

Winter

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MONO



LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R



Mono Lake Newsletter

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MONO LAKE
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Grebes cover the surface of Mono Lake in this issue's cover photo, while the snow of an early season storm lingers in the Bodie Hills and on Black Point. Grebes have been plentiful this fall, blanketing the lake in numbers totalling up to two million.

Here in the Mono Basin, the proposed restoration of Mill Creek continues to be a complex issue: see pages 4 to 7 for the story. On the overall restoration front, the October Water Board hearing was postponed (page 8) on the promise of successful negotiations. And, looking to next year, the Forest Service is planning to implement fees in the Scenic Area (page 8).

In the electronic world of the Internet, Mono Lake and the MLC are now on the World Wide Web (page 9), so come visit us in our new medium (it's still not quite like being at the lake itself, but you sure can check the lake level easily).

The Mono Basin is entering the quiet time of year, with Tioga Pass closed and snow on the ground. It's never a good idea to forecast the extent of winter snows in print, but I can say this: with two feet of snow in October and five inches of rain by mid-November, it does look like a wet winter season. So far.

—Geoff McQuilkin

Late breaking news

Frances Spivy-Weber, previously with the National Audubon Society, will be the new Executive Director of the Committee beginning in January 1997. Outgoing ED Martha Davis is thrilled with her selection after a year-long search process. Look for an interview with Fran in the spring *Newsletter*!



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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Castle in the sand

by Gary Nelson

I must confess that at some point during the summer canoe tour program, after I have guided about 50 or 60 tours, I begin suffering from the dreaded canoe burnout syndrome. Symptoms include:

- hysterical laughter upon being asked how DWP gets the salt out of the lakewater before sending it south;
- not being able to remember whether it's the flies or the shrimp that have pupa;
- a strong yearning for winter.

Our summer visitors might have a hard time understanding why I would look forward to sub-zero temperatures and icy roads. I guess every blizzard has its silver lining, and for me winter is the time when canoe tour responsibilities are behind me, and I can get into one of our Kiwi kayaks and go for a solitary paddle.

Soon after our first snowfall, I pointed my bow east and paddled far away from the more familiar tufa groves. In the distance I could see my goal, looking at first like a castle rising above its mounded ramparts. As I got closer, the image resolved into a solitary tufa formation surrounded by a sand dune.

Beaching the kayak, I walked up to the tufa and found a spring flowing from the base of the formation. Its rust-colored water cut a miniature gorge through the sand, nourishing lush plant growth along its short course to the lake. Tracks on the dune showed that this spring was well known to the local kangaroo rat population, as well as to many small birds.

Additional tufa towers arced away from the spring, enclosing an amphithe-

ater of sand that opened out onto the lake. In the few years since I had been there last, the lake had risen almost 5 feet. Its waters now blocked my former path along the shoreline to the east, so I turned toward the sand.

At the top of the dune, a gap in the

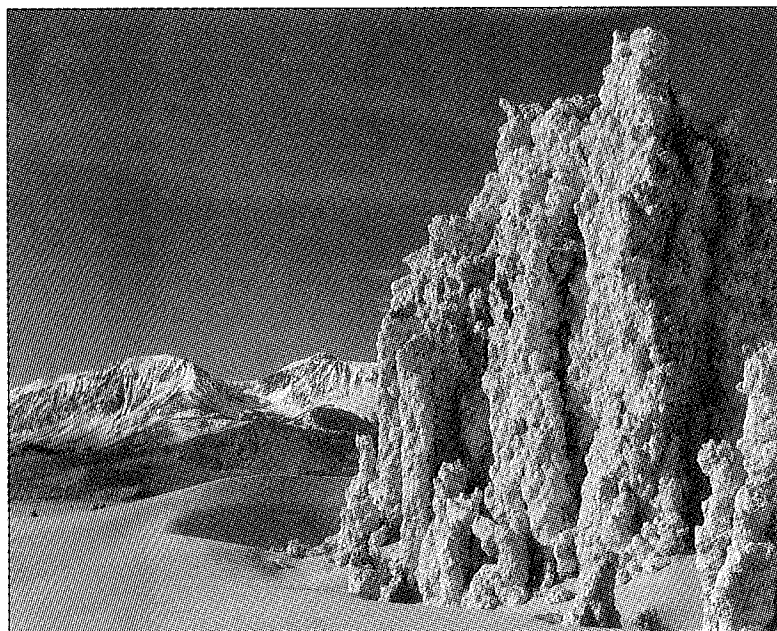


Photo by Viki Lang

tufa provided a pass. Crossing over, I surprised seven ducks who took flight over the lake. I, too, was rather surprised: the ducks came from a freshwater pond which was separated from the lake by a sinuous stretch of sand. This barrier beach, created by deposition of wave-born sand, was only five feet wide.

The last time I was in this area, it had been a dry, shallow, sandy depression which was over 20 feet from the lakeshore. Following the shore eastward, I came upon a larger pond which, like the duck's retreat, was covered with a thin crust of ice.

Just beyond, a line of coyote willows traced the bottom of a small drainage which led down to the lake. These

willows stood around six feet tall and towered over the surrounding vegetation.


As I approached the willows, I noticed coyote tracks in the wet sand along the shore. This drainage apparently was serving as the coyotes' access to prime hunting grounds around the ponds and springs. The line of willows provided excellent cover, allowing these crafty predators to stalk unseen to within a few feet of the shoreline.

Coyote tracks winding through the willows showed that this dry, sandy arroyo was certainly an artery of life and, as I soon discovered, a place of death.

Before I had gone twenty feet up the drainage I found the carcass of an adult coyote, skin and skeleton still intact. Ten feet further along, I found another coyote carcass, slightly more decomposed. Ten feet further I found a third set of coyote remains which could best be described as a pile of something that used to be fur.

I immediately recalled the account of a Mono Basin coyote researcher whose radio-collared subject had been eaten by a mountain lion. At that moment, I realized that these willows could give cover to other predators. *Larger predators!*

Becoming very still and attentive to my surroundings, I attained instant empathy with all prey species. Straining to be aware of the slightest sound, I heard only the frigid immensity of the Great Basin.

Gary Nelson is the Committee's Canoe Tour Supervisor. 

Mill Creek: sharing scarce water

by Heidi Hopkins

Lee Vining's public meeting places—the grammar school's gymnasium, the local fire hall—have become key venues for discussing the proposal to rewater Mill Creek (see sidebar), one element of the Department of Water and Power's Mono Basin restoration plans. County supervisors, community residents, scientists, resource agency staff, and the Mono Lake Committee have come together to review questions raised during recent months as parties to the Mono Basin restoration planning process focus on how to restore Mill Creek.

The community discussion—at times highly charged and contentious—is about how the limited water of the north Mono Basin should be allocated and whether there is a way to use part of that water to restore Mill Creek while retaining existing water-dependent landscapes and habitat.

While all impacts relating to any change of water use will be addressed in the environmental review process stipulated by D-1631—the 1994 Water Board decision that established the target lake level for Mono Lake and called for restoration—the community's questions have been brought to the fore by a soon-to-expire option to purchase the Conway Ranch.

Conway Ranch acquisition linked to restoration proposal

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the Mill Creek restoration proposal is linked to a proposed public land acquisition project in the northwest corner of the Mono Basin. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has acquired an option on the thousand-acre Conway Ranch, including the ranch's 18 cubic feet per second (cfs) Mill Creek water right. At present, TPL is working with Mono County to develop grants to fund the acquisition; if the purchase is successful,

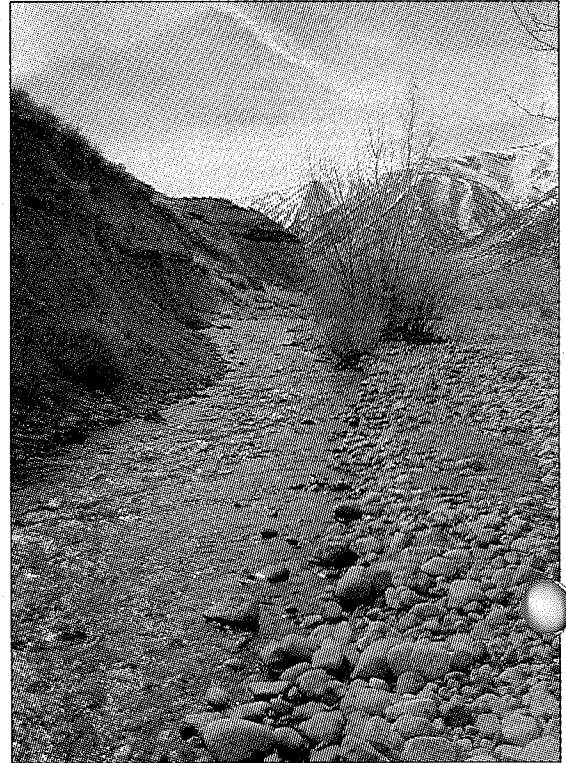
the land will be set aside as public open space. The series of public meetings held in Lee Vining is TPL's attempt to bring the community to some sort of consensus about Conway Ranch so that TPL can move forward with its project in advance of the Water Board process.

The essential question under discussion is: What will be done with the property's 18 cfs of Mill Creek water? In the D-1631-mandated restoration plans, DWP recommended the rewatering of Mill Creek (see sidebar) and suggested that the Conway Ranch water rights were critical to this effort. Conway Ranch's water, then, has become the link between the open space project and Mono Basin restoration.

The benefits

The restoration proposal is to re-establish the natural hydrology of Mill Creek, Mono Lake's third largest tributary. Evidenced by dry channels and remnant stumps, Mill Creek once provided lush, wooded bottomland and deltaic habitat such as that formerly found along Rush and Lee Vining creeks, a type that is rare today in the Great Basin.

If restored, Mill Creek's bottomland would once again develop riparian vegetation, meadows, and willows underneath a canopy of cottonwoods and Jeffrey pines. Deer, bobcat, coyotes, and all sorts of water-loving birds would find cover in the multi-storied habitat. Summer recharge would keep groundwater tables high and maintain backwater pools for fish and ducks into the fall and winter. With creek flows continuing through the winter, Mill Creek's brown trout population would thrive.



Remnant of a creek: If year-round flows are returned to Mill Creek, woodland habitat will return to the bottomlands area.

Down by the lake, where Mill Creek has cut two separate trenches across the existing delta, two embayments, or rias, would fill with water and extend upstream. Creek flows into these embayments would provide protected freshwater refuge for waterfowl in the fall and winter months, as recommended by the restoration scientists.

