

MONO LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Fall 2011



It's fall—time to reflect on the summer behind and prepare for the winter ahead. Looking back, there is one particular moment, a little window into a day at the Mono Lake Committee. It was an unassuming summer afternoon, and the moment was as simple as this: Bartshe stuck his head in the office door and said, “The Forest Service is cutting their South Tufa tours. They’re not doing them anymore.”

At the time we were knee deep in the news that Mono Lake was on the state park closure list. Forest Service budget cuts already meant friends doing good work at the Scenic Area Visitor Center were being laid off. It felt like a last straw, like big, important things were literally crumbling around us.

My introduction to Mono Lake was on a South Tufa tour in my senior year of high school. Years later, as an intern for the Committee I crafted my own South Tufa tour to share this place with people who were brave and curious enough to bump down the dirt road and spend an hour at the lake. The scientific, legal, and natural history that is explored in those tours is deep, vast, and critical to Mono Lake’s ongoing protection.

These things—access to the lake, state reserve rangers, education programs—they are bricks in the wall of protection for the lake. If people can’t visit Mono Lake, that’s a problem. If people don’t have the opportunity to learn about the Mono Basin, that’s a problem. Shifts in the economic and political landscape affect the way we work towards the change we seek in the physical landscape, and these shifts can happen in the blink of an eye. That’s why the Committee is here—to do the work of coming up with sustainable solutions at any given moment. In these pages I hope you’ll see not only news of problems, but also solutions. In fact, we’re crossing our fingers that by the time this *Newsletter* makes it to your mailbox you’ll already be seeing some of the solutions in action.

It’s fall—the wood is stacked, the shovels are ready, and we’re hunkering down for another season of solutions for this place we all love so much.

—Arya Degenhardt, Communications Director



COVER PHOTO BY ARYA DEGENHARDT

ROSANNE CATRON

Early season snow and fall color in Lundy Canyon.

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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Campaign advances to keep Mono Lake's state park open

Public support and proposed solutions are key to progress

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

California's budget woes played out over the summer as word of the planned closure of 70 state parks, including Mono Lake and adjacent shoreline lands that compose the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve, spread far and wide. The Mono Lake Committee has been hard at work seeking solutions to change the state's plan. At press time the chance of success is looking very good, which is rewarding given the common closure responses we heard at Mono Lake over the summer: "no way," "how can we stop this," and "what are they thinking?"

Indeed, it remains unclear exactly what the thinking was behind the closure list released on May 13, 2011. The Committee submitted a public records request the next day, seeking the analysis that justified placing Mono Lake on the closure list. Earlier in the year the legislature provided 11 analysis points that must be considered, and our own internal review found Mono Lake to be strong on most points (there are no major infrastructure improvements needed, for example), although weak on fee collection. Interestingly, we still haven't received the state's analysis as of press time, despite further inquiries from our attorneys.

The analysis, if it exists, should consider the many impacts of closing the Mono Lake Reserve. While adventurous visitors will always find their way to the water's edge, actual closure is quite dramatic because state resources and oversight are removed. Among many things, two major visitor access points to the lake would be closed, ranger programs for the public would be discontinued, permitting of scientific studies and film projects on the lake would be shuttered, and coordination of volunteers and programs for visiting

school groups would be discontinued. In a closure situation, many visitors planning their trips in advance would simply choose to visit other destinations, causing local economic damage.

Nonetheless, while the inclusion of Mono Lake on the closure list remains on shaky ground, there it is. And that means that decision makers needed to hear concerns from the public.

Committee members and Mono Lake fans have been writing letters and signing locally placed petitions all summer. We've delivered over 4,000 letters and signatures in Sacramento so far. "Delivered" truly means delivered: each Friday, Sacramento Policy Associate Betsy Reifsnider hand-carries a fresh stack of letters and petitions to Governor Jerry Brown, Parks Director Ruth Coleman, Mono County's State Assemblymember Kristin Olsen, and State Senator Ted Gaines. Assemblymember Olsen's staff is so used to Betsy's weekly visits that they've started saying, "Oh there you are, we've been expecting you!" On one occasion, Assemblymember Olsen happened to be on

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Campers with a tufa fire, 1970s. When you invite 250,000 people to visit your favorite lake, visitor management experts like state park rangers are a critical asset. When the first state park rangers arrived in 1982 tourists camped on the shoreline, made campfires in tufa, and carted whole tufa towers away in their cars to decorate their front lawns.

hand to personally receive the thick stack of support and exclaimed, “Wow!”

