to cease operations until Congress agreed on a budget. The budget compromise did move forward in the final hours and immediate disaster was averted. The details of the pending \$39 billion in federal budget cuts have yet to trickle down to individual forests, but they will soon.

For the Inyo, that means more and more hard decisions about how to maintain facilities, staff visitor services, and protect natural resources—all with less funding. The Mono Basin is somewhat buffered because all fees collected here stay here, which helps to offset some of the cuts levied across the

forest. Still, when the air conditioning unit needs to be replaced at the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center—an expense upwards of \$40,000—and expenses have already been slashed to the bone, fee monies can only go so far.

This year we're seeing the following cuts in the Mono Basin:

- The Inyo pulled funding from the Willow Flycatcher scientific study on Rush Creek. Funds had been set aside to initiate conservation interventions related to cowbird predation in hopes of stabilizing the endangered flycatcher population—the only known one between Bishop and Carson Pass. Without immediate intervention this year Rush Creek's Willow Flycatchers are in danger of extirpation.
- Backcountry ranger positions in the north part of the forest (the Mono Basin included) will not be staffed this year. This means a reduced presence in Lundy Canyon, the Twenty Lakes Basin, and the very popular upper Rush Creek drainage out of Silver Lake. The rangers'

presence provides public safety, visitor education, and resource protection in otherwise unmanaged areas. The Inyo is looking for ways to creatively partner with other organizations to maintain some level of service for wilderness visitors.

- The Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center is continuing its practice of closing completely during the winter months. After opening later than last year, the Visitor Center will not have extended hours on Fridays and Saturdays but will maintain a straight 8:00AM to 5:00PM daily schedule during the peak summer months, closing for the season on December 1.

In the midst of all these agency cuts one thing is certain: the Mono Lake Committee has no intention of reducing any of its interpretive programs or visitor services. The Committee remains a committed partner to the Inyo National Forest, always looking for ways to leverage funding and maximize support to help out where possible. ❖



The Inyo National Forest faces severe budget cuts, which will affect the Visitor Center and 150,000 acres of Forest Service land in the Mono Basin.

See *The Mono Lake Story* in high-definition

by Elin Ljung

When you visit Mono Lake this summer, don't miss the brand-new film, *The Mono Lake Story*, a stunning 25-minute high-definition film that has replaced the beloved, but aging, slide show.

Over a year ago, the Mono Lake Committee began working with Ryan Christensen and Jonah Matthewson of the local film company Bristlecone Media to bring the film to life. They have captured the Mono Basin in all seasons from all angles, and worked with the Committee to tell Mono Lake's history and future through the camera.

Cody Westheimer, a composer based in Los Angeles, scored the film with original music that enhances the dramatic and moving story. It seems fitting that we found our musical collaborator at the southern end of the aqueduct.

The new film features appearances by Mono Lake experts, including geomorphologist Scott Stine. California Trout's legal counselor Richard Roos-Collins makes the legal aspects of the story easy to understand. Many of the people featured have been involved since the Committee's beginning, like Board Chair Sally Gaines. The film also includes historical footage of co-founder David Gaines, whose passion for Mono Lake continues to inspire the Committee's work today.



The new Mono Lake Story film is now playing regularly in the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore.

The Mono Lake Story DVD includes four special features—on education, restoration, the Public Trust Doctrine, and Mono Lake through the seasons—in addition to the full-length film.

Interested in a copy of the DVD? You get one for free when you join the Committee's monthly giving program, Guardians of the Lake. Contact Ellen King (ellen@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595 to sign up.

If you are a teacher, instructor, or professor, or if you would like to show the film at your local Audubon chapter, Sierra Club, or community meeting, we have copies available for education and advocacy use. Just give Ellen a call.

We're excited to share Mono Lake's moving history with audiences in this state-of-the-art way. We have screened the film for visiting school groups and select audiences this spring—people laugh, cry, and leave the theater inspired to be a part of Mono Lake's future. We hope that you will too! ❖

Elin Ljung is the Committee's Communications Coordinator. Since her sister recently moved to Los Angeles, she is getting better acquainted with the southern end of the Mono Basin watershed.

Mill Creek from page 7

throughout the floodplain.

As Mill Creek awaits construction of the return pipeline, this year's heavy snowpack promises a much needed jump-start on restoration goals: recharging groundwater in the bottomland forest, dispersing new black cottonwood seeds, moving large woody debris, and improving trout habitat by scouring out deep pools. Lundy Lake

Reservoir is now filling rapidly and is forecasted to spill.

Thirty years after the Lundy hydroelectric project relicensing began, we will at last begin to see the benefit of over two decades of tireless efforts for Mill Creek to retain its streamflow in compliance with the adjudicated water rights. ❖

Morgan Lindsay is the Committee's Project Specialist. This summer she hopes to follow Mill Creek from where it enters Mono Lake up to the top of Lundy Canyon, and maybe spot a beaver or bighorn sheep along the way.

Policy notes

by Lisa Cutting, Morgan Lindsay, and Geoffrey McQuilkin

Swallows won't be nesting at the Visitor Center

Last year when the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Visitor Center was undergoing renovations, a decision was made to prevent access to nesting Cliff Swallows by installing netting around the perimeter of the building. The Forest Service reported that the swallows' wet nesting material was damaging the structural integrity of the supporting beams.

Cliff Swallows make their nests under eaves or other overhangs and create a mud structure so that the nest stays in place. Cliff Swallows have been a part of the Visitor Center experience since it was built in 1992. In fact, interpretation at the Visitor Center has often included watching the swallows and learning about their natural history. While it's understandable that federal assets need to be protected and maintained, it's sad to think that creative options that respect the building and the natural environment couldn't have been explored in greater detail.

EPA's PM10 dust rules up for review

Five years ago the Mono Lake Committee mounted a vigorous response when the federal Environmental Protection Agency proposed eliminating clean air regulations that apply to the toxic dust storms that blow off the exposed bed of Mono Lake. We were successful, and the Clean Air Act still regulates particulate emissions at Mono Lake (and Owens Lake too).

But the rules are up for review every five years, so what does 2011 bring? It appears that reasonable science-based revisions to the standards are in the works for both the PM10 (that's particulate matter of ten microns or less in size) standard that is most relevant at Mono Lake, as well as other particulate classifications.

While the proposed new rules have not yet been released, early indications are that adjustments may tighten the acceptable particulate standard while increasing slightly the number of violations that are allowable each year. On the whole, we expect these

important health protections to continue to effectively govern the dust storms at Mono Lake, which are the result of past excessive diversions of water. The current strategy to eliminate these storms—which are among the largest in the nation—will remain in effect: raise Mono Lake to the level set by the State Water Board.

What's happening in the Bodie Hills?

Just north of Mono Lake, the Bodie Hills feature sweeping vistas of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, popular Bodie State Historic Park, and a great diversity of plant, bird, and mammal species including Greater Sage-grouse and pronghorn antelope. In recent months, potential management changes affecting the wilderness characteristics, mineral rights, and vegetation of the Bodie Hills have been the focus of much debate.

Cougar Gold, a mining company that in 2009 conducted exploration on some of the 600 mining claims it owns in the Bodie Hills, recently petitioned the Mono County Board of Supervisors to support Congressional release of the Bodie Wilderness Study Area (WSA), one of three WSAs located in the Bodie Hills. "Release" would lift long-standing protections preserving the wilderness characteristics of this area. After hearing much local support for additional protection for the Bodie Hills as well as for WSA release, the Supervisors decided to take no immediate action in response to the mining company's request. Cougar Gold is still allowed to continue mineral exploration under the existing WSA rules.