100 years of diversions

But because of historical water diversions from Mill Creek, the restoration proposal raises questions. As described in past newsletters, Mill Creek has been diverted for over 100 years. Its water has been used to irrigate north Mono Basin pastures and to generate hydroelectric power in the Lundy power plant. (DWP, which has rights to Mill Creek water, diverts its water for north

(please see page 6)

The Mill Creek proposal

In its 1994 Mono Lake decision, the Water Board required DWP to prepare plans for Mono Basin stream and waterfowl habitat restoration. Rewatering Mill Creek was identified in these plans as the most important action next to raising the lake itself for habitat restoration at the lake.

The proposal objective:

To rewater Mill Creek's natural stream course sufficient to achieve a multi-channeled bottomland and year-round freshwater conditions in Mill Creek's delta trenches at the lakeshore.

The proposal benefits:

Restoration of Mill Creek's natural hydrology resulting in:

- groundwater recharge throughout Mill Creek's bottomland and delta;
- re-establishment of wooded wetlands in the bottomland;
- a productive fishery the full length of Mill Creek; and

- a freshwater environment in both of Mill Creek's delta trenches, or "rias," as well as a freshwater skim off the mouth of the creek, particularly important in winter months for migrating waterfowl.

The need for restoration

- Mill Creek restoration will re-establish the kind of productive wildlife and waterfowl habitat that the Water Board recognized as having been destroyed by DWP's historic diversions, a kind that is rare in the Great Basin.
- Mill Creek's relatively intact deltaic bottomland offers an excellent opportunity to mitigate for habitat irretrievably lost elsewhere in the basin through stream incision, such as on portions of lower Rush Creek.
- Restoration of Mill Creek was specifically recommended by scientists in DWP's plans as the most important action next to raising the level of the lake itself.

Potential sources of water

Mill Creek water could be returned to its natural stream course by drawing upon all or part of the water from any of the following sources:

- Mill Creek flows in excess of those legally appropriated. Currently, unappropriated Mill Creek water flows by default down Wilson Creek during high flow periods due to limited return ditch capacity.
- DWP's irrigation rights. DWP has rights to 32.4 cfs of Mill Creek water for irrigation, which could be dedicated back to instream uses.
- Appropriated water not needed for irrigation. Conway Ranch, for example, has 18 cfs of irrigation rights. This water could be returned to Mill Creek when the irrigation season ends.
- Purchase of the Conway Ranch water rights. If purchased, all or part of the Conway Ranch's rights to 18 cfs could be dedicated to Mill Creek.

The Mono Lake Committee's position

The Mono Lake Committee strongly supports restoration of natural habitats and ecological processes in the Mono Basin. We concur with the waterfowl scientists' recommendation that Mill Creek be rewatered sufficient to achieve a multi-channeled bottomland and year-round freshwater conditions at the mouth of Mill Creek.

Any reallocation of water from existing uses back to Mill Creek *must* be consistent with environmental review and appropriate protection of habitats currently benefiting from Mill Creek water.

Given the potential impacts to existing landscapes, the Committee specifically supports the following points.

- Green meadows on Conway Ranch should be maintained. The irrigated acreage north of Wilson Creek, representing roughly 85 percent of the ranch's pasture, can be maintained with spring flows and Virginia Creek water; the meadow south of Wilson Creek could be maintained with water-conserving irrigation techniques.

- Green meadows and trees on Thompson Ranch should be maintained using water-conserving irrigation practices.
- Riparian habitat on the upper reaches of Wilson Creek above and through the Conway Ranch should be maintained for visual and habitat qualities.
- Maintaining a seasonal, put-and-take fishery along the upper reaches of Wilson Creek should be considered. We recognize that it may not be possible to maintain fish in good condition on a year-round basis in Wilson Creek due to the small amount of water available during the fall-winter period.

We appreciate hearing your comments on the Mono Lake Committee's position. You can contact us by letter (P.O. Box 29, Lee Vining, California 93541, attention: Heidi Hopkins) or by e-mail (heidih@monolake.org). Also, look on our Web page for up-to-date information on the Mill Creek proposal and the Water Board proceedings.

Mono Basin irrigation, not for export.) As a consequence, Mill Creek has disappeared into the sand several miles from the lakeshore for most of this century. Its bottomland and deltaic habitat—rich wooded wetlands, marshes, open water ponds, and a freshwater environment off the creek's mouth—was lost.

In part because it *was* dry, Mill Creek's bottomland was less affected by the type of stream incision that DWP's operations caused on Rush Creek. At present, the underlying physical structure of the Mill Creek bottomland is relatively intact and offers an excellent opportunity to compensate for irreparable physical and biological damage to Rush Creek—just by reinstating natural flows and opening side channels.

But rewatering Mill Creek could affect landscapes currently benefiting from Mill Creek water. The diversion ditch in which Mill Creek's water has flowed for 100 years has taken on some of the attributes of a functioning stream with riparian habitat; it is now known as Wilson Creek. Additionally, a number of pastures irrigated with Mill Creek water lie scattered across the north Mono Basin landscape.

Questions raised

Whenever a change to the way water is distributed is proposed, there are questions. Not surprisingly, then, a number of people—fishermen, homeowners on the Conway Ranch, residents interested in protecting the basin's historical pastures—have raised questions. Some locals have formed a loose organization called People for Mono Basin Preservation as a means of participating more effectively in the Mill Creek decisions. Many of the questions relate to *change*.

The most pressing question asked by those concerned with the basin's historical landscapes is: Can you maintain the historical green meadows of Conway Ranch? The answer is an emphatic "yes!" For the last decade, roughly 85

percent of Conway Ranch—the entire meadow section north of Wilson Creek—has been irrigated with Virginia Creek water, diverted over from the Walker River system to the north, as well as with natural springs and runoff. Even during recent droughts, the meadows stayed green. The remaining 15 percent of Conway Ranch land to the south of Wilson Creek could be kept green using water-saving irrigation techniques.

Birdwatchers fond of the willows that meander across Conway Ranch ask: Can you return water to Mill Creek and still

ing brown trout population. To achieve these flows, virtually all of Mill Creek's available water in the fall and winter would need to be returned to Mill Creek, at least in dry years. This timing is additionally important because the fall and winter are precisely when water will make the most difference to migrating waterfowl. A Wilson Creek seasonal fishery could likely exist, however.

Duck hunters ask whether the rich waterfowl habitat at the Wilson Creek delta will disappear. It won't. The freshwater springs in the area existed before the diversion of Mill Creek water into Wilson Creek, as evidenced by the old age of the spring-formed tufa towers in the area. These springs will continue regardless of where Mill Creek water flows.

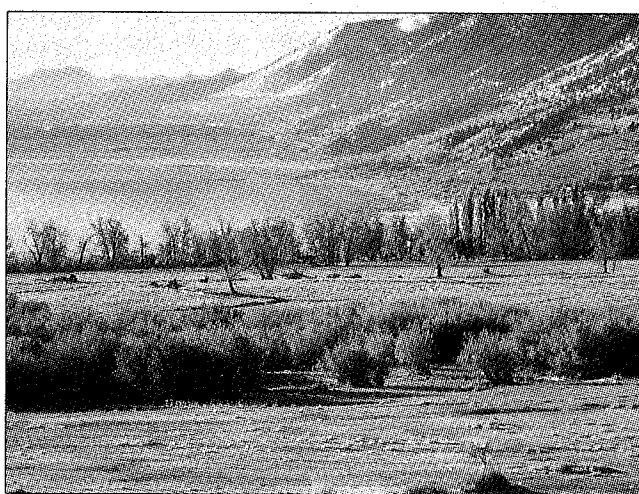
Others pose legal questions. How secure is the Virginia Creek water right? Apparently, Conway Ranch's 6 cfs right has high priority due to its having been established in the 1870s. Furthermore, the right is so small that it is unlikely to be challenged.

And people ask practical questions. For example, the ditch that carries Virginia Creek water

over to the Conway Ranch cannot carry the full 6 cfs. Despite this, the 2-3 cfs that is brought over, combined with natural accretion from the ravine through which the ditch descends, has been sufficient to keep the meadows green.

Another practical issue is that the Mill Creek return ditch, which returns water to Mill Creek after a brief diversion through the Lundy hydropower facility, has limited capacity. If a substantial amount of the Conway Ranch water right were to be dedicated to Mill Creek, could the water physically get there? Not as the ditch is currently configured.

Furthermore, summer peak flows in excess of the water rights of Conway Ranch and others currently run down Wilson Creek by default. To return these flows to Mill Creek—where they belong by right—clearly requires restoring the



View across Thompson Ranch. Efficient irrigation would improve meadows and free up water for Mill Creek.

retain riparian habitat values on Wilson Creek? Again, yes, due to the property's hydrologic features. Runoff from natural springs and irrigation eventually ends up in the meadow depression through which Wilson Creek runs, actually increasing the creek's flow as it crosses the property. This, combined with a base-level release of Mill Creek water into Wilson Creek during the summer growing season, should maintain the important visual and habitat qualities of the riparian vegetation along the upper reaches of Wilson Creek.

Local fisherman ask: Can you maintain a productive year-round fishery on both Wilson Creek and Mill Creek? Probably not. In a recent study, the California Department of Fish & Game recommended streamflows for Mill Creek that would provide a healthy ecosystem for its exist-

capacity of the ditch if not expanding it to a greater capacity.

Those with historical interests have questions that are separate from the Conway Ranch proposal but part of the restoration proposal—and they are definitely part of the current debate.

For example, as part of its restoration plan, DWP proposed dedicating its north basin irrigation rights back to Mill Creek. If DWP did so, some have asked, wouldn't the meadows and old cottonwoods dry up on the historic Thompson Ranch, whose scenic meadows lie immediately adjacent to Highway 395 on Mono Lake's north shore? The Committee thinks not, if the current irrigation system is modernized. In fact, most agree that Thompson Ranch has been *overwatered* for many years, encouraging shallow root growth in its cottonwoods and proliferation of water-loving plants unpalatable to the sheep that graze there. With water-saving irrigation methods, the scenic values could be maintained, the meadow composition for grazing improved, and stronger-rooted trees developed.

A decision-making process

At the most recent community meeting, the Mono Lake Committee proposed that the Water Board be asked to help design a process that all can agree upon that will both (1) allow the community to move forward to protect Conway Ranch as open space under the tight timeline of the current option and (2) provide for thoughtful analysis of the Mill Creek restoration proposal and all its potential benefits and impacts.

As it stands now, December is a critical month. TPL's option expires at the end of January 1997; the county board of supervisors has agreed to make a decision on whether to move forward with the Conway Ranch project in December. Fires will continue to burn in the Lee Vining Fire Hall's wood stove as the parties struggle to reach some sort of consensus on a process for making decisions before the December deadline.

Heidi Hopkins, the MLC's Eastern Sierra Policy Director, is determined to keep hiking despite the snow. 🐾

DWP policy switch leads to dry grass at Cain Ranch

The green meadows of the Mono Basin are a cherished part of this region's arid, high desert landscape. So it is understandable that area residents would be unhappy to see formerly irrigated pastures turn brown.