Public concern—your voice—really makes a difference in these public issues. As a result of hearing so much support for Mono Lake, both Olsen and Gaines made their first visits to Mono Lake in the early fall, taking time to meet Mono Lake Reserve staff, experience the lake by canoe, see the great regional economic benefit of the Reserve, and discuss solutions with the Committee. The Governor and Parks Director Coleman also made private trips to the lake over the summer, and they are well aware that they need to help move solutions forward that remove Mono Lake from the closure list.

Seeking solutions to avert closure

Amidst the legal questions and public pressure against closure, the Mono Lake Committee has been working hard to identify solutions that will keep the Mono Lake Reserve open.

Parks in general, including the Mono Lake Reserve, need to look to three foundational elements for support: 1) the state Department of Parks & Recreation, 2) the community of park supporters, and 3) visitors to the park itself.

The parks agency of course is the key player, with the highly trained staff and depth of experience to manage the sovereign state lands and waters at Mono Lake sustainably for public enjoyment. Even though the agency’s budget is faltering, the presence of park rangers at Mono Lake is invaluable.

The community of supporters is the next major resource. In an era of dwindling state budgets, park advocates like Committee members need to step up and offer support. Happily, Mono Lake is very strong on this point, starting with the tens of thousands of Mono Lake advocates. A thriving volunteer program started by the Committee nine years ago serves the Reserve and makes programs and public contact happen that the state can no longer afford (see page 5). Non-profit fundraising also substantially underwrites the Reserve’s operation.

The weak spot for the Mono Lake Reserve is the third foundation element: visitors. There are, of course, plenty of visitors—over 250,000 annually—and they are generally quite enthusiastic about Mono Lake. But while visitors spend money in town and benefit the local economy greatly, there are no visitor fees collected that go directly to the Reserve (the fee charged at South Tufa goes to the Forest Service). So when Sacramento decision makers look at their spreadsheets, they unfortunately give Mono the scarlet “no revenue” mark.

A modest user fee

The revenue-generation weakness at Mono Lake also holds the solutions that can keep the park open. User fees of some sort are a reasonable place to change the operating formula for the state park at Mono Lake, especially when you consider that an estimated 40% of visitors come from

international and out-of-state locations, meaning they are enjoying the lake but are not part of the California taxpayer base that supports park operation. Could collecting a visitor fee equivalent to a coffee shop stop for a latte make a difference?

In the Committee’s discussions with State Parks administrators, we found the agency very receptive to bringing back the user fee as a way to change how business is done at the Mono Lake Reserve—and that change in business practices, in turn, is a firm basis for removing Mono Lake from the closure list. Given the low cost and high efficiency of the Reserve operation, adding a user fee to the already strong level of community support means it is possible to substantially strengthen the foundation of the Reserve and thus keep it open and operating.

In fact, a user fee was once charged at the state reserve access points to the lake. It was set aside in 1997 when South Tufa fees went into effect.

How would reviving the user fee work? The concept under discussion is to charge a per-vehicle parking fee at the Old Marina site, starting in 2012. Collection would be through a self-pay system. While state park fees generally go to Sacramento, the arrangement at Mono Lake would focus on returning revenue directly to the operation of the Mono Lake Reserve. This would be accomplished by the Reserve working with its specially-designated cooperating partner organization, the non-profit Bodie Foundation, which would collect the fees, cover basic site operational costs, and invest the remainder in funding the state park ranger that runs the Reserve on the ground.

Other parks on the closure list may seek other approaches, such as swapping operating duties and costs between agencies. Even non-profits now have the opportunity to take over operation of a state park thanks to new legislation. But none of these approaches comes with money, meaning once again that park-generated fees are key to continued operation.