Also this spring, after many years of analysis and a controversial pilot project, the Bishop Bureau of Land Management (BLM) office released a proposal for an intensive 20-year vegetation management plan on over 16,000 acres of sagebrush steppe and



Cliff Swallows trying to build nests under the eaves at the Forest Service Visitor Center.

Continued on page 11

piñon-juniper forest in the Bodie Hills. This proposal represents a large shift from the current BLM wild lands management policy of minimal interference, and would involve treatments such as mowing sagebrush, cutting piñon pines, and prescribed burning.

While there is a pressing need for fuels reduction for fire safety around Bodie State Historic Park and other structures in the project area, the huge scale of the proposed treatments in an otherwise unaltered landscape has prompted strong concerns within the scientific community as well as from some Mono Basin residents. The Mono Lake Committee submitted scoping comments urging the BLM to develop a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement for the project within the framework of an updated general management plan for the Bodie Hills that fully considers multiple uses including tourism, recreation, and grazing.

Mono County General Plan Amendment process underway

The General Plan Amendment process began last year and the Mono Lake Committee is now reviewing a proposed draft. The Mono County General Plan is the comprehensive document that regulates land use and development within the county.

General plans are a state requirement and include elements such as transportation, housing, conservation, and open space protection. The General Plan is the single source for land use information and restrictions in Mono County because it incorporates zoning code regulations as well.

The current General Plan is being revised through a process initiated by the Mono County Planning Commission. General plans are periodically updated to keep pace with new requirements



EPA clean air regulations that apply to Mono's dust storms are up for review in 2011.

and refine existing requirements. In this case, the proposed changes are the result of changes in state law, clarifications proposed by planning staff, and public input through the Regional Planning Advisory Committee groups. In order to change the document, a General Plan Amendment is required and the draft document is currently under review. A final decision on the General Plan Amendment is expected later this year.

Lee Vining Airport recovery

As summer warmth brings wildflowers into bloom throughout the Mono Basin, restoration ecologist Michael Hogan is keeping a close eye on the plants sprouting at the Lee Vining Airport. Last year, a seemingly straightforward Mono County project to flatten and resurface the runway turned out larger than expected and resulted in significant visual and habitat impacts from an unnecessary ten-acre soil stockpile. Committee staff worked quickly to find a solution before the earthmoving equipment left the site and successfully helped both to reduce the stockpile height by half and develop a more comprehensive vegetation recovery plan (see Fall 2010 *Newsletter*).

Now, Hogan's Tahoe-based restoration company, Integrated Environmental Restoration Services, is monitoring a series of treatment plots to determine the best combination of seeds, nutrients, and mulch cover

to encourage native plant recovery over the vast disturbed area. The final revegetation treatment is scheduled for implementation on all ten acres this fall, and will be watched closely for four years to ensure the best possible outcome. Successful native plant regeneration is vital to reducing the remaining visual impacts, controlling erosion, and restoring damaged habitat.

Mary Beth Hennessy moves on from the Inyo

Former Inyo National Forest Resource Staff Officer Mary Beth Hennessy was recently promoted to the Regional Forester's Office, Pacific Southwest Region in Vallejo, where she has accepted the position of Regional Appeals and Litigation Manager. Here she will coordinate all environmental planning and policy litigation for the region and oversee the environmental appeals process. She will also serve as the liaison among the forests, the Regional Forester, and the chief's office in Washington, DC.

Hennessy was a valued member of the Inyo staff for over 13 years working in a variety of different job capacities. We fondly remember her assignment as acting Mono Basin Scenic Area Manager in 2006 and her continued attention to the Mono Basin through the years. In fact, Mary Beth told us that the Mono Basin is one of her favorite places in the Inyo National Forest. ❖

Streamwatch

Wet year runoff to deluge streams?

by Greg Reis

The runoff forecast for the 2011 runoff year (April 1, 2011–March 31, 2012) is 148% of average—the second “wet” year type since the State Water Board’s Decision 1631 in 1994. Since then, only 1995 and 2006 have been wetter.

In a wet year, Rush Creek’s minimum peak flow requirement is 450 cubic feet per second (cfs). But since the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) is testing new flow prescriptions, this year the goal is to maximize discharge below the confluence of Parker and Walker creeks and to achieve a minimum flood peak of 650 cfs from

Grant Lake Reservoir. This is quite a challenge—that flood peak is 100 cfs higher than any peak flow released in decades (see page 4).

At the end of March, after water exports were shut off, Grant Lake Reservoir began to spill. It should spill at least through July, providing a perfect opportunity to test the new flow prescriptions.

On Lee Vining Creek, the current practice of releasing a minimum flow below the diversion dam until the release of the peak flow has not worked well. At times DWP has been unable

to reliably predict the peak flow and shut off diversions in time. The flow prescription being tested this year is to divert an increasing amount as the creek rises from 30 cfs to 250 cfs, then shut off the diversion when the inflow is above 250 cfs so as to allow the peak flow to pass downstream.

Normally, Lee Vining Creek would not rise above its minimum flow below the diversion dam until mid-May, but this spring we have enjoyed the sights and sounds of a more naturally-fluctuating creek. ❖

Lakewatch

Mono Lake could rise two feet this summer

by Greg Reis

Mono Lake rose 0.3 feet over the last year, as of April 1st. This is the first time since 1994 that the lake’s actual rise matched the forecasted rise. Runoff was greater than predicted and precipitation was average; however, the volume of water stored and exported was above average.

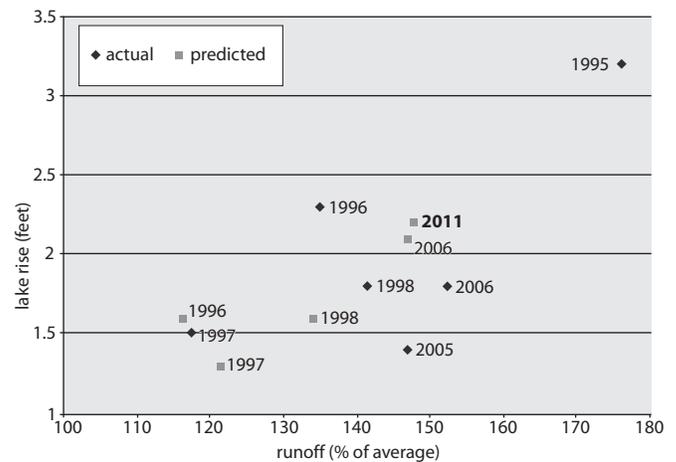
In April, DWP predicted that Mono Lake will rise 1.6 feet by September and 2.2 feet by April 2012. However, in 2006, a year with very similar forecasts, Mono Lake rose 2.1 feet during the summer. This year the reservoirs are fuller and the water export will be less, indicating that a 2-foot rise is not out of the question.

Meromixis may return next winter. Meromixis is a lack of wintertime mixing in Mono Lake that begins during a wet year when, due to high

runoff, lighter fresher water floats on top of heavier denser water. In 2005, a 1-foot rise during the summer with a net 1.4-foot rise by the following April was enough to trigger meromixis. This condition affects the nutrient cycle in the lake, limiting the availability of nutrients, the productivity of brine shrimp and the reproductive success of California Gulls. The most recent episodes of meromixis lasted from 1983–1988, 1995–2003, and 2006–2007.