This is particularly true of Cain Ranch, a large meadow area owned by DWP several miles south of Lee Vining and one of the verdant expanses of the Mono Basin. But in recent, wet years portions of the ranch below the aqueduct have received little or no water, causing these green fields to turn to brown by mid-summer.

The reason for Cain Ranch's brown luster is clear: DWP decided not to irrigate below the aqueduct with Walker and Parker creek water. Interestingly, this is in contradiction to their policy as stated during the Water Board's EIR process.

In a 1992 letter from DWP's Mitch Kodama to Jordan Lang of Jones and Stokes (the firm which prepared the Water Board's EIR), the DWP outlined its "future Mono Basin irrigation policy." During wet years, DWP stated that it would continue historic irrigation of Cain Ranch below the aqueduct; during normal years, DWP indicated irrigation below the aqueduct would be discretionary. Only during dry years did DWP specify that no irrigation would occur.

Since DWP owns Cain Ranch, how much land the Department decides to irrigate is ultimately its own choice. However, in late September, when local residents expressed their distress at seeing Cain Ranch's pastures turn brown again despite a second wet year, DWP responded by claiming that court orders won by the Mono Lake Committee in 1990 did not permit DWP to irrigate major parts of Cain Ranch below the aqueduct. This was not true.

Water Board staff member Jim Canaday set the record straight at an October community meeting. He explained that nothing in the 1990 El Dorado Superior Court decision or the 1994 State Board decision prevents DWP from irrigating Cain Ranch with water from Walker or Parker creeks, as long as required minimum stream flows and seasonal peak flows are met.

In fact, in most years there is water above the Water Board-ordered minimums that is available for irrigation on Cain Ranch. The Mono Lake Committee has prepared tables showing water availability in different types of years, and this information has been made available to all Mono Basin residents interested in seeing the pastures rewatered. The next move will be for locals, and the Committee, to pursue the matter with DWP.



Meromixis occurring in Mono Lake

by Heidi Hopkins

A study which has been submitted for publication in the scientific journal *Ambio* indicates that Mono Lake has entered a state of chemical stratification, or "meromixis," in which the upper, less saline layer of the lake fails to mix with the colder, more saline water below. The study has been funded by the Department of Water and Power (DWP) and the National Science Foundation.

Water Board delays hearing on promise of negotiations

The hearing scheduled before the State Water Resources Control Board to address the restoration plans proposed by the Department of Water and Power (DWP) has been postponed to allow for negotiations between the participating parties.

In the month prior to the original hearing date of October 9, the Committee, DWP, the State Lands Commission, California Trout, the Department of Fish and Game, and other parties began a negotiation process in hopes of resolving differences without a protracted legal battle before the Water Board. The parties requested postponement of the hearing so negotiations could proceed.

Whether negotiations are successful or not, all interested parties will have a chance to speak to the stream and waterfowl habitat restoration plans before the Water Board when the hearing finally takes place, probably in early 1997.

Usually, Mono Lake stratifies during the summer months due to solar heating and freshwater inflow, only to "turn over" in the fall, mixing completely from top to bottom. This mixing brings essential nutrients from the lake's lower levels into the surface waters. According to Dr. Robert Jellison, one of the scientists working on the study, in 1995 the great volume of water entering the lake combined with the low lake level and the lake's extremely high salinity to create a meromictic condition which persisted into 1996.

To project the duration of meromixis, Jellison used a lake-mixing model, applying it to 50-year simulations based on varying historic sequences of freshwater inflows. The model results suggest that the current management regime will result in long-term meromixis at Mono Lake in most cases. Jellison suggests that the stratification could lower lake productivity, reducing available food for the lake's birds.

While Jellison's study is no doubt

credible, the actual implications of long-term meromixis on lake ecology remain unknown. Meromixis is a natural phenomenon that has occurred in the past, even before DWP's water diversions. In addition, the Jellison study analyzed deep water areas of the lake, not the readily mixing shoreline zone, which generates the majority of food resources for birds. Indeed, lower salinity caused by meromixis in this zone may be beneficial to productivity. Furthermore, meromixis must be assessed in the larger context of Mono Lake resources; suggestions that meromixis be averted by curtailing streamflows, for example, fail to consider the health of the streams themselves.

The Mono Lake Committee will continue to monitor the issue. Certainly, we want to know how lake productivity will be affected by the current restoration regime. On the other hand, we need to be cautious about this issue being used as a tool to reopen the Water Board decision and modify the lake level requirement.

Forest Service to charge fees in Scenic Area

Fees of a dollar or two may soon be the norm to access South Tufa and the Forest Service Visitor Center just north of Lee Vining.

The Forest Service Scenic Area, which includes most of the land around Mono Lake, has been designated a trial location for charging fees along with a handful of other Forest Service sites around the country. A majority of the funds collected locally will support operation of facilities and interpretive programs in the Mono Basin.

While not yet finalized, the trial pro-

gram, which will last three years, will most likely include a flat fee for admission to the Visitor Center film and exhibits, and to South Tufa, Mono Lake's most popular tufa grove.

As the program goes into effect, the Committee will be watching to see if recreation patterns change, possibly causing negative impacts on Mono Lake resources.

For further fee information, watch for news in the spring *Newsletter* or contact Roger Porter, Scenic Area Manager, P.O. Box 429, Lee Vining, CA 93541.

Mono Lake goes online

Mono Lake hit the Internet over the summer with a site on the World Wide Web featuring information and services for visitors, students, Committee members, and Monophiles from around the world. In fact, in the first weeks of operation the site saw visits from as far afield as Indonesia and Germany.

The Mono Lake Web site can be found at <http://www.monolake.org> and covers three major areas of Mono Lake information. In the "About Mono Lake" section, geological and ecological information (a favorite with students working on reports) provides a firm background for understanding Mono Lake's natural history and the issues associated with its section. Already popular is a page of concise Mono Lake statistics which includes the current lake level.

Information for visitors is featured in the "Visit Mono Lake" section. It offers guidance on current walks and activities at the lake; tips on travel, weather, and road information; and a complete listing of lodging and other services in Lee Vining. In coming months, look for local businesses to add photos and text detailing their establishments. Additionally, links to other regional web sites provide easy access to other places, events, and people in the Eastern Sierra.

Finally, a section on the Mono Lake Committee and the fight to save the lake rounds out the offering. The Committee section includes selected *Newsletter* articles, restoration information, a profile of the alternative water supplies available to Los Angeles, and a history of litigation and legislation relating to Mono. Of course, information on joining the Committee can be requested, and there's even a selection of merchandise from the Mono Lake gift catalog.

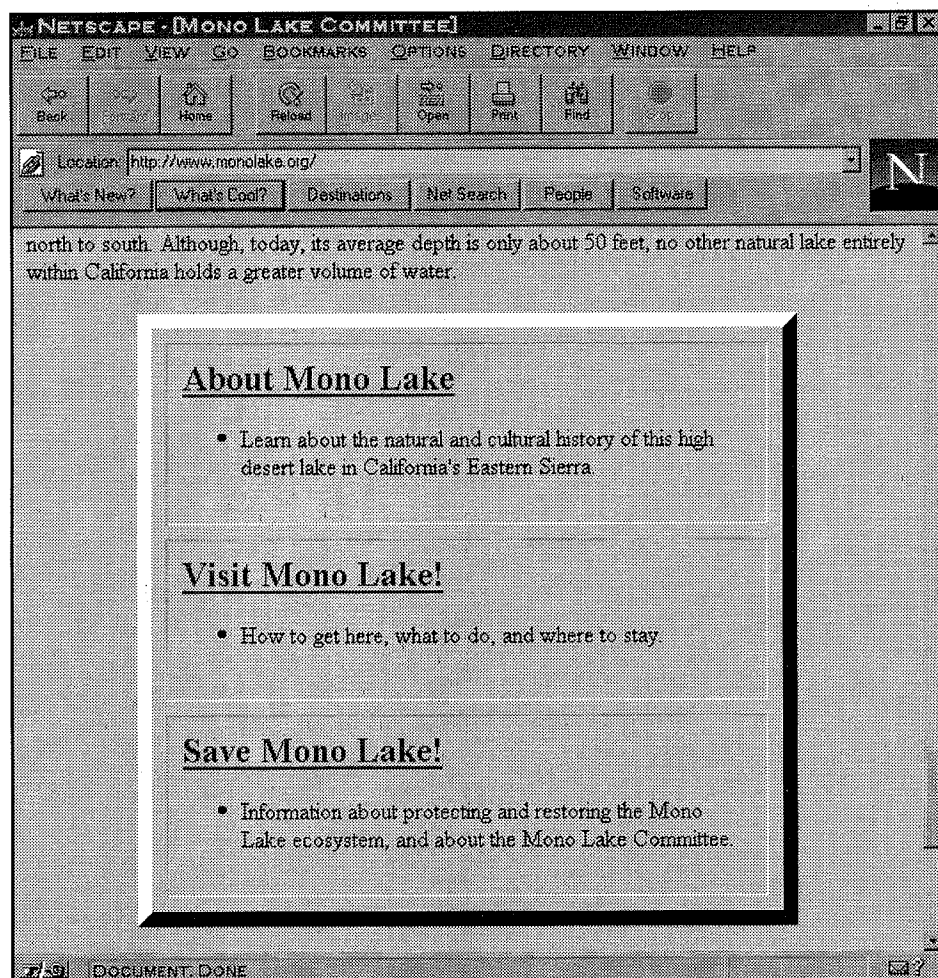
Beyond providing information, the Committee hopes that the Web site will recruit new members and supporters of

the Mono Lake cause. Additionally, current Committee members can utilize membership services, such as registering a change of address, through the site.

MLC member Karen Rogers, who runs Clarity Internet Services (<http://catalog.com/clarity>) helped lay the foundation for the site in the spring by preparing a basic set of pages and links from material provided by the Committee. Development took off in the summer with the arrival of Committee intern Wendy Stanford, who has dedicated

numerous hours to coding and expanding the homepage's contents. The page is suited for Netscape, Internet Explorer, and other up-to-date Web browsers.

"My favorite thing," Wendy says, "has been watching the site grow and seeing the increase in visitation. Many of the people who call us on the phone for information are excited to hear we have a Web site, and it's terrific we can provide this detailed, 24 hour information source." 🐼



www.monolake.org—The Mono Lake Website, hosted by the Committee. Stop by to check the lake level and current snowpack conditions, research the history of Mono Lake litigation, investigate accommodations in Lee Vining, or use member services such as registering a change of address.