Will there be some confusion as a web of user fees is created? You bet—but it’s a small price to pay for keeping the Mono Lake Reserve open. Federal fee passes will get you in the door at Yosemite and South Tufa, but not Old Marina, and vice versa. If you go to Bodie State Historic Park in the morning, that will cover your afternoon visit to the Mono Lake Reserve—but not the other way around. Good, clear information will be critical for visitors, and the Committee expects future fee system discussions to look at how to bridge the various Mono Lake sites and create a universal visitor pass of some sort.

Moving a solution forward is urgent as decisions to revise the park closure list are likely to be made this fall. The Committee is optimistic that implementing a solution at Mono Lake will keep the Reserve open, under the expert care of state park rangers, and ready for all of us to visit and enjoy next summer. ❖

Can the Forest Service pick up state slack?

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

With budget woes showering down on California's State Park system, a natural question has arisen here at Mono Lake: Could the US Forest Service, which manages vast tracts of federal land across Mono County, help out? After all, they too have expertise in land and recreation management.

The answer, it turns out, is no.

Recent budget cuts sent down from Washington, DC underscored, highlighted, and then shone a spotlight on that answer. Far from looking for new duties, it turns out that the Inyo National Forest is in much the same situation as the State Park system, cutting deeply into core programs and searching for ways to keep its own basic operations afloat.

This past summer budget cuts to the Inyo included personnel layoffs, campground closures, a freeze in hiring that has left key positions vacant, and multiple service reductions. In the Mono Basin these have resulted in the full shutdown of public programs the Forest Service has led for decades (see page 6) and serious questions about how to keep the agency's Scenic Area Visitor Center doors open.

Collaboration and partnerships to make the most of scarce resources is an area of focus for the Forest Service and for State Parks (and the Mono Lake Committee, too). But the bottom line is that no government agency has the spare funding or capacity to simply take over another agency's duties.

Reshuffling which government entity does what isn't a roadmap to long-term solutions. Instead, a new era of user fees, community collaboration, and other yet-to-be-determined solutions is fast arriving.

There are many discussions to be had to figure out how to put these new approaches to work at Mono Lake. Some programs are already well underway, such as the successful Mono Lake Volunteer Program and the Mono Lake Committee's field interpretation services for the public.

But others, like resolving a potentially confusing web of user fees, will require substantial investment to find stable long-term approaches that work for visitors, for management agencies, for non-profits, and for the local community. And with more federal budget cuts on the horizon for 2012, the work of finding these answers is already upon us. ♦

Volunteers help visitors enjoy Mono Lake

by Janet Carle, Mono Lake Volunteer Coordinator

More than 40 Mono Lake Volunteers helped visitors enjoy their experience at Mono Lake over the summer by guiding tours, roving and answering questions at the lakeshore, helping at the Scenic Area Visitor Center, staffing special events, assisting research scientists, and removing invasive plants.

Now in its eighth season, the Mono Lake Volunteer Program is more important than ever, as agency budgets shrink and interpretive opportunities for the public are cut. Volunteers make it possible to maintain a high quality visitor experience at Mono Lake. The program partners—the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve, Inyo National Forest, Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, Mono Lake Committee, and the Bodie Foundation—provide training and support for the growing group of volunteers. Participants are locals, second-home owners, and people from as far away as Santa Barbara, Dana Point, and Reno and Fallon, Nevada, who love the Mono Basin.



In 2011 the Mono Lake Volunteers donated over 1,800 hours—leading interpretive tours, answering questions at the lakeshore and the Scenic Area Visitor Center, and helping with restoration projects.

The Mono Lake Volunteers donated over 1,800 hours to education and stewardship activities this season. This is a huge contribution to the local economy and to visitors from around the world. We couldn't provide a great visitor experience without them. For more information on the Volunteer Program visit monolake.org/mlc/volunteer.

Budget cuts eliminate Forest Service interpretation in the Mono Basin

by Sarah Melcher

The summer of 2011 brought additional news of budget cuts to the US Forest Service, directly affecting visitor services, staffing, interpretive programs, and hours of operation throughout the Inyo National Forest. At the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center, two seasonal staff members were laid off, all interpretive programs were cut, and hours of operation were reduced. This trend is likely to continue with further cuts in the upcoming fiscal year. With over 164,000 visitors to the Visitor Center in 2010, increasing numbers of people are depending on a visitor center with severely limited resources, no on-site management, and no ranger-led interpretive programs.