As we go to press, Mono Lake was 6382.5 feet above sea level. ❖

Runoff vs. Lake Level Rise
(runoff year)



Runoff and lake rise for the recent years when Mono Lake has risen at least 1 foot. Squares are the predictions, and diamonds are observed amounts. The lake level predictions for 1995 and 2005 were unavailable; however the runoff predictions were 165% and 132%, respectively, in keeping with the pattern of DWP under-forecasting the wet years.

Greg Reis is the Committee’s Information & Restoration Specialist. He is now living at sea level and working remotely, dreaming of those perfect summer High Sierra days at Mono Lake.

6417'

Prediversion lake level, 1941

6391'

Target lake level

6382.5'

Current lake level

6372'

Historic low, 1982

Mono Basin Journal

A roundup of quiet happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



GEOFF MCQUILKIN

Time. Time and the lake rising. It happens slowly, the next minute indistinguishable from the last, the next hour the same as the prior, the next day much like its predecessor. Yet the streams flow continuously into Mono Lake and imperceptible change in lake level piles on top of imperceptible change.

And then, after a week or two in a wet year like this, you notice that the lake has risen—all 70 square miles of it, an area twice the size of San Francisco, one, maybe two, inches higher. The shoreline shifts, a pumice block is slightly more submerged. It's higher. This is how we get to the lake's promised management level, ten vertical feet to go, invisible change on top of invisible change.

Time builds up, and time takes away. In the case of the front of the Mono Lake Committee building in Lee Vining, the imperceptible changes have been accumulating for decades. A

small piece of the building façade comes loose in the winter snow. The mural of Mono Lake fades in the sun. Paint and plaster peel away.

The look, we've decided, was fresh and interesting when the mural was last repainted in 1993, hiding the cracked plaster beneath. Over time the building moved through the interesting phase, hit the still-interesting but sun-faded mark, progressed early this decade to the nice-and-appropriately-disheveled-for-a-non-profit-organization look, and then settled into the dreaded run-down look. Then last week we made a dramatic change and refurbished the entire building front; it looks great, and though time is already ticking we expect it to say "welcome home" to Mono Lake friends for many years to come. ❖

Geoff McQuilkin is the Committee's Executive Director. His daughters were intrigued by the fact that the storefront construction crew used walnut shells to blast the old plaster.

Benchmarks



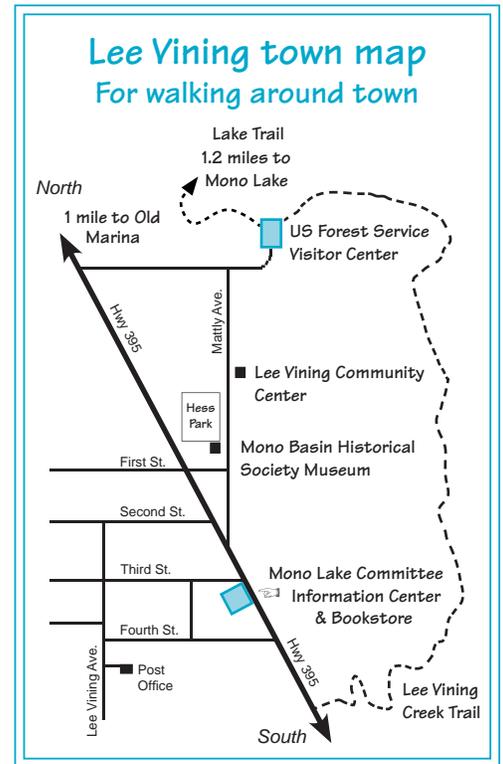
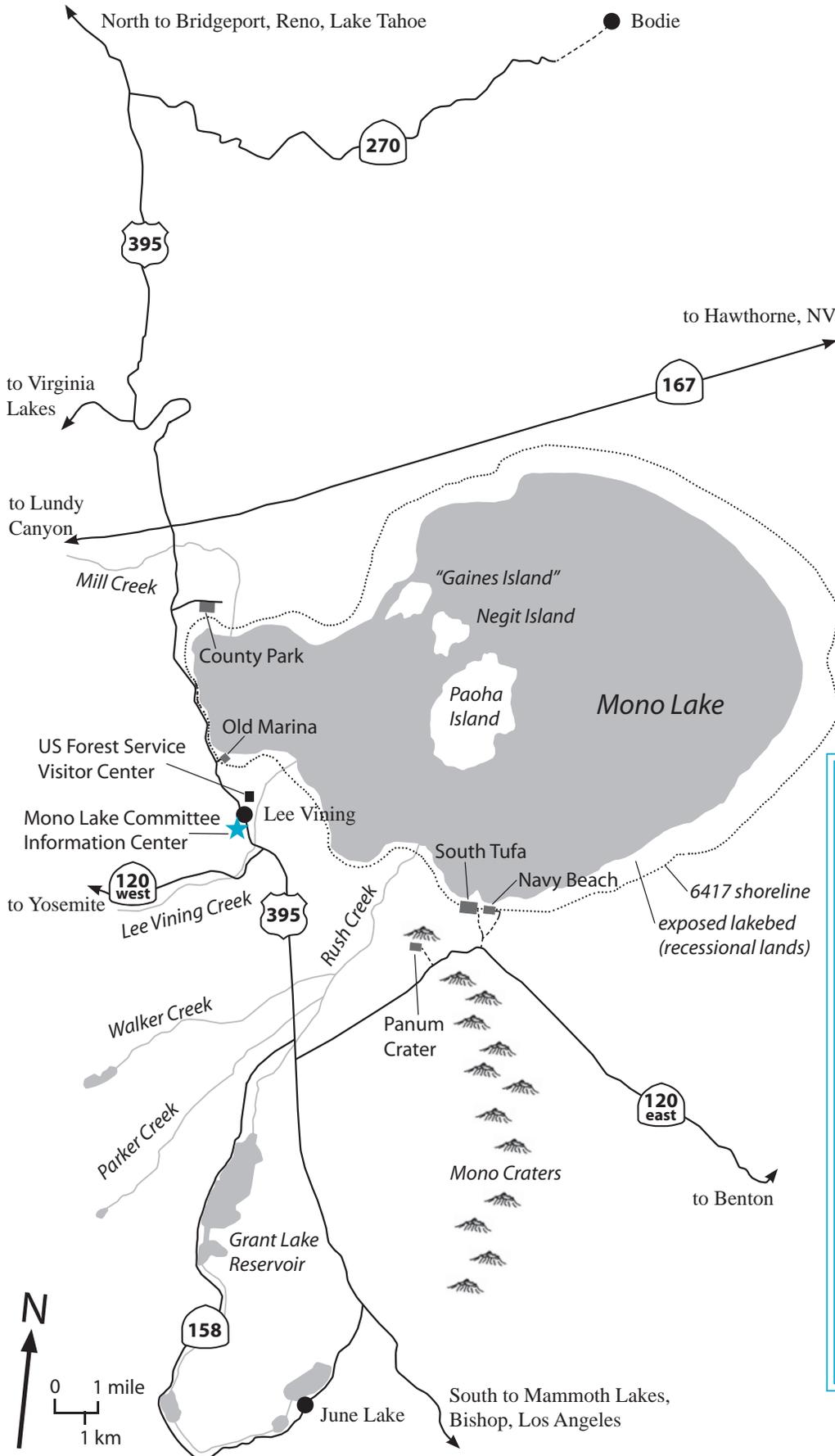
ARYA DEGENHARDT

April 18, 2011: before renovations, the storefront with its crumbling plaster façade.



May 18, 2011: the storefront, all fixed up with a new coat of stucco ... stay tuned for more improvements at monolake.org.