Mono Basin Journal

A roundup of less-political events at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

The sure signs of winter flew like banners over Mono Lake in October; twisting and spiraling, stringy lenticular clouds danced in the strong winds undulating across the Sierra. What followed was perhaps not unusual, but relatively unexpected. Several days before Halloween, twenty inches of snow fell in Lee Vining, burying unstacked firewood and lingering garden hoses, leaving the basin white from Conway Summit and Black Point to South Tufa and the Mono Craters.

Surrounded by bright snow, the lake took on a burnished silver hue as storm clouds continued to pass overhead. Out on the water, Eared Grebes suddenly were unavoidably visible: hundreds of thousands

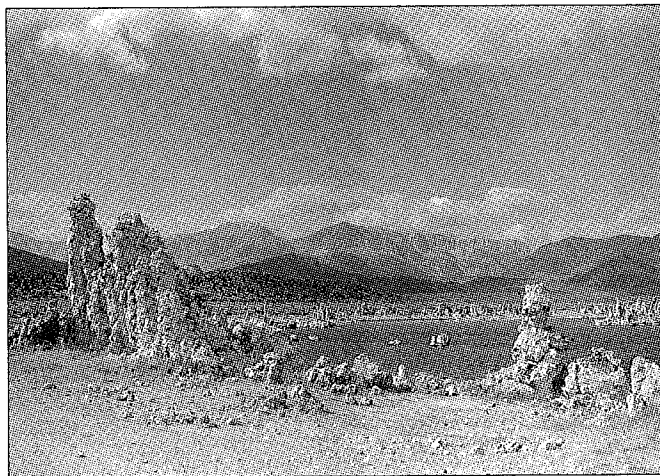


of low-riding birds, dabbling and diving in search of brine shrimp. Until then, I had never seen the spectacle David Gaines described so visually: birds so plentiful one can envision "walking across the lake stepping from the back of one bird to the back of the next."

A few days later, cold temperatures seized the basin. Traces of pogonip—the ice fog the fills the basin in January—lurked about Paoha, lingering leaves went straight from green to brown, and the grebes, perhaps dreaming of warmer Mexican waters, navigated among drifting rafts of rippled

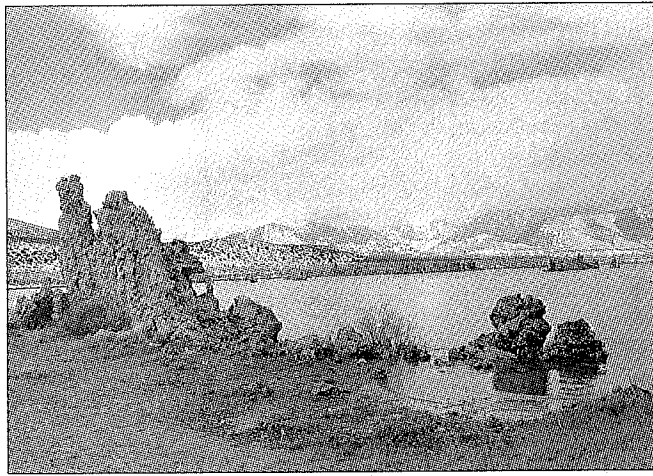
ice, dark birds navigating a bright world in the light of the red, rising sun. ☞

Benchmarks

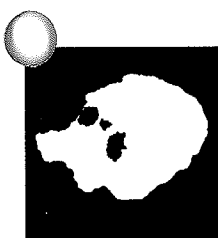


Summer 1991: South Tufa, looking west. Lake level 6375.2 feet above sea level.

Photo by Don Jackson



Fall 1996: The same location at a lake level of 6379.6 feet. Note that the top of the tower at the right has fallen off.



Lakewatch

Annual lake decline halted by fall storms

By Greg Reis

As usual, Mono Lake dropped at the end of the summer and began its annual rise as winter approached. Why does this pattern happen almost every year? Because Mono Lake is a terminal lake. This means that it has no outlet, and as a result it fluctuates over a wider range than most natural lakes, which have stable outlet elevations.

Within the course of a year, the lake rises and falls as a result of seasonal fluctuations in streamflow and evaporation. When inflow exceeds evaporation, the lake rises. When inflow is less than evaporation, the lake drops. Mono Lake typically rises from winter into spring and, during wet years, into summer.

Then, as snowmelt slows, evaporation losses are not completely replaced by freshwater inflow, and the lake drops.


This year, with runoff at about 120% of average, Mono Lake peaked in August at 6,380.1 feet. It began dropping in late

August, reached an October low of 6379.6, and, as of November 21, stands at 6,379.8. This year's winter rise in lake level has thus begun, a little earlier than usual thanks to several strong storms in October and November. Two feet of snow fell before Halloween, and a weather pattern with a tropical connection delivered over six inches of rain to Lee Vining in November (the east side of the lake gets far less precipitation, explaining its less than six inch rise).

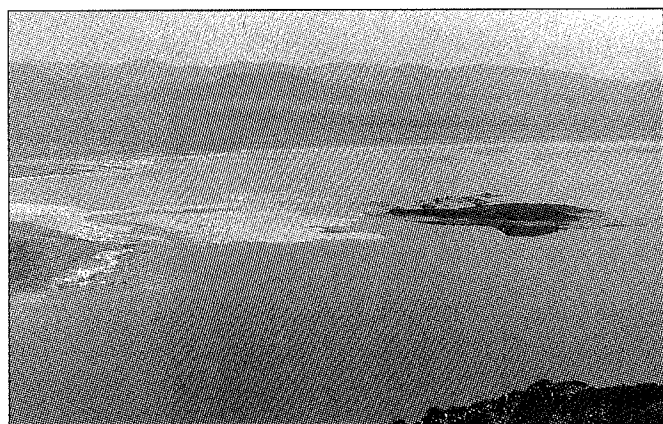
DWP began diverting water from the Mono Basin to Los Angeles on July 16, and the diversions ended in mid-November. The State Water Resources Control Board allows DWP to divert 4,500 acre-feet in years when Mono Lake's April 1 elevation is between 6,377 and 6,380 feet above sea level, as it was this year. To get a feel for how much water this is, consider this: if the diverted water had gone into the lake, the level would be a

tenth of a foot higher (assuming that none of this water was lost along the way through evaporation, infiltration, or use by plants).

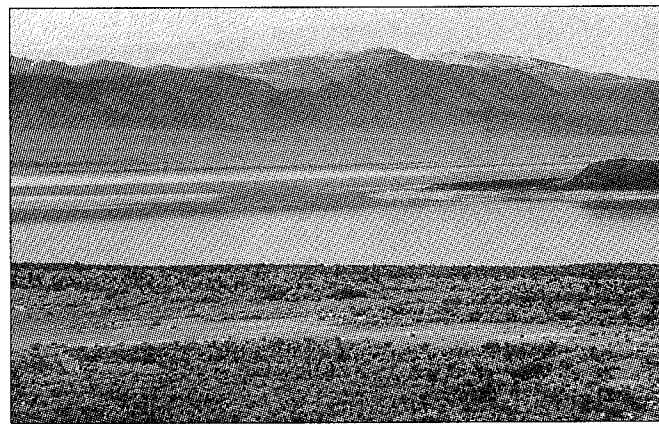
By April 1, 1997, Mono Lake's surface should be above the 6,380 foot mark, according to Peter Vorster, the Mono Lake Committee's consulting hydrologist. Even during the driest winters, the lake has risen half a foot. DWP forecasts agree, predicting that with median precipitation through April, Mono Lake will stand at 6,380.3 feet above sea level, a level that will allow diversion of 16,000 acre-feet of water next year. What actually happens, of course, all depends on the weather; the wetter the winter, the higher the lake will rise!

Greg Reis is the Committee's Information Specialist. He has become a master of spreadsheets. 

Benchmarks



Summer 1994: Negit Island is separated from the landbridge by a narrow channel of water at a lake level of 6375.6 feet.



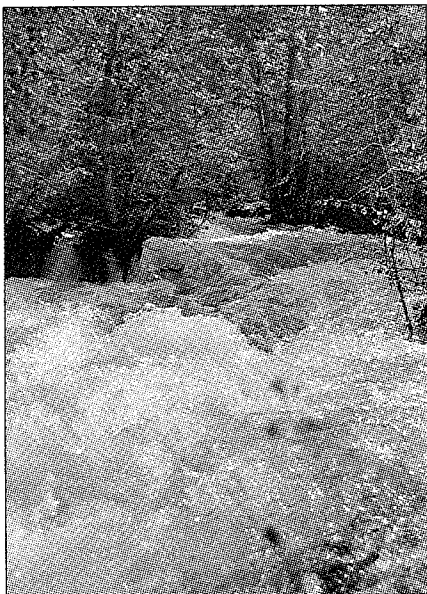
Fall 1996: The landbridge is receding but not gone. Lake level 6379.6 feet.

The year in review



Court Victory!

The Committee and its allies won another important court victory, defeating efforts to strip the El Dorado Court of its control over Mono Basin stream restoration programs. The court shares this responsibility with the State Water Resources Control Board until the Water Board adopts a final, enforceable restoration plan.



Mono Lake Continues to Rise

Runoff from the wet 1995-96 winter pushed Mono Lake up to 6380.1 feet, the highest point for 1996. This makes for a total increase of 5.5 feet since the Water Board ruling. Don't let the recent rise skew your expectations, however. The lake still needs to rise another 12 feet to reach the Water Board-ordered level—a rise which is still expected to take at least twenty years.

\$25,000 Federal Grant Received

The Committee's work in reviewing DWP's proposed restoration plans for Mono Lake's streams and waterfowl habitat won a \$25,000 grant of support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The grant was awarded as a match to the generous gifts made by members in the fall of 1995.

DWP's Restoration Plans Challenged

The MLC and allies joined together to challenge the draft restoration plans submitted by DWP to the Water Board. The flawed plans failed to incorporate key recommendations made by independent scientists for the restoration of Mono Basin streams and waterfowl habitat.

L.A. Water Conservation and Recycling Funds Appropriated

The MLC supported the commitment of funds by the California Legislature and Congress for water conservation and recycling projects to replace the water L.A. no longer diverts from Mono Lake. To date, the state has appropriated \$27 million of the promised \$36 million in AB 444 funds; the final \$9 million will be appropriated in 1997.

Trees Planted along Rush Creek

In partnership with DWP and the U. S. Forest Service, the Committee organized a tree planting project to help with restoration work on a recently reopened channel of lower Rush Creek. Under the direction of restoration specialist Scott English, MLC volunteers planted 225 Jeffrey pine seedlings, 260 cottonwoods, and numerous willow cuttings. Work continued through the summer in watering and weeding the newly planted trees.