According to Nancy Upham, Public Affairs Officer for the Inyo National Forest, in order to tackle the unwieldy federal deficit, all federal agencies are receiving budget reductions, which, unfortunately, are deeply felt on the ground.

Twenty years of connecting people to Mono Lake

1992 marked the grand opening of the long-awaited Scenic Area Visitor Center. In the very first year of operation over 64,000 people visited in search of information and visitor services and by 1994 that number had swelled to an astonishing 117,800 people. About 47,000 of those people also viewed the featured film and about 15,000 attended one or more of the many interpretive programs offered at the time.

In the early years the Visitor Center offered a wide and varied array of programs, including campfire programs and ranger-led hikes to destinations such as Gardisky Lake, Black Point, Bennettville, and Lundy Canyon. There were also

programs specifically for children at the Visitor Center and at South Tufa. There were often 20–30 different programs offered per week, some offered multiple times, and all were guided by paid interpretive rangers.

There were three full-time staff members at the Visitor Center in 1992, supplemented by six seasonal staff during the summer months. Nowadays, the three remaining Forest Service staff members at the Visitor Center are required to serve an ever-increasing number of visitors with ever-diminishing resources.

The slow demise of interpretive programs

As of this past summer, all Forest Service ranger-guided tours and programs have been canceled. The daily South Tufa walk, a 26-year tradition of the Forest Service, has been postponed indefinitely due to the lack of financial support for an interpretive ranger. Patio talks, given three times daily since 1992, were ended as well. These cuts, although dramatic, are definitely not sudden. Rather, they are the final end to the slow demise of the Forest Service interpretive programs over a period of almost 20 years.

The Visitor Center was funded with a \$5 million grant for construction with no special appropriations for further development or operations. Now, almost 20 years after the Visitor Center opened, hours of all the Inyo National Forest's visitor centers are being reduced to align with the amount of staffing needed simply to keep the doors open. The bottom line is that Forest Service management is having to make decisions on how to use what limited resources remain, which means that education and interpretation programs get reduced so that visitor centers can stay open for the public. According to Upham, interpretation is still a priority for the Forest Service since the Inyo has so many interesting places to interpret.

Mono Lake, of course, is one of those places. And interpretive programs are much more than a nice walk. Interpretation is integral to managing public lands because it fosters public responsibility toward the cultural and natural resources of the area. As a Mono Lake ranger recently said, "Someone in uniform needs to be there to mingle with people, to offer information on the natural and cultural history of the place, and connect them to that place." Tough budget times don't change the fact that education is the only way to encourage interest, excitement, and dedication to special places like Mono Lake. ♦

Sarah Melcher was a Mono Lake Intern during the summers of 2010 and 2011. She is back at St. Olaf College in Minnesota for her senior year.



In the summer of 2011 the Forest Service cut Mono Basin interpretive programs, ending 26 years of ranger-led South Tufa tours. Mono Lake Committee-led tours, shown here, will continue in 2012.

Now showing: *The Mono Lake Story*

by Elin Ljung

Here at the Mono Lake Committee we are extremely careful to use the resources we have wisely. This means when it comes to technology we often find ourselves walking a fine line between staying on the cutting edge and making do with what we have.

We navigate complex statewide water policy issues and overcome restoration obstacles with progressive solutions, but we do all of that work from an aging office in Lee Vining—making sure members' contributions stretch as far as possible.

And so we stretched the old beloved slideshow as far as it could go. When it began running in 1998 it shared the Mono Lake story with audiences perfectly. However, after 13 years it was in serious need of updating—the story had become outdated as new chapters continue to be made, and the obsolete format was even too old to be retro.

Making the leap from slides to high-definition film was daunting, but we knew that telling the Mono Lake story the right way was important enough to make that leap.

We found the film team, Bristlecone Media, after seeing a short film they produced for our neighbor non-profit Friends of the Inyo. From the very first meeting Ryan Christensen's and Jonah Matthewson's interpretive experience and passion for Mono Lake seemed like a perfect fit.