Mono Lake and vicinity map



How far is it?

Remember to check for road closures before you travel.
1-800-GAS-ROAD

Distance from Lee Vining to:

South Tufa	11 mi	18 km
Yosemite Park entrance	13	21
Tuolumne Meadows ...	21	34
Mammoth Lakes	27	44
Bodie	32	52
Bishop.....	66	106
Yosemite Valley.....	77	124
Lake Tahoe.....	110	177
Reno.....	140	225
Death Valley.....	177	285
San Francisco (via 120)	250	402
Los Angeles	303	488
Las Vegas	326	525

Things to do in the Mono Basin

Activities

There is a lot to do in the Mono Basin! Stop by the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore when you're in town and our knowledgeable staff can help you plan your visit.

- **South Tufa tours** are an excellent introduction to Mono Lake. Join a naturalist on a walking tour at South Tufa to learn about the ecology, geology, and natural and human history of the Mono Basin. The walk is approximately one mile long on easy terrain and lasts about an hour. Meet at the South Tufa parking lot at 10:00AM, 1:00PM, and 6:00PM daily during the summer months. There is no charge for the walk, but a \$3 per person fee is required to enter South Tufa. No reservations are necessary.

- **Canoe tours** depart Saturday and Sunday mornings in summer at 8:00, 9:30, and 11:00AM, and last for one hour. \$25 per person. Reservations are required; sign up at monolake.org/canoe or call (760) 647-6595.

- **Bird walks** take place Fridays and Sundays at 8:00AM throughout the summer. Meet at the Mono Lake County Park with binoculars and a bird book (not required). Tours last 1½–2 hours and are open to all levels of birders. Committee staff can also suggest good birding areas around the Mono Basin.

Visitor Centers

- **The Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore**, located in the heart of Lee Vining, offers a free film (brand new in 2011!), educational and fine art exhibits, and activity schedules. The bookstore has an excellent selection of regional books, maps, T-shirts, local crafts, and gifts. The Committee also houses the Lee Vining Chamber of Commerce with information on lodging, dining, and recreation opportunities as well as weather and road conditions. The Mono Lake Committee is open from 8:00AM–9:00PM daily during the summer, or call (760) 647-6595 for more information.

- **The Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Visitor Center**, located just north of town, features an expansive view of Mono Lake, interpretive displays, and natural history trails. A dramatic film on Mono Lake shows regularly in the theater, and during the summer rangers give patio presentations daily. Open daily from 8:00AM to 5:00PM; contact the Visitor Center at (760) 647-3044 for more information on program offerings.

- **The Mono Basin Historical Society Museum**, located in Lee Vining at Hess Park, houses a fascinating collection of materials from the Mono Basin's past. See Native American artifacts, gold mining implements, and even the legendary upside-down house. Open Thursdays–Mondays from 10:00AM to 5:00PM and Sundays 12:00 to 5:00PM. There is a \$1 charge but children under the age of 13 are free. Contact the museum at (760) 647-6461 or visit monobasinhs.org for more information. ❖

Regional travel resources

- Mono Lake Committee Information Center
(760) 647-6595 monolake.org
- Lee Vining Chamber of Commerce
(760) 647-6629 leevining.com
- US Forest Service Scenic Area Visitor Center
(760) 647-3044 fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/about
- Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve
(760) 647-6331 parks.ca.gov
- Mono Basin Historical Society
(760) 647-6461 monobasinhs.org
- Bodie State Historic Park
(760) 647-6445 parks.ca.gov
- Mammoth Lakes Visitor Center
(760) 924-5500 visitmammoth.com
- June Lake Chamber of Commerce
(760) 648-7584 junelakechamber.org
- Bridgeport Chamber of Commerce
(760) 932-7500 bridgeportcalifornia.com
- Devils Postpile (760) 934-2289 nps.gov/depo
- Inyo National Forest 24-hour Wilderness Permits/Info
(760) 873-2408 fs.fed.us/r5/inyo
- Yosemite National Park nps.gov/yose
Information by phone (209) 372-0200
Campground Reservations (800) 436-7275
Hotel and Motel Reservations (801) 559-5000
Wilderness Permit Reservations (209) 372-0740
- White Mountain Ranger District–Bishop (760) 873-2500
- Lone Pine Interagency Visitor Center (760) 876-6222
- Manzanar National Historic Site and Interpretive Center
(760) 878-2932 nps.gov/manz
- Death Valley Reservations (760) 786-2345
- Bridgeport Ranger Station—Toiyabe National Forest
(760) 932-7070
- California Road Conditions
(800) 427-7623 dot.ca.gov

The Mono Lake story

Nestled at the edge of the arid Great Basin and the snowy Sierra Nevada mountains, Mono Lake is an ancient saline lake that covers over 70 square miles and supports a unique and productive ecosystem. The lake has no fish; instead it is home to trillions of brine shrimp and alkali flies. Freshwater streams feed Mono Lake, supporting lush riparian forests of cottonwood and willow along their banks. Along the lakeshore, scenic limestone formations known as tufa towers rise from the water's surface. Millions of migratory birds visit the lake each year.

A story of hope

In 1941, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) began excessive water diversions from Mono Basin streams. Mono Lake dropped 45 vertical feet, lost half its volume, and doubled in salinity.

The Mono Lake Committee was founded by David and Sally Gaines in 1978 in response to the threat of inevitable collapse of the Mono Basin ecosystem. The early Committee bought an old dance hall in Lee Vining to use as headquarters (which still houses the Information Center today), and went to work spreading the word about Mono Lake. The Committee took the City of Los Angeles to court in 1979, arguing that DWP had violated the Public Trust Doctrine, which states: "The public trust ... is an affirmation of the duty of the state to protect the people's common heritage of streams, lakes, marshlands and tidelands...." —Supreme Court of California, 1983

During the winter of 1988, David Gaines was killed in a car accident in a snowstorm. He never got to see the lake he loved

begin to rise, but his inspiration is carried on through the work of the Mono Lake Committee.

Mono Lake's recovery depends upon water conservation in Los Angeles, and the Committee has created solutions to the demand for water by implementing conservation programs in LA that have saved more than enough water to share with Mono Lake. Over the last two decades, LA has become one of the most water-conscious cities in the United States, and the Committee works statewide to promote wise water use for people and the environment.

In 1994, after over a decade of litigation, the California Water Resources Control Board ordered DWP to let Mono Lake rise to a healthy level of 6,392 feet above sea level—twenty feet above its historic low. DWP has reduced its Mono Basin water exports by over 80 percent, and Mono Lake is on the rise. This is truly an environmental victory. See below for more on what the Committee is doing today.

16,000 members

Mono Lake has a great success story, and you can be a part of it. Add your voice to the 16,000 members who are committed to the protection and restoration of Mono Lake. Your support as a Committee member will be put to hard work for Mono Lake.

Check out Mono Lake on the web at monolake.org for action alerts, letter-writing campaigns, webcam images of the area, and fun activities happening year-round. By staying connected to Mono Lake, you ensure its protection for generations to come. ❖

What is the Committee doing today?

Protecting Mono Lake. The Committee serves as a voice for Mono Lake in the face of land development threats and recreation pressures. Working with agencies like DWP, California State Parks, and the US Forest Service, the Committee is successfully balancing the water needs of both humans and natural ecosystems.

Restoring Mono Lake. Restoration work at Mono Lake focuses on

re-establishing natural processes along damaged streams. As water flows down the creeks and into the lake, vegetation and wildlife return and the lake rises, helping to bring back a healthy ecosystem.