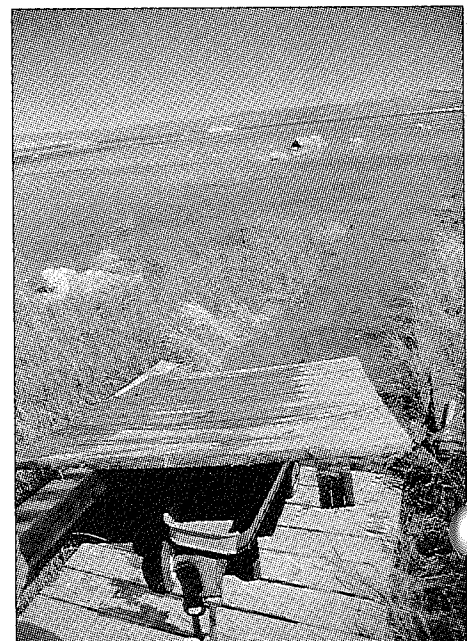
Acclaimed Outdoor Experiences Program Grows

In partnership with DWP, the Mothers of East Los Angeles Santa Isabel, Korean Youth and Community Center, and other L.A.-based community groups, the Committee brought inner-city youth to



Photo by Bartshe Miller

Mono Lake to experience the Eastern Sierra and see where L.A.'s water comes from. The Committee won a highly competitive \$16,000 Urban Resources Partnership grant to develop and co-teach (with community groups) L.A.-based water conservation workshops as part of expanding the Outdoor Experience program.



Help us protect and restore Mono Lake!

Photo by Kay Ogden

Mono Lake

Home Page Opened

With the assistance of several members, the MLC went online on the World Wide Web in 1996. We're working hard to expand the site, which already has lots of information for students and supporters alike—and is a new way to recruit Mono Lake supporters. Look us up at <http://www.monolake.org>.

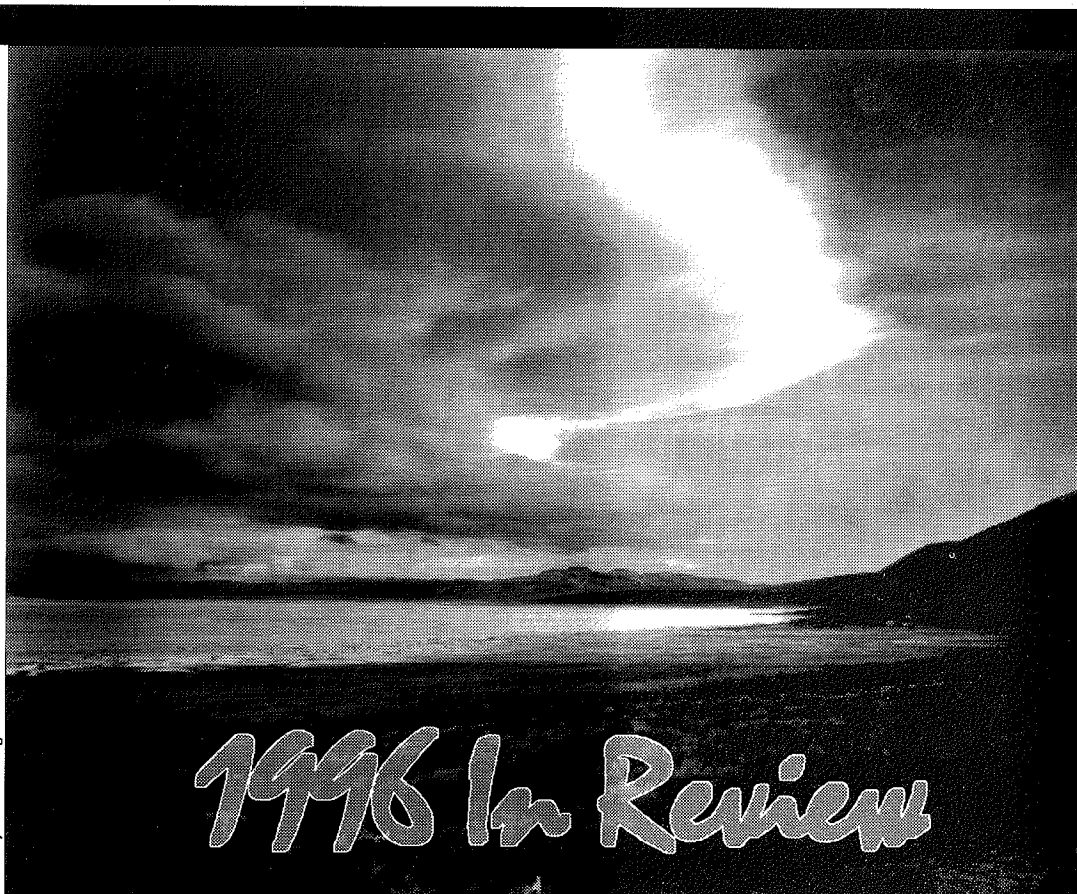
Restoration Week Founded

Committee established a program to bring members to Mono Lake for a week of fun and restoration work. Activities included planting and watering trees, mountain bike expeditions, the MLC Annual Meeting, and a fundraising 100-mile cycling tour through the Mono Lake region. Restoration Week also included the traditional rehydration ceremony at Mono Lake's shore. Two "Torch Bearers" made the 350-mile journey from DWP's headquarters in Los Angeles to bring water for the Mono Lake ceremony.



Photo by Kay Ogden

Photo by A. Schenkangas



Switzer Environmental Leadership Grant Received

The Committee received a \$15,000 grant from the Switzer Family and the San Francisco Foundation to help fund the work of our Mono Basin hydrology expert in reviewing DWP's proposed restoration plans for the Mono Basin. This is the second year that a generous Switzer grant has made this work possible.

Phalaropes Return to West Shore; Grebes Blanket Lake in Fall

Graceful flocks of phalaropes were once again seen on the west shore, most likely due to the rising lake creating new habitat for their favorite food: alkali fly pupae. Not far behind them in the fall migration were the eared grebes—hundreds of thousands of them, if not millions. Preliminary surveys indicated more grebes on the lake than have been

reported in recent years. The giant flocks of birds are just one reminder that, in 1996, Mono Lake has been on the mend. ➤



Jeffrey pines, Rush Creek, and the grand adventure

By Bartshe Miller

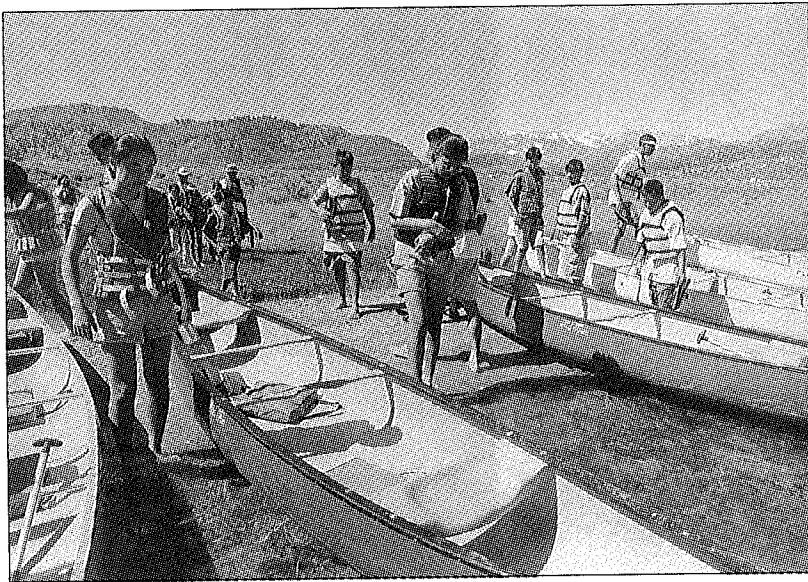


Photo by Bartshe Miller

I am scared, but I think this is really cool," remarked one boy. I could not see who it was. I did not recognize the voice yet, as the group from First African Methodist Episcopal had only just arrived a few hours ago. We were deep in the forest, hiking, at night, *without* a flashlight.

The imposing silhouettes of Jeffrey pines glided past silently as we hiked. We could barely distinguish the dirt road, just enough to know where to walk. No moon, only bright stars and the glowing Milky Way to give us light. Nervous chatter and laughter put some of the group at ease. After all, it was dark and there could be coyotes lurking just behind those trees!

But the fear of darkness and the unknown gave way to a more powerful sense of wonder and awe. Here we were, 350 miles from Los Angeles, relying mostly on our hearing and the feel of our feet on the ground, alone among the trees, the stars, and somewhere out there—the creatures of the night. Because of Mono Lake, we were having a grand adventure.

Five groups from Los Angeles

traveled to the Mono Basin this past summer to participate in the Outdoor Experiences Program. Two new groups, Iglesia Poder de Dios and Korean Youth and Community Center came up to Mono Lake for the first time. They



Photo by Bartshe Miller

Daisy helping with restoration along Rush Creek.

joined the three groups that had also visited the previous summer: Mothers of East Los Angeles Santa Isabel, First African Methodist Episcopal, and Executive Partners in Environmental Resource Training.

All of these community-based organizations participate in the ultra-low flush toilet distribution programs in Los Angeles. They are members of the Los Angeles Water Conservation Coalition, and collectively they represent a cross-section of the population of Los Angeles. For the past three summers, the Mono Lake Committee has worked together with these groups to bring children and young adults to Mono Lake for one simple and powerful reason: to experience the Mono Basin.

For the kids in the Outdoor Experiences Program, there is a lot to experience. A good number come from low-income neighborhoods. Most of the children and young adults have never ventured beyond the Los Angeles area.

Many have never camped before. Few have heard of Mono Lake.

We dive right into the program the first night after setting up the tents and eating dinner. A "night prowling" through the Jeffrey pine forest is a good way to begin by shattering myths and misconceptions about a new place (realizing that coyotes don't hunt humans helps everyone sleep better at night), and how many people can say they've hiked through the forest on a moonless night without a flashlight?

Over the next few days we walk Mono Lake's shores, swim and canoe its waters, and hike surrounding volcanoes. In the mountains above Mono Lake we wander along steep-walled canyons, beaver ponds, and alpine lakes. We have snowball fights and get drenched in waterfalls. For most participants, this is the first time for a whole new set of experiences:

hands in the snow, waterfall immersions, swimming in Mono Lake, climbing inside a volcano, smelling vanilla-scented Jeffrey pines, canoeing over underwater tufa towers, and even tasting traditional food of the Kuzedika'a—alkali fly pupae.