Right away we decided to tell the story through interviews instead of a single narrator. This was a challenge—we set up interviews with more than 20 people and Bristlecone Media ultimately collected over 50 hours of interview footage, which they wove together to tell the story. The resulting framework shows how deeply so many people have connected with this place and offers a fitting, grassroots telling of the story.

Ryan and Jonah recommended Los Angeles-based composer Cody Westheimer for the musical score, knowing that his extensive experience scoring films, TV shows, and documentaries would prove valuable. Cody, who is also passionate about conservation, visited the lake for inspiration and wrote original music to complement the storyline. In fact, he was so inspired by the stories of David Gaines playing the mandolin that he picked one up to add to the mix.

The Mono Lake Story was shown in our Information Center & Bookstore all summer, but we held a special “green carpet” premiere during the Defense Trust Weekend in late September. Ryan, Jonah, and Cody all traveled to Lee Vining to celebrate and held a question-and-answer session about the production.

The film is also making an impact farther afield. Due to our film permit, we cannot sell the DVD. However, it is available for anyone who joins the Committee's Guardians of the Lake monthly membership program.



The Mono Lake Committee rolled out a green carpet for the film premiere of the new Mono Lake Story film, now showing regularly in the upgraded theater and gallery.

We also offer DVDs to educators. As of press time we have sent the film to 50 teachers and professors representing second grade through graduate school. Those teachers are located in 14 different states and one foreign country—Serbia. Most inspiring of all, these teachers will be sharing the story of Mono Lake with over 4,500 students this year!

We are so pleased to see people emerge from the theater to sign up as members, sometimes with tears in their eyes. We feel gratified to see our mailbox full of requests for the film from teachers across the country. We love hearing families making plans to visit the lakeshore after watching the film. Our primary goal was to inspire people to become part of the Mono Lake story—it's working. ❖

Elin Ljung is the Committee's Communications Coordinator. Her desk shares a wall with the theater so she can already hum the entire film score.

Aqueduct modernization talks continue

Discussions focus on benefits for streams and city

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

This fall there's been more talk in our office about the particulars of the Los Angeles Aqueduct than, perhaps, the days when the city construction crews took a turn on the Information Center dance floor back in the 1930s.

Conduit capacity. Water balance models. Lake level regression equations. Dam safety. How much water could that ditch safely hold? How can restorative high springtime flows move past old dams of limited capacity? How long exactly does it take to fabricate a Langemann gate?

These focused discussions with the

Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, facilitated by the Center for Collaborative Policy, are driven by the need to implement the stream restoration flows and measures prescribed in the 2010 Synthesis Report by the State Water Board-designated Stream Scientists who have been studying Mono Lake's tributaries for the past decade (see Fall 2010 *Newsletter*).

The Synthesis Report requirements don't change the total amount of water flowing to Mono Lake, but they do shift to a more natural flow pattern during the year and across wet and dry

years. Why? To maximize the recovery of stream health—and minimize the impacts of the continuing diversion of water to Los Angeles.

With meetings every two weeks, plenty of homework, and a schedule that stretches well into 2012, we're far from done. But the hard work is worth it: the outcome that we expect will be a set of modernization plans for the aqueduct that will make the facilities more reliable for Los Angeles and at the same time benefit the health of the streams, cottonwood-willow forests, and diverse wildlife for many decades to come. ♦

Wind data towers near Mono Lake proposed, withdrawn

by Morgan Lindsay

This past summer, two wind energy companies proposed a series of 200-foot-tall meteorological data (met) towers on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land southeast of Mono Lake.

If approved and constructed, the met towers would collect data for a three-year period. Then if the data confirmed a suitable wind resource, EWindfarm Inc. and Enel Green Power Inc. planned to propose full-scale wind farms capable of generating a total of 550 megawatts with as many as 200 wind turbines over four hundred feet tall distributed across 33,500 acres of sagebrush scrub and piñon-juniper forest.

This proposal comes at a time of increased interest in renewable energy development on public lands in the Eastern Sierra, partially in response to California's commitment in former Governor Schwarzenegger's order for 33% of energy supplies to come from renewable sources by 2020.



In July the BLM led a tour of the proposed wind energy site southeast of Mono Lake.