Educating the next generation. Each year the Committee partners with Los Angeles community and school groups, bringing inner-city youth to the Mono Basin to learn about the source of their water. For kids who may never have left

LA, these are life-changing trips filled with hiking, canoeing, helping with restoration work, and learning about the connections between natural and urban landscapes.

Find news, updates, and lots of great information at monolake.org.





monolake.org/store

For more products visit
MONOLAKE.ORG/STORE



PIKA FINGER PUPPET

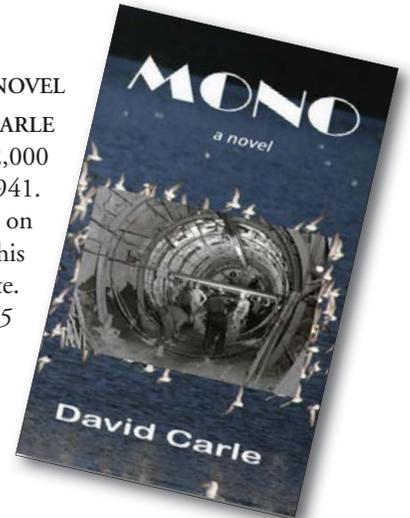
This adorably furry puppet looks just like the elusive pikas that make their home in the Sierra Nevada. With a finger slot on their bellies, these puppets provide an opportunity for education about the changing habitat in which these creatures live. Each puppet has an ear tag with fun pika facts and is a great gift for both children and adults.

Pika finger puppet, measures approximately 3" x 5": \$6.95

**MONO: A NOVEL
BY DAVID CARLE**

Weaving fact and fiction into his first novel, Carle illuminates the struggles of the 2,000 men sent to the Mono Basin to build the Los Angeles Aqueduct from 1934 to 1941. Experience the basin through the eyes of Justin, a biologist, Randy, a local day laborer on the aqueduct, and Randy's sister Alisa, a Berkeley college student with big ideas. This remarkable piece of historical fiction will both entertain and educate.

Mono: a novel, paperback, Phalarope Press, 226 pages, 8½" x 5½": \$16.95



ASPEN VASE WITH TURQUOISE ACCENT

Local self-taught woodturner Ron Overholtz resides in Bishop, California. His vases capture the heart of the natural wood with a beautifully smooth finish and turquoise accents. These masterpieces would be right at home on any mantel—no two are exactly alike.

Aspen vase with turquoise accent, measures approximately 6" x 3": \$55.00

MONO LAKE COMMITTEE BUCKET HAT

Protect yourself from the summer sun with this handy bucket hat. Perfect for all outdoor activities, it easily folds up to stash in a jacket pocket or a pack so it's with you when you need it. With a chin strap for windy days and an embroidered Committee logo, this hat is a great way to show your support for Mono Lake.

Mono Lake Committee bucket hat, headband diameter measures 22", please specify navy blue or green: \$23.00



order these products and many more at monolake.org/store & (760) 647-6595

Restoration Wednesdays

by Julia Runcie

Summer in the Mono Basin is heralded by flocks of California Gulls, herds of migrating deer, and crowds of visitors from all over the world.

Yet the return of warm weather brings about another, far less welcome reappearance: that of invasive weeds along Mono Lake's tributary streams. Like all aspects of restoration work, invasive plant removal is a slow process and requires patient treatment year after year. Fortunately, dedicated effort

can lead to perceptible positive changes in the long-term health of our riparian ecosystems. That's why the Mono Lake Committee will be back out in the field this summer, and we need all the help we can get!

For Restoration Wednesdays meet us at 10:00AM on the patio of the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Visitor Center where we'll give a short talk on restoration and the decades of work that have taken place in the Mono Basin.

Following the presentation, we'll lead any willing volunteers in hands-on stewardship activities. We will alternate every other week between uprooting sweet clover on the shady banks of Mill Creek and watering Jeffrey pine saplings along Lee Vining and Rush creeks. This dual approach will fight the spread of invasive plants while helping the native vegetation to thrive.

If you'd like to take part, join us Wednesdays from June 29th through August 31st at the Forest Service Visitor Center. Contact Julia (julia@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595 for more information. ❖

Julia Runcie is a Mono Lake Intern. She would give almost anything to see a badger this summer.



Starting June 29, meet Wednesdays at 10:00AM on the Forest Service Visitor Center patio for a restoration talk and stewardship activities.

State Parks from page 3

Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site of international significance.

3. Legal requirements prevent closure

The Reserve is wholly composed of sovereign California state lands that must be protected and managed in a manner consistent with the Public Trust obligations of the state. As such neither the Department of Parks & Recreation nor any other agency has the authority to abandon the state's constitutional responsibilities at Mono Lake.

4. Mono Lake is popular with visitors

Each year over 250,000 people visit the Reserve from around the world. Tourists enjoy hiking, bird-watching, picnicking, photography, boating, swimming, cross-country skiing, solitude, and many other forms of recreation. Closing the Reserve would deprive hundreds of thousands of visitors who have traveled great distances of their chance to enjoy Mono Lake.

5. Physical closure not feasible

How would closure work? The Reserve covers over 70 square miles of Mono Lake and the surrounding shoreline, making any method of physical closure in the form of a fence or barrier prohibitively expensive. Closure of popular Reserve access points at Old Marina or County Park would expose the surrounding sensitive shoreline areas to damage from trespassing and could cause a public safety hazard if visitors attempt to access Mono Lake by parking and crossing Highway 395 in unsafe areas.

In California's challenging budget climate, the state park system is called upon to make sacrifices. The Reserve is doing its part by strengthening partnerships, expanding its successful volunteer program, and utilizing alternative sources of funding.

Closure of the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve, were it physically possible, will not save the state any money. The financially—and legally—responsible choice is to leave the park open, a point the Mono Lake Committee will be advocating strongly. ❖

First annual Andrea Lawrence Award Dinner

Eastern Sierra Audubon Society receives recognition

by Julia Runcie

As the sun set behind the Ritter Range on Friday, April 29, guests at the first annual Andrea Lawrence Award Dinner were treated to a spectacular view of the landscape Andrea loved and worked tirelessly to protect. The panorama visible from the windows of Mammoth Mountain's Parallax Restaurant even featured Peak 12,240, a summit we hope will soon be renamed in Andrea's honor. Yet the view was only a small part of a truly remarkable evening.

The venue was filled to capacity with Andrea's friends and supporters, a group that included many local environmental leaders, four of Andrea's five children, and one grandchild. Throughout the event, speakers pursued a balance between nostalgia and forward-thinking, recalling their favorite memories of Andrea while acknowledging the obligation we all share to carry her legacy into the future.

Ron Nichols, new General Manager of the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP), gave the keynote address as his first public appearance in the Eastern Sierra. His talk touched on some of DWP's long-range plans, including departure from coal-dependence, the replacement of aging infrastructure, and further exploration of renewable energy resources. Although Nichols presented an optimistic outlook, it is clear that DWP faces enormous challenges in achieving these goals.

Quentin Lawrence, Geoffrey McQuilkin, Rusty Gregory, and Tom Jacobson also spoke briefly. Their stories about Andrea depicted a passionate environmental pioneer whose good humor, strength, and vision made her a force for conservation and collaboration in the Eastern Sierra. Through the Andrea Lawrence Fund, to which all event proceeds were dedicated, the Mono Lake Committee will strive to continue where Andrea



DWP General Manager Ron Nichols, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area CEO Rusty Gregory, Mono Lake Committee Executive Director Geoffrey McQuilkin, Andrea Lawrence's daughter Quentin Lawrence, Eastern Sierra Audubon Society President Pete Pumphrey, and Mono Lake Committee Board Chair Sally Gaines.

left off. It is our particular hope that the Fund will inspire a new generation of environmental leaders through the Outdoor Experiences program.