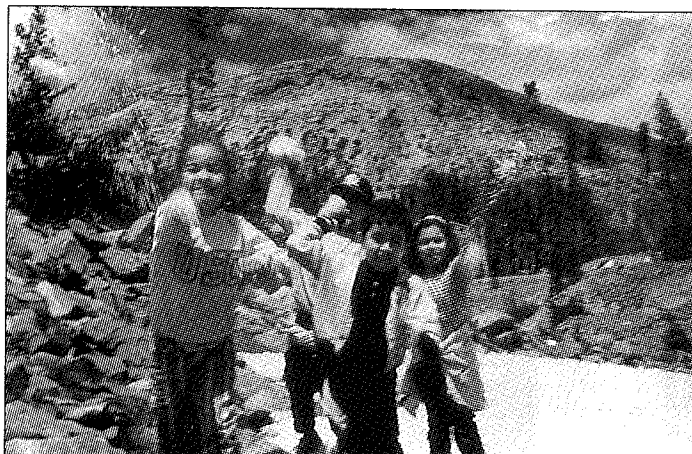
There is, of course, a good dose of education thrown in with all the fun.

Words can fill the gaps in our experience, but ultimately, the words alone do not affect change. Learning about the source of Los Angeles's water, realizing the value of Mono Lake and its connection to LA, and comprehending the difference that individual action can make in preserving water resources:

These are concepts which can be best understood in the context of experiencing the Mono Basin. We can all understand that we are connected to Mono Lake by water, and that using water responsibly will help protect it, but this knowledge on its own does not necessarily motivate us to care. The most passionate supporters of Mono Lake, past and present, were those who developed a personal relationship with the water and the land.

Out of all the activities that take place for each group, perhaps the most powerful one is helping with stream restoration. Three of the Outdoor Experiences groups helped water newly planted Jeffrey pines along Rush Creek. Periodic watering is critical to the survival of newly planted seedlings. At first, some of the kids complained a little about what sounded like work. Dissatisfaction mounted when we arrived at Rush Creek. A hot afternoon, no shade, lots of mosquitoes, and we had to wade across the creek to reach the pines. After a brief explanation of why we do restoration work and how to water the Jeffrey pines, we began the task.

An amazing transformation took



Pummeling our fearless Education Director with snow near Tioga Pass

Photo by Bartshe Miller

place. Nearly everyone became obsessed with watering the trees. All but necessary conversation ceased. Kids searched out young Jeffrey pines hidden among the sagebrush as if their very lives depended on it. Watering the young trees suddenly became an all-important mission.

Anything that even remotely resembled a Jeffrey pine seedling got water. What provoked the swift change in attitude? Was it something I said? I doubt it.

Was it the opportunity to restore stream habitat and give something back to Mono Lake? Maybe. Was it the memory of tall Jeffrey pines beneath countless stars? Everyone probably had slightly different reasons.

How do you measure success in environmental education, or more specifically watershed education? This is the question I find myself asking after my first summer leading the Mono Lake Committee's Outdoor Experiences Program. Pictures can stir the heart, but add sound, smell, touch, some well-placed ideas, and even taste, and you have the ingredients necessary to form a lasting relationship. Watershed education is about establishing relationships. Everyone who came to Mono Lake this past summer continued a relationship or began a new one with the water and the land. But what is the measure of a success-

ful relationship? This is subjective and can not exactly be quantitatively analyzed. With environmental education we can set goals and objectives, satisfy them, and declare some success, but can this be the true measure of our efforts? Perhaps decades from now when we restore Mono Lake, its streams and waterfowl habitat, and meet real water needs without further compromising what precious little of our natural water

resources we have remaining, maybe then we can truly measure our success.

Bartshe Miller is the Committee's Education Director. If you know of a group from Southern California or the Bay Area that might fit with the Outdoor Experiences Program, please contact him at (619) 647-6595 or via e-mail at bartshem@monolake.org.



Photo by Bartshe Miller

Min waters a Jeffrey pine seedling near Rush Creek's recently rewatered channel 10.

Bike-A-Thon 1997

Restoration Week and Century

by Kay Ogden

1996 was a year of many changes for the Mono Lake Committee, and the 17th Annual Bike-A-Thon was no exception. The traditional route from Los Angeles to Mono Lake was ridden by just a few dedicated cyclists, and a new set of exploration activities and a hundred-mile bicycle ride became the highlight of five days of activities here at Mono Lake.

Dedicated cyclists

Restoration Week started in Los Angeles on Monday, August 26th, with a handful of dedicated "Torch Bearers" who were set to ride the 350 miles to Mono Lake in record time! Denny Green, Frank Smith, George Tredick, Pete Smith, and Martha Davis met at the reflecting pools in front of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) and held a private ceremony to honor not only the important tradition of the Bike-A-Thon, but also to pay respect to Los Angeles groups who are working hard to educate and conserve water in their communities.

The riders strapped vials of collected water onto their bikes, the SAG team

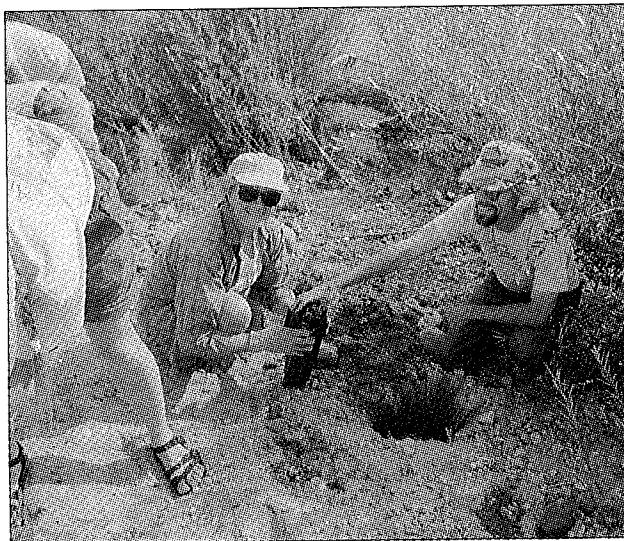


Photo by Kay Ogden

(that's support and gear!) collected water to be shared with Restoration Week participants at the Rehydration Ceremony later in the week, and then the caravan left in the quiet of dawn to begin the journey to Mono Lake.

Unfortunately, as Denny was riding into Palmdale at two in the afternoon (what a pace!), he was struck by a car. Denny's ride ended at the hospital, where he was diagnosed with a fractured collarbone, bruises, and road rash. We are all very grateful that Denny will fully recover and look forward to seeing him next year pedaling up Highway 395!

Exploring the Mono Basin

As the remaining Torch Bearers cycled towards Mono Lake, Restoration Week activities started in the Mono Basin on Wednesday with a 19-mile, off-road Diversion Dam bicycle ride, which passed by three of DWP's diversion dams. The ride was fairly difficult with rough

roads, long climbs and over 1590' of total elevation gain! Later that day, special tours of Rush Creek and South Tufa were given by MLC staff.

The second Exploration Day started early with canoe tours of Mono Lake, which offer a way to explore the lake's unique beauty from a different perspective. The two tours were an opportunity to glide through groves of tufa towers, float alongside diving birds, and to dip paddles into swarms of brine shrimp. The afternoon featured a tour of Panum Crater, the youngest and smallest crater in the Mono

Crater chain, and then an off-road bike ride up Lundy Canyon! The riders climbed over 1840' in just 18 miles, but were rewarded with spectacular views of Mono Lake. Later that evening, friends and family gathered to hear storyteller and MLC Sales Manager Tom Siewert share tales of kings, queens, talking trees, and howling wolves from his grab bag of stories.

Work by the creek

Friday was Restoration Day, and for over 30 participants it was a long, hot and wonderful day filled with much-needed hard work. Over 120 Jeffrey pines were planted and watered; an additional 225 Jeffrey pines, cottonwoods, and willows were watered; a survival tally of previously planted trees along Rush and Lee Vining creeks was conducted; and old irrigation pipe from an experimental project was picked up from Lee Vining Creek. This day would not have happened without the support of TreePeople, which nurtured the 120 Jeffrey pine seedlings throughout the summer in Los Angeles, and the guidance of Scott English, a biologist who has designed and supervised much of the



restoration work along the creeks.

For those who weren't too tired, an advanced off-road bicycle ride was offered in the afternoon, and the day wrapped up with an evening discussion at the Committee Information Center and Bookstore about recent NASA research done at Mono Lake.

Just as the sun was setting, a rumor that the Torch Bearers were approaching turned out to be true. Friends and strangers lined the street to cheer on the arrivals of Pete Smith (venerable SAG driver and incredible supporter!) and George Tredick (who rode and helped SAG). Then in the dusk and up the final hill came our lone all-way rider and Torch Bearer, Frank Smith, to the cheers and tears of those who gathered.

Rehydration

For cyclists, Saturday brought the chance to explore the June Lake Loop in the morning; for everyone, the day was filled with the events of the Rehydration Ceremony and the Committee's Annual Meeting. Executive Director pro tem Martha Davis presided over the Rehydration Ceremony and reminded those who attended that the work to truly preserve Mono Lake and its tributary streams has just begun. Participants reached high and poured vials of water into Mono Lake to show their commitment to the continuing protection and restoration of Mono Lake and its tributaries. The water was drawn from places each individual felt to be especially significant: a barren stretch of Lee Vining Creek awaiting restoration, for example, or buckets of DWP reflecting pool water brought from L.A., or perhaps even the water tap at home.

Good food, fun, updates on stream restoration, and the opportunity to meet *Storm Over Mono* author John Hart made the Annual Meeting, held on Mono's



Torch Bearers George Tredick (left) and Frank Smith (right) join MLC Executive Director Martha Davis in the Rehydration Ceremony.

north shore, a great time for all. Later, a hike along Mill and Wilson creeks with Eastern Sierra Policy Director Heidi Hopkins featured a discussion of the restoration potential of Mill Creek's deltaic bottomlands.

The Century

Sunday brought a new event offered by the MLC—a Century! The inaugural Century Ride was a 100-plus-mile journey through the scenic backcountry of the Eastern Sierra that started and finished in Lee Vining at the high school. Although the Mono Basin had been smoke-filled all week due to the fires in Yosemite, Sunday brought clear skies and clean air, a relief for the cyclists and volunteers.

Forty-three riders rode south on Highway 395 to the first rest stop, but only after climbing Deadman Summit, the first "hill" of the day. After snacking on fresh muffins and goodies donated by event sponsors, the cyclists again rode south and then turned at Benton Crossing Road. Here the road becomes a lightly traveled country road, winding up several more hills until the first lunch stop at Watterson Divide (7525'), where the view of White Mountain Peak was a main topic of conversation!