The Mono Lake Committee supports renewable energy and has plans to add even more rooftop solar panels to our offices here in Lee Vining.

However, good projects need to address local conditions. The met tower proposals and the wind farms that could follow raise questions related to possible impacts on nesting and migratory birds, including Mono Lake's Eared Grebes, which only fly at night. The Committee highlighted this need for careful study in scoping comments to the BLM. Community members raised additional concerns in public meetings related to available transmission capacity, closure to public access, and road development.

Before the studies could commence, the wind energy companies withdrew their proposals in favor of other sites.

As with other recent large-scale renewable energy projects like the Solar Ranch proposed last year by the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power in Owens Valley, the Mono Lake Committee continues to keep an eye out for Mono Lake and its surrounding landscape.

DWP tests new restoration flows during big runoff year

Results are mixed

by Lisa Cutting

During the past year newly-prescribed streamflows have been tested in Mono Lake's tributaries in order to determine the feasibility of achieving the new flows using current infrastructure. In order to test these flows, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) has been operating under a Temporary Urgency Change order issued by the State Water Resources Control Board. The flows, developed by the State Water Board-appointed Stream Scientists, tend to be higher during the spring runoff and lower during the winter, mimicking the natural pattern of a healthy stream system. So, how did the existing infrastructure perform?

Lee Vining Creek

Lee Vining Creek's lower winter minimum flow of 20 cubic feet per second (cfs) was easily achieved. The summertime recommendation to pass all flow downstream of the diversion facility when the creek is above 250 cfs was also achieved. On June 23 Lee Vining experienced a seasonal peak flow of 536 cfs.

In the past, delivering the peak flow on Lee Vining Creek has been problematic for DWP and somewhat of a guessing game. Usually DWP is diverting water and when the peak looks like it is approaching they have to ramp down the diversion within a specified percentage so the creek doesn't experience an unnaturally large pulse of water, which would be harmful. Once the "peak has passed" downstream of the diversion dam then DWP can ramp diversions back up. Lee Vining's natural hydrograph is often a series of several high peaks, so "passing the peak" is tricky. Despite much analysis, communication, and urging by the Mono Lake Committee, DWP has often not been able to deliver Lee Vining Creek's primary peak flow.

Now, under the new flow prescriptions, when the creek is between 30 cfs and 250 cfs, a diversion table specifies the allowed diversion for each day in 5-cfs increments. The table is designed so that once the creek reaches 250 cfs the diversion amount is zero. Therefore, any flow above 250 cfs will be passed downstream. According to preliminary data, DWP followed this table quite well with operations personnel making one flow change per day. Looking ahead, new gate structures can be constructed to automatically make adjustments and assure ongoing compliance with the flow requirements.

Parker and Walker creeks

As per the Stream Scientists' recommendations, these two creeks were not diverted, and remain in a flow-through condition. (Note: The two creeks were, however, diverted during September to reduce the flows for annual fish monitoring in Rush Creek.) The peak flows on Parker and Walker creeks (85 cfs and 60 cfs respectively, according to this year's preliminary data) contribute a significant amount of additional water to Rush Creek in the bottomlands below Highway 395. The flow recommendations for these two creeks, essentially a pass-through condition year-round, is by design—since that water was incorporated into the flow amount needed in the lower sections of Rush Creek.

Additionally, Parker and Walker creek water is important to lower sections of Rush Creek that at times experience thermal warming. The cooler water offsets warming and helps keep conditions good for trout.

Rush Creek

Despite a huge water year resulting from winter snowpack that was 169% of normal, Rush Creek's important spring peak flows were again limited by infrastructure constraints. In a water year in which Rush Creek should have received 650 cubic feet per second under the new flow requirements, only 468 cfs made it past Grant Lake Reservoir to Mono Lake.

Even though Grant Lake Reservoir started spilling in March, and kept spilling until mid-August (except for the three days immediately following the peak flow) the capacity constraint of the Mono Gate One Return Ditch (380 cfs) and the limited availability of water from Southern California Edison's upper watershed hydropower operations resulted in DWP falling well short of the 650 cfs requirement (see Summer 2011 *Newsletter*).

This again confirmed what the Committee firmly