The evening culminated in the presentation of the Andrea Lawrence Award to the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society in recognition of its central involvement in the Owens Lake Master Plan process. The Master Plan, which seeks to generate a collaborative vision for the future of the Owens Lakebed, is the work of many stakeholders joining forces. Through a series of meetings the group will craft an integrated approach to lakebed habitat restoration, dust control, ranching, mineral extraction, protection of the public trust, and renewable energy development. In helping to create this cooperative planning team, Audubon showed an admirable commitment to finding the pathways that create real and lasting environmental protection.

When Pete Pumphrey, Eastern Sierra Audubon's President, accepted the award, he shared with the audience his favorite Andrea Lawrence call to action. She would hear about an issue and immediately say, "We need to do something about that." As the dinner came to a close, this sentiment was echoed by many guests who drew from Andrea's memory a new motivation to look around and ask what we can do to protect and enrich our communities and our shared landscape.

In short, the first annual Andrea Lawrence Award Dinner was a rousing success. The event would have been impossible without the generous support of Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, the Lawrence family, and the many guests who came to the event. We thank you for a very special evening, and we look forward to seeing you at the next Award Dinner in the spring of 2012. ❖

Statewide water droplets

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

With a big winter snowpack in the Sierra, California officials announced earlier this year that the state's three-year drought is over. Because water conservation is part of everyday life—and everyday water management planning—they did so with some reluctance, concerned that Californians might slip back into old water wasting ways.

This led to many calls to keep conservation habits going—and the Mono Lake Committee agrees. In a notable editorial, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power's (DWP) top water manager made this point using some language that, well, we haven't seen much from DWP in years past. He wrote, "the reality is that we have relied far too long on importing

water supplies from hundreds of miles away—sources such as the Eastern Sierra and Owens Valley ..." and spoke of "replenishing Mono Lake" as part of DWP's obligations. Indeed, the Eastern Sierra continues to supply over 35 percent of Los Angeles' water, meaning that conservation will be an ongoing way DWP can successfully meet the needs of Mono Lake and the region as well as of Los Angeles.

The Mono Lake Committee does a lot of thinking about DWP's water operations in the Mono Basin. But every now and then we have to note events on the power side of the organization, which is actually much larger than the water side. Los Angeles Mayor Villaraigosa set an ambitious goal for DWP when he took office, declaring that by 2010 the city would get 20 percent of its power from renewable sources—up from five percent in 2004. DWP met that goal last year.

What's next? DWP's objective is to reach 33 percent from renewable sources by 2020, plus a drive to eliminate reliance on coal-fired power. ❖



The Eastern Sierra supplies over 35 percent of Los Angeles' water.

High flows from page 4

Lee Vining creeks. Aqueduct facilities capable of delivering a peak flow of 650 cfs to Rush Creek are key to this effort. If you do the math, the MGORD has a capacity of somewhere between 350–380 cfs. That means Grant needs to spill at a rate of approximately 300 cfs for at least five days to meet the new flow requirement. Given the complications of achieving the requirement with antiquated facilities not designed for the task, the need for installing a Grant Lake Reservoir release facility for Rush Creek, anticipated over a decade ago, is now certain.

For DWP and this year's test, the good news is that Grant Lake Reservoir is full and has been spilling since late March. Given the snowpack and Southern California Edison's anticipated operation this year, we expect Grant to spill well into July. Even though this is the best situation that DWP could have hoped for, achieving 650 cfs in Rush Creek for five days is unlikely. The tricky part will be the timing and magnitude of the natural snowmelt—will it last long enough to provide the flows necessary for restoration?

It's a big water year, which is great

for the creeks, but only if they can receive the benefit of the extra-high flows. The obstacle to these flows is DWP's infrastructure, designed early in the last century without the streams in mind. Tests will be helpful, but the real work of modernizing these aqueduct facilities lies ahead. ❖

Lisa Cutting is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director. This summer she will cast for trout using the bamboo fly rod she made by hand.

2011 Field Seminars



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBB HIRSCH

Mono Basin Landscape Photography

July 8–10

Robb Hirsch

\$220 per person / \$200 for members
limited to 12 participants

The Mono Basin is a magnet for nature photographers due to its unique, otherworldly landscapes, striking canyons, and dynamic light—it's the perfect outdoor classroom to learn the fine art of landscape photography. All levels of photographers are welcome. Topics will include creating strong compositions, evaluating proper exposure, utilizing depth-of-field for maximum impact, and reading light to increase productivity. As a biologist/naturalist turned professional photographer based in Groveland, Robb brings a positive and engaging teaching style to his workshops.

Los Angeles Aqueduct Tour

July 9

Greg Reis

\$90 per person / \$80 for members

The Mono Basin extension of the Los Angeles Aqueduct began transporting water 350 miles south to the City of LA in 1941. Visit all the major aqueduct facilities in the Mono Basin and learn about the aqueduct's effects on Mono Lake, its tributary streams, the Upper Owens River, and land management in the area. The group will discuss the history of water diversions, the effort to save Mono Lake, and the future of habitat restoration. Greg Reis is the Committee's Information & Restoration Specialist and the perfect guide for unraveling the Mono Basin's complex and fascinating plumbing—he has over 15 years of experience in Mono Basin hydrology and restoration and he keeps close track of Mono Basin water management.

**Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars fill quickly every year—
call (760) 647-6595 or register online at monolake.org/seminars.**



A flock of Wilson's Phalaropes takes wing near County Park.

Summer Birds of the Mono Basin

July 15–17

David Wimpfheimer

\$150 per person / \$135 for members

This field seminar will concentrate on the identification and ecology of birds that breed in the Mono Basin and others that migrate to Mono Lake during the summer. In sagebrush meadows and riparian and montane forests, the class will explore a number of sites, mixing short leisurely walks with periods of observation and natural history discussion. Woodpeckers, corvids, flycatchers, warblers, and other passerines display varied behaviors, but a major focus will be Mono Lake and other special wetlands. David Wimpfheimer has been educating and interpreting birds and the natural history of California for over 20 years. His seasoned focus and knowledge always make for enjoyable and educational outing.

Digital Photography Basics

July 22–24

David Gubernick

\$225 per person / \$200 for members

\$10 materials fee

limited to 12 participants

This workshop is designed to demystify the technical terms and functions of your digital SLR camera and enhance your picture-taking abilities in a warm and supportive learning environment. Learn how to get good exposures, read your histogram, understand different f-stops, shutter speeds, shooting modes, ISO settings, depth-of-field, white balance, lens choices, and much more. In addition to mastering the technical aspects of creating images, we will explore the artistry of photography with an emphasis on composition. Through guided practice sessions, field trips in the Mono Basin, coaching in the field, and review of images, you will learn to create better images with visual impact. Participants must bring digital SLR cameras; no point-and-shoot cameras.