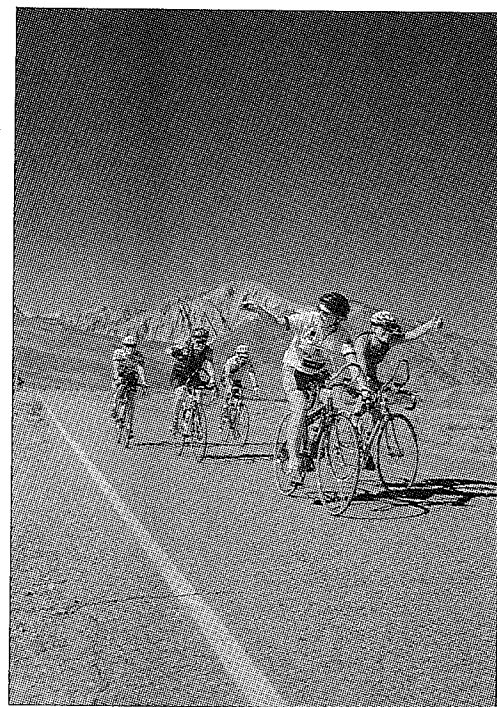
Once hydrated and full, the cyclists had a short rest before starting their

next climb to Wildrose Summit, and were then rewarded with an exciting downhill. After turning west on Highway 120, riders had an incredible view of Boundary Peak followed by a ride through Adobe Valley (and all the dips!) to the next lunch stop.

Then the cyclists tackled the last incline of the day, Sagehen Summit (8139'), and coasted down the other side through the Jeffrey pine forest. Here riders had their first glimpse of Mono Lake since leaving it behind earlier in the day. After soaking up the views at the final rest stop, riders cruised back into town, where a

barbecue and music were waiting for them. Century riders, Restoration Week participants, family, friends, community members, and MLC staff and interns all gathered at the barbecue to say good-bye until next year and to celebrate the close of Restoration Week!

Kay Ogden is the Committee's Special Events Coordinator. She's already working on next year's ride. 🚴



Restoration Week and Century Sponsors and Volunteers

Organizations

Backroads Bicycle Tours
CalNature Tours
Cellular One
Clif Bars
Global Sportswear
Knudsen & Sons, Inc.
Lifesong Awareness Camps
Lee Vining High School
Patagonia
Power Bars
Reidel Cycles
Sierra Septic Tank Service
Trailhead & Company
TreePeople

U. S. Forest Service
Vons—Bishop (both locations)
Vons—Mammoth Lakes

Individuals

Pete Bischoff
Jackie & Marty Bramlett
Dale Burger
Frank Byrd
Gerry Byrd
Deb Caldwell
Janet Carle
Erica Chapin
Terry Crawford
Shelli Edwards

Scott English
Kelly Farwell
Larry Ford
Ken Fortune
Michael Franz
Sachi Fukuman
Rick Graham
Craig Hansen
Pete Hein
Diane Hunt
Jim Jennings
Nancy Keplinger
Walter Keplinger
Mike Klapp
Nancy Lampson

Chuck Lippolt
John Lynch
Dave Mettam
Nickolas Mook
Don Newsome
Bill Rich
Jill Richards
Robin Roberts
Steve Schmidt
Charlie Simis
Pete Smith
Sue & Bud Stickles
Alan Taylor
Sarah Taylor
George Tredick
Mark Williams

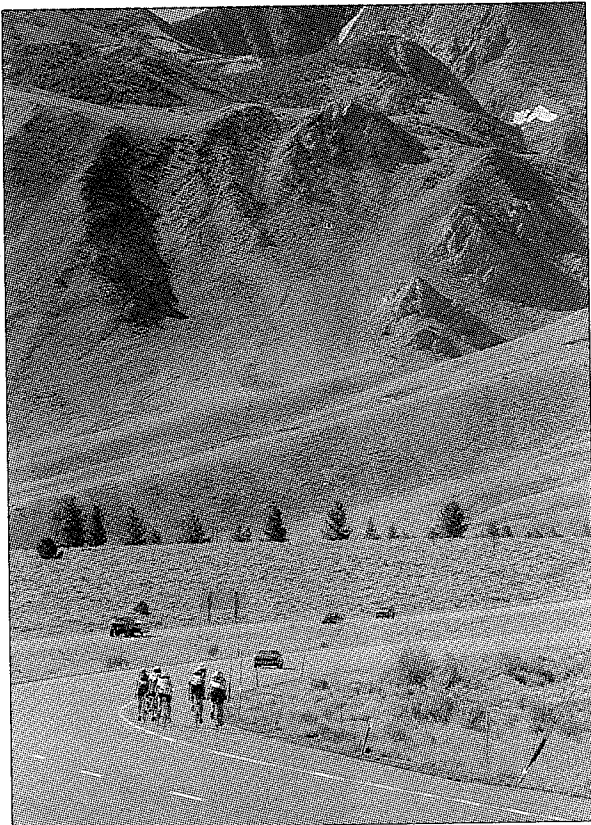
Restoration Week and Century Participants

Jodie Aas
Christine Arnson
Jillian Bogota
Tom Booker, family, and friends
Stephan Bork

Mr. Bredon and guest
John Brennan
Janet Carle
Bill Collins
Bryan Cook
Mike Cooper

Terry Crawford
Nancy Cuddeback
John Cuddeback
Robert D. Glenn
Nancy DiCarlo, family, and friends
Kathy Duvall
Canda Emmeluth
Bruce Emmeluth
Scott English
Sandra Evans
Paul Falkenstein
Sachiko Fortune
Kenji Fortune
Ken Fortune
Charles Fraser
Robert Fuller
Dominick Fuller
Vireo Gaines
Sally Gaines
Denny Green
Helen Green
Paul Green
Chris Hamma
Sarah Hess
Hans Hoff, family, and friends
Rich Howe
Sue Jahnke
Eric Jahnke
Larry Johnston
Renee Jones
Roger Kennedy
Jain Koepke
Carol Levin and family
Laura Lind
Chris Lizza

Charles Massieon
Pat Monzo
Patti Murphy
Michael Mutschler
Karen Neilsen
Dave Neilsen
Andrew Ogden
Edward Poll
Richard Potashin
Sheri Pueblo
Katie Quinlan
Mary Lee Ray
Nancy Rehg
Ron Richards
Lori Rifkin
Joan Rupp, family, and friends
Robin Sachs and family
Don Sada
Bill Sarno
Jim Sayer
Steve Schmidt
Joan Seear
Frank Smith
Anna Strathman
Patty Jo Struve
Kevin Thomas
Kelli Thompson
Timothy B. Tiernan
George Tredick
Clyde Underwood
Shelli W. Edwards
Art Walker
Martha Walker
Rene White
David Wimpfheimer



Mono Lake Newsletter, 10 years ago

Mono Lake Watch

by David Gaines

Editor's note: Ten years ago, Mono Lake Committee founder David Gaines wrote of his unabashed enthusiasm for the "real world" of nature. In a Newsletter article, reprinted in part below, Dave took hope from the land and rejoiced in the abundant life of the Mono Basin, of which he made himself an active, observant part. Tragically, his words here describe his last summer at Mono Lake; on a snowy day that winter Dave died in an auto accident. His writing endures, and here, from the Mono Lake Newsletter ten years ago, is what he had to say.

The summer solstice marks the height of Mono Lake's spring: flowers in colorful bloom, islands covered with gull eggs, sagebrush brimming with bird song...

The swell of life is contagious, and we, too, delight in the land and lake's rebirth. It works in our blood. It tears us away from desks, papers and telephones, and propels us into the real world of sprouts, buds and singing birds. The office can't contain us. We

move our weekly staff meeting down to the lake, where we can include desert peach blossoms, spadefoot toads, yellow-headed blackbirds and brine shrimp.

Outside my window, house wrens are singing incessantly. They can't sit still and neither can I. Yesterday I bicycled to lower Rush Creek, where one of the tufa-nesting ospreys was fishing for trout. The day before I joined avocets, phalaropes and winnowing snipe on Mono's north shore. Piles of papers wait impatiently while I count the clouds, take Mono's pulse and align myself with the changing seasons.

I'm a newsletter refugee. Today, instead of writing about lawsuits, I ambled to the summit of the ridge behind Lee Vining. From a small patch of tundra where horned larks nest, the world drops into water and space. Mono Lake sprawls across the landscape like a giant amoeba.

These ramblings connect my work to the land. They bring me face-to-face with what the poet Wallace Stevens called "point blank reality." Sometimes I'm led to epiphanies, but more often to questions and insights which are not always

simple or comfortable.

But, after all, that's why I'm trying to save this place: because it can teach us and put us in our place.

Looking down on Mono's cerulean waters, I think of burgeoning cities at the other end of the aqueduct. I think of a civilization estranged from the earth that sustains it. I think of the waste and pollution that, as Harold Gilliam warns ... threatens us all. I think of the fate of birds, flowers and children when the ozone layer is gone, the rains stop falling, and the bombs do.

I think of my life. I have not lived lightly on this earth, but have consumed, directly or indirectly, more than my share or need of water, topsoil, oil and other resources. I have fathered two children who also will burden this overcrowded planet.

But as long as the birds return and the flowers bloom, I will dream of a time when we value blue skies more than new automobiles, count our wealth in joy rather than possessions, and dwell in peace and balance with the earth. I am not without hope ...

Special Mono Lake Calendar opportunity for businesses

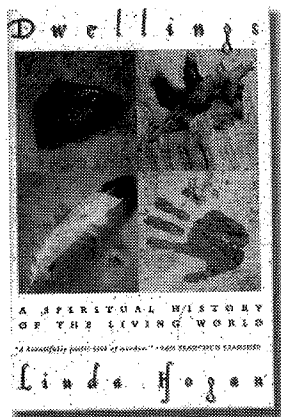
Looking for a distinctive gift for your customers, clients, or employees? The award-winning Mono Lake Calendar is a terrific choice, and a special production opportunity allows us to add a "shirttail" that keeps your company's name on the wall all year long!

The shirttail addition extends two inches below the regular calendar and can be printed with whatever message you like. Of course, the full-color Mono Lake Calendar spends the year on the office wall and so does your message. And for the Committee, calendar sales

help raise both funds and awareness of Mono Lake.

One regular shirttail purchaser reports that his customers get so excited about receiving the calendar that he's committed to purchasing them for many years to come.

We're planning the 1998 Mono Lake Calendar right now, so give a call right away if this opportunity interests you! Pricing is substantially lower than retail and varies with quantity. Please contact Tom Siewert at 619-647-6595 or via e-mail at toms@monolake.org.



Review by Kay Ogden, Special Events Coordinator

DWELLINGS

This beautiful little book by award-winning Chickasaw poet and novelist Linda Hogan expands the definition of "home." Hogan's spiritual writings offer praise to sky, water, earth, and animals and beautifully put into words feelings about nature not easily expressed.