Capturing the Mono Basin in Pastel

July 29–31

Ane Carla Rovetta

\$160 per person / \$145 for members

\$30 materials fee

limited to 12 participants

The sparkling light and radiant skies of the Mono Basin are pure inspiration. Add a set of brilliant pastel chalks and your own unique imagination, and you have an incredible weekend of color exploration and art. Landscape painter Ane Carla Rovetta is known for her realistic depiction of our golden western lands. She will guide students through a value system she modeled after Ansel Adams' work that will help organize the overwhelming hues of the summer terrain. Each participant will go home with at least one small finished painting and several sketches, color studies, and value experiments that will fuel future artistic endeavors. Ane Carla can provide you with your own set of 72 pastel chalks; *you must reserve your set when you sign up for the class.*



Ane Carla Rovetta paints the view along the Lee Vining Creek Trail.

Introduction to High Country Plants & Habitats

August 5–7

Ann Howald

\$150 per person / \$135 for members

This class will explore the mosaic of habitats found in the Eastern Sierra high country—flower-filled meadows fed by meandering streams, sagebrush-covered slopes, lodgepole pine forests, subalpine lakes bordered by willows, and flowery rock gardens. Sight identification of common trees, shrubs, and wildflowers will be emphasized, as well as the many ways that plants, birds, insects, and other wildlife interact in

high country habitats. Ann Howald is a consulting botanist and volunteer for the California Native Plant Society. She has taught popular Committee field seminars for over ten years.

Birding the Migration: Mono Basin & Long Valley

August 6–7

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, late summer is the time of year to see the greatest diversity of landbirds, shorebirds, and waterbirds in the Mono Basin and on Crowley Lake Reservoir. Dave Shuford has been a staff biologist at PRBO Conservation Science for over 30 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.



ELIN LUNG

A California Gull along Mono Lake's north shore.

The Artist's Book & the Great Outdoors

August 12–14

Camden Richards

\$160 per person / \$145 for members

\$150 materials fee

limited to 8 participants

With stunning Mono Lake as a backdrop and natural resource inspiration, artists of all skill levels will gain an understanding about artists' books by creating their own. Participants will make handmade paper utilizing natural fibers from the Mono Basin, and will develop book content through merging of various fine art media, natural elements, and simple

printmaking techniques. We will also explore various book structure techniques, with the goal being to combine material and content into a bound format. Instructor Camden Richards is a book artist, graphic designer, and teacher.

Identifying High Country Wildflowers

August 20–22

Mark Bagley

\$150 per person / \$135 for members

At the headwaters of Lee Vining Creek amidst a rich summer display of wildflowers, shrubs, and trees, this class will identify a great diversity of plants using Norman Weeden's *A Sierra Nevada Flora*. This seminar will start with a lecture and hands-on session to introduce the basics of plant identification for beginners. The group will then move to the field for easily-paced short walks at high elevations with much more time stopping and keying out plants than walking. This seminar is suitable for beginners or those with some experience with keying. 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.

Miwok-Paiute Basketry

August 26–28

Lucy Parker & Julia Parker

\$185 per person / \$170 for members

\$80 materials fee

primitive group campsite included (no pets, please)

During this seminar, participants will prepare materials and create a Miwok-Paiute burden basket—used for gathering pinenuts, acorns, and berries. This seminar is designed for



ELIN LUNG

The Mono Basin is full of insect-plant interactions each summer.

weavers of all levels. Participants 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. Julia Parker has dedicated her life to learning and teaching basketry and is the only weaver still practicing who was taught by women who wove in the early 20th century.

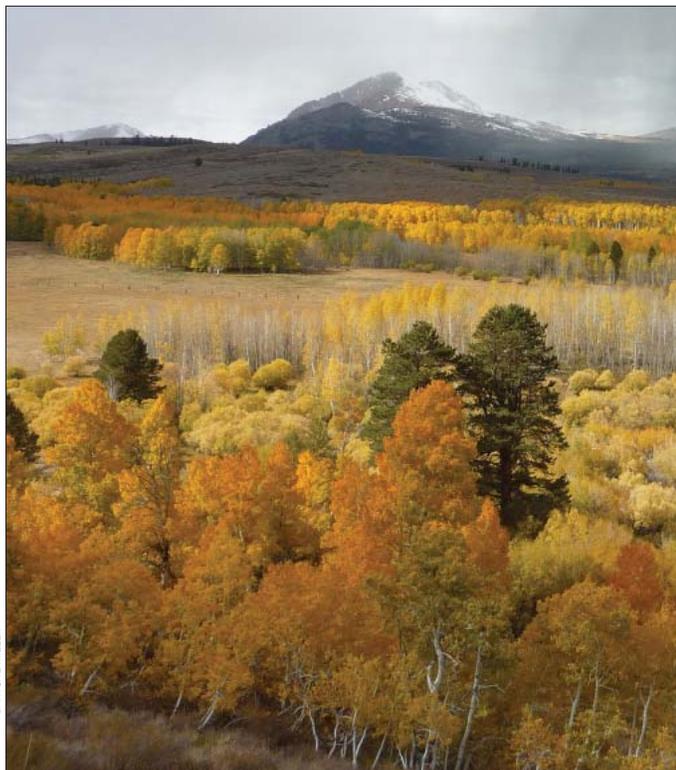
Living on the Edge: Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep in the Mono Basin

September 10–11

John Wehausen

\$165 per person / \$150 for members

The US Fish & Wildlife Service listed the Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep as Federally Endangered in 2000. This field seminar will involve discussions of the fascinating biology of bighorn sheep, their relationship with other mammals (including mountain lions and humans), and their conservation in the field. Past participants saw bighorn 12 out of the last 13 years—while there is a very good chance of seeing bighorn sheep in the wild during this seminar, there is no guarantee. John Wehausen is a research scientist at the White Mountain Research Station in Bishop who has been studying the Sierra Nevada bighorn and working for their conservation



Golden aspens blanket the slopes of Conway Summit each fall.

since 1974. *Please be aware that this seminar involves very strenuous hiking at the 10,000-foot elevation and above.*

Birding the Migration: Mono Basin & Bridgeport Valley

September 17–18

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, autumn is the time of year to see late fall migrants and early arriving wintering birds in the Mono Basin and Bridgeport Valley. Dave Shuford has been a staff biologist at PRBO Conservation Science for over 30 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.

Visions of the Past: Bodie, Masonic, Aurora

September 17–18

Terri Geissinger

\$140 per person / \$125 for members

In the Bodie Hills, all within 20 miles of each other, lie three ghost towns full of stories of pioneer families, prospectors, muleskinners, heroes, and gunslingers. This guided tour will visit the town and the cemetery of Bodie, once the second largest city in California. Next, visit the rock cabins and foundations of Masonic, where 500 people resided in a beautiful canyon—mining gold with great hope and eventually producing considerable wealth. The last stop is Aurora, once a bustling town of 8,000 souls in the 1860s. Your leader Terri Geissinger is a Bodie State Historic Park interpreter and guide. She is active in the Mono Basin Historical Society, and has a talent for making history come alive.

Photography at Burger's Sierra Retreat

September 30–October 2

Elizabeth Kenneday-Corathers

\$300 per person / \$285 for members
accommodations & meals included

This field seminar will explore photography of the beautiful aspen groves and alpine landscapes above Mono Lake. Practical topics include landscape representation, macrophotography of wildflowers and other flora, painting with light, night photography, and time studies, as well as philosophical and ethical issues in photographing the natural

environment. Accommodations will be provided at the rustic and comfortable Burger's Sierra Retreat above Lee Vining, with all meals catered by Linda Dore Food Service. Photographers of all skill levels using either film or digital cameras are welcome. Elizabeth Kenneday-Corathers is an accomplished local photographer who is currently working on a photography book of the Mono Basin.