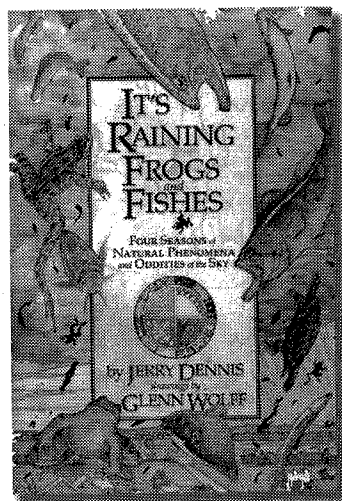
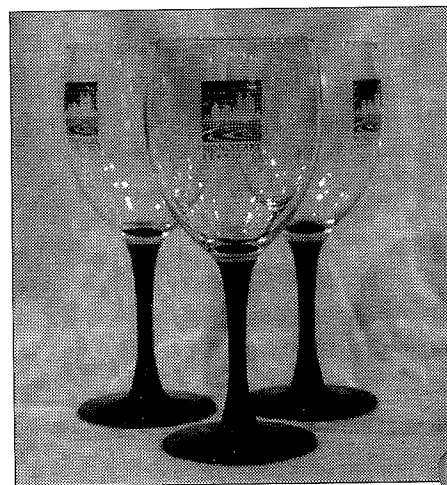
Softbound, 158 pages: \$11.00

NEW! COMMITTEE WINE GLASSES

These fine wine glasses feature the Committee's tufa, birds, and sky logo and a matching blue stem and base.

2 for \$12.00; 4 for \$23.00.

Shipped in special mailers.



Review by Wendy Stanford, Intern

IT'S RAINING FROGS AND FISHES: FOUR SEASONS OF NATURAL PHENOMENA AND ODDITIES OF THE SKY

This book draws on a rich history of bizarre natural phenomena both to hold your attention and to enhance its detailed information on more common natural happenings. It teaches children about the unique aspects of each season and can expand an adult's knowledge of subjects such as meteor showers, eclipses, and autumnal flying mammals!

Softbound, 324 pages: \$12.50

MONO LAKE RESTORATION T-SHIRT

This limited edition T (modeled here by Executive Director pro tem Martha Davis) was prepared especially for the 1996 Restoration Week, and now you can own one too! Due to their popularity, a second run of these two-sided, white shirts makes them available for a limited time. The front features a graphic blue, purple, and yellow image of Mono's tufa and birds while the back portrays a bicyclist riding hard to protect the lake.

White only; S-XXL: \$12.00





Staff review by Geoff McQuilkin, Communications Director

STORM OVER MONO

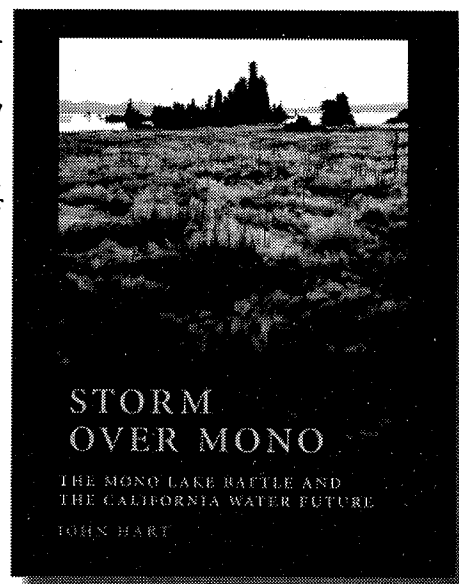
A limited number of signed copies are available!

Storm Over Mono captures the history and spirit of the fight to save Mono Lake. Author John Hart spent five years researching this well-balanced and thoroughly readable book and he successfully unravels the complex web of Mono Lake litigation and public policy.

Hart also examines the origins of ecological restoration in the Mono Basin and investigates how Mono advocates came to look beyond the losses of the day to recovering the past richness of the ecosystem.

All in all, *Storm over Mono* makes for engrossing reading about a special place and is a must for the bookshelf of any Monophile.

By John Hart; UC Press, 1996; 253 pages; 31 color plates, 61 b/w photos, and 10 maps: hardbound, \$50.00; softbound, \$29.95



1997 MONO LAKE CALENDAR

A favorite! The award-winning calendar featuring Mono Lake photographs by Fred Hirschmann, Don Jackson, William Neil, Jim Stimson, George Ward, and other leading photographers. With an essay by *Storm Over Mono* author John Hart, the 1997 Calendar captures the unique beauty of this remarkable inland sea and the surrounding basin.

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	1997 Mono Lake Calendar		
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Mono Lake Committee

P.O. Box 29, Lee Vining, CA 93541

Year-end giving can lower taxes and raise Mono Lake

As 1996 comes to a close, we hope you will consider taking advantage of potential tax savings by making a special year-end donation to the Mono Lake Committee. Your generous gift will benefit Mono Lake and can help you save on taxes.

Remember, the Mono Lake Committee received 501(c)(3) tax status from the Internal Revenue Service last year. This means:

- All donations to the Committee are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law;
- You can always write your check to "Mono Lake Committee;"
- Your donation supports all the Committee's outstanding programs.

And don't forget: to affect your 1996 taxes, your gift must be made by midnight on December 31, 1996.


As you prepare to file your 1996 taxes, you might want to consider the role that a year-end donation of cash, securities, or other assets could play in your plans. A year-end gift may create substantial

tax savings for you next spring, particularly if you itemize deductions.

Gifts of appreciated assets, such as stocks, bonds, and mutual funds also are popular, and the Committee is now able to accept such donations directly. By contributing appreciated assets that you have owned for more than a year ("long term"), you may be able to reduce capital gains tax that would be due if you simply sold the assets.

Many members also take time to review their overall estate plans at the year's end. When reviewing wills or living trusts, people often choose to include charitable dispositions. There are many ways to arrange meaningful gifts as part of these plans, and we'd be happy to discuss individual arrangements with you.

In short, there are numerous opportunities for you to receive tax savings by making a year-end gift to the Mono Lake Committee. As always, it is important to ask your professional advisor about the methods of giving that will offer you the

greatest benefit. The Committee is happy to work with you and your advisor to craft a personalized plan. 

Special offer

This year, the Mono Lake Committee is offering two exciting gifts in thanks for your special year-end gift.

Members who make a year-end gift of \$50 or more will receive a free 1997 Mono Lake Calendar.

Members who make a year-end gift of \$250 or more will be listed as Mono Lake Defense Trust members in all Committee publications, and will receive both the Mono Lake Calendar and a signed edition of John Hart's spectacular book, *Storm Over Mono*.

Please mail your donation using the envelope enclosed in this newsletter so we know you would like the year-end incentives (or enclose a note if you prefer to use your own envelope)!

Berkeley legal symposium to include Mono Lake

The ramifications of the lawsuits brought in defense of Mono Lake are just beginning to be felt throughout California. In particular, the Public Trust Doctrine is being used in several environmental struggles for water resources, echoing its landmark importance in Mono Lake's protection. An upcoming environmental symposium, to be held at the University of California at Berkeley on February 21 and 22, will examine the significant role the Public Trust, and other laws, are playing in ecosystem protection.

The symposium brings together a

distinguished panel of experts including Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and Professor Joseph Sax, who authored the influential article "The Public Trust Doctrine in Natural Resource Law: Effective Judicial Intervention." Sax's article led the Mono Lake Committee and National Audubon Society to select the Public Trust Doctrine as the basis for Mono Lake litigation.

Other speakers will include practitioners and scholars of law, economics, and the sciences, representing the most significant ideas in the field of ecosystem protection. The symposium will focus on

the challenges and opportunities inherent in using the law to protect and manage whole ecosystems.

A break-out session will provide the opportunity to join attorneys and policy makers involved in the Mono Lake litigation to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of this application of the Public Trust Doctrine in setting the stage for environmental restoration and long-term protection at Mono Lake.

For more information, contact the office of the Ecology Law Quarterly at Boalt Hall, 510-642-0457.

Accolades

In Memoriam

Richard and May Belle Gaines of Windsor sent in a donation in memory of Mono Lake Committee founder **David Gaines**, their nephew. Dave died in a tragic wintertime auto accident in 1988.

William and Florence Stone of Walnut Creek made a donation in memory of William's father **Charles Stone**.

A donation to Mono Lake was made by **Ronald and Elaine Melin** of Torrance in memory of **Pepper**, their loyal friend and pet.

Special Gifts

Marcus Cole of Madison, Wisconsin, honored friends **Michael and Kathy** with a gift to the Committee.

Phyllis Edwards of Scotts Valley made a gift to Mono Lake in honor of the 76th birthday of **Warren Edwards**. 🐾

New MLC job opportunity

The Committee is seeking environmentally conscious applicants for the full-time position of Sales Manager at the Information Center and Bookstore in Lee Vining.

The Sales Manager is in charge of overseeing, executing, and analyzing the Committee's retail, wholesale, and mailorder programs. The position also includes responsibilities for general marketing and promotion of the store, Committee products, and Mono Lake's protection.

For more information, contact **Shannon Nelson**, Mono Lake Committee, P.O. Box 29, Lee Vining CA 93541. Phone: 619-647-6595; E-mail: shannonn@monolake.org

From the mailbag

"In the spring of 1980 a companion and I were on the last leg of a trek around the Annapurna massif in Nepal. Walking down a trail in the Kali Gaudaki gorge I met two trekkers coming up the trail, one wearing a blue T-shirt with a round logo and text reading "Mono Lake: It's worth saving."

Funny thing. I was wearing the same T-shirt.

We stopped and discussed our interest in Mono Lake on the other side of the world. Lovers of Mono Lake are everywhere!"

— Art Walker, San Jose

Do you have a similarly striking Mono Lake experience to share? A tale of where your T-shirt has been? A photo of your Mono Lake bumpersticker in front of, say, the Eiffel Tower? We're looking for stories and photos which show the worldwide distribution of Mono Lake interest and enthusiasm. Selections will be printed in the Mono Lake Newsletter.

Send your materials to: Mono Lake Newsletter, P.O. Box 29, Lee Vining, CA 93541 (USA, for those of you far away)!



Photo by Sarah Taylor

The Mono Lake Committee staff, summer 1996

Top row (l to r): Bartshe Miller, Tom Siewert, Greg Reis, Juliet Breckenridge, Nathan Bomer, Paul Levine. Second row: Shannon Nelson, Wendy Stanford, Kristen Drake, Matt Newman, Michelle Hofmann. Bottom row: Geoff McQuilkin, Laura Maltby, Kay Ogden, Heidi Hopkins, Kathi Richards. Working too hard to be pictured: Martha Davis, Sherri Kalivoda.

Give a gift of Mono Lake!

A Mono Lake Committee membership is the perfect holiday present. A gift membership of \$25 or more supports Mono Lake, and your lucky recipient will receive:



A special gift membership welcome card



A 1997 Mono Lake Calendar (while supplies last)



A year-long subscription to the *Mono Lake Newsletter*



A warm welcome to the Mono Lake family



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