Mono Basin & Bodie Fall Photography

October 7-9

Richard Knepp

\$300 per person / \$285 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 seventh 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 ghost town of Bodie. Photographers of all levels are welcome; a fully adjustable camera of any size or format is suggested. This is the 17th year in a row of this popular seminar.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GREG LUSO

Bodie's buildings, frozen in time, offer haunting glimpses into the past.

Field Seminar Registration Information

To register for a field seminar, please call the Mono Lake Committee at (760) 647-6595 or register online at monolake.org/seminars.

More extensive seminar descriptions are available online at monolake.org/seminars.

We accept VISA, MasterCard, and Discover only. We cannot accept personal checks or registration by mail or email. Seminars are limited to fifteen participants except where noted. If a seminar receives less than six participants (with some exceptions) 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 can be issued for any reason if cancellation is within three weeks of the field seminar date, but tuition can be applied to another seminar in 2011.

Participants must sign a liability release form. All seminars operate under permits from the Inyo National Forest and California State Park system.

The Mono Lake 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 this magnificent outdoor setting for a reasonable cost. Proceeds from 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 registration 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 and Geoffrey McQuilkin

As the Violet-green Swallows fly overhead and the desert peach blooms along the Lee Vining Creek Trail, we are seeing some significant migrations as we welcome the seasonal staff team for the summer.

A standout among our spring migrations is Office Director **Erika Obedzinski**. Erika is a core part of the staff family (so we know we'll be keeping in touch) and over her nine years with the Committee she succeeded handily in the ever-challenging mission of keeping numerous Committee staff, volunteers, and programs synchronized and on track to success. Erika is heading to the coast to start a family with her husband (and fellow staff member) **Greg Reis**. We wish them all the best and many happy trips back to the Mono Basin with the family in tow. We'll be seeing Greg a little less in the office but thanks to modern communication technology he'll be carrying on with his current staff duties as Information & Restoration Specialist.

Rosanne Catron has left her post as Information Center & Bookstore Manager but happily has not gone far—she is now the Committee's Office Manager. Stepping up to the plate as Information Center & Bookstore Manager is **Jessica Horn**. With Jess' experience last summer as Bookstore Assistant and her work at Mammoth's Booky Joint this past fall and winter, we know the store is in capable hands.

Information Center & Bookstore Assistant and local resident **Russ Reese** returns after a winter full of backcountry ski adventures for his second summer to share his knowledge and love of the area with visitors. Also filling the role of Information Center & Bookstore Assistant is **Carolyn Weddle**. Carolyn arrives from Arcata where she recently graduated from Humboldt University with a BS in Environmental Science.

Joining the team as Outdoor Education Instructors are **Chelle DeLong** and **Will Jevne**. Chelle has worked as a certified lifeguard, taught ropes courses, built trails, and graduated from the University of Montana with a BA in English Literature. Chelle arrives from Redding where she worked at Whiskeytown Environmental School. Originally from Grand Rapids, Minnesota, Will graduated from Stanford University this spring with a BA in Political Science. Will

has worked as a natural preserve ranger, residential counselor, tutor, first aid supervisor, and backpack trip leader.

Originally from Birmingham, Alabama, Canoe Coordinator **Russ Taylor** most recently lived and worked in the Florida Everglades. Russ has worked as a trip leader for Outward Bound, taught Wilderness First Aid courses in Ladakh, assisted with rescue trainings in Pakistan, and worked in the Sierra Nevada as a backcountry ranger for Yosemite National Park.

Birding Intern **Oliver James** has led hundreds of programs for his local Audubon chapter and the Point Reyes Bird Observatory. Oliver previously worked in the Mono Basin as a researcher for *Golondrinas de las Americas*. Oliver just finished his freshman year at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

Mono Lake Intern **Erik Lyon** just completed his junior year at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, where he is pursuing a degree in Economics. Erik got interested in Mono Lake when he visited as part of Whitman's Semester in the West—a field program that focuses on environmental studies, politics, ecology, and writing. **Sarah Melcher** returns for her second summer as an Intern. Sarah just finished her junior year at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, where she spent the spring semester continuing her studies of Spanish, sociology, and anthropology abroad in Spain.

Intern **Mila Re** just finished her junior year at Stanford University, where she is pursuing a degree in Human Biology with a concentration in Environmental Policy & Sustainable Agriculture. Mila has also worked as a docent at Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve. A National Outdoor Leadership School Semester in the Rockies graduate, Intern **Abby Rivin** just finished her junior year at Indiana University where she is majoring in American Studies with a minor in Outdoor Recreation & Resource Management.

And last, but certainly not least, **Julia Runcie** worked hard all winter as a Committee Project Specialist. She masterfully coordinated the Andrea Lawrence Award Dinner and was instrumental in several grant proposals and reports, to name a few of her many projects. We're glad Julia is spending a second summer in the basin as an Intern. ❖



Erika Obedzinski and Greg Reis before their move to the coast, in front of the newly stuccoed storefront.



From the mailbag

News from members and friends

by Ellen King

Life at the membership desk has seasons, and summer is definitely a fun one. The year goes something like this.... It is busy but calm in January and February when we send out the first fundraising letter of the year. Then as the days grow longer, the pace quickens. Renewal gifts begin to arrive, and visitors on their way to and from warmer climates stop by the Information Center & Bookstore and often decide to become Committee members.

Summer brings the arrival of our seasonal staff, the start of the Free Drawing, and longer store hours. The membership desk is a hub of activity—with new member packets to be built, welcome and thank-you letters to be sent, and calendars to be put into mailers for bulk mail. In late summer the interns leave and the rush of visitors quiets, but thankfully we're still busy with membership.

We prepare for our year-end fundraiser in November and December and trips to the post office to mail thank-you gifts become a lesson in walking on ice. As the year ends we pause for a few minutes to catch our breath and thank our wonderful members for their support over the past twelve months, and then it all begins again.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who sent in 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 honor

Diane Metz of Fairfield sent a contribution in honor of **Bowman Looney's** birthday. **Betsy Rieke** of Carson City, NV gave a gift in honor of her mother—"Mono Lake was one of the

special places my Mother and I both embraced in our shared concern about the protection of the natural world."

Photos for the archive

Thank you to **Jim Lawson** of San Diego and **Patricia Oliver** of Mariposa for sending in their photos of the Committee store from years past.

From the young historians

We received great news from students **Amelia Koske-Phillips** of Bishop and **Geoffrey Leonhardt** of

Rocklin. Both won their California National History Day divisions with projects about Mono Lake and are headed to the national competition. Each of them stopped by and I enjoyed talking to them about Mono Lake's history and challenges for the future. Congratulations and good luck! ❖

Ellen King is the Committee's Membership Coordinator. She is happy to see green leaves and flowers after a very white June Lake winter.



GEORGE MACQUILKIN

With thanks to members, storefront changes are afoot

The Lee Vining Elementary School kindergartners came to see the changes to the Mono Lake Committee storefront. Layers of paint and plaster were blasted off to make way for a new coat of stucco—the first major overhaul to the front of the store since 1993. This change is part of the Committee's long-term plan to remodel the area in front of the Information Center & Bookstore in order to make the space more comfortable, educational, and useful for visitors and members. Stay tuned to the Mono-logue at monolake.org to see this exciting project as it develops. The Information Center & Bookstore will be open through construction, so please stop by!



MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

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Tioga Pass Run September 11, 2011



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD ERB

tiogapassrun.com

Don't miss the
brand-new film,

"The Mono Lake Story"

now showing in
high-definition at
the Committee's
theater & gallery
in Lee Vining



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Make your reservations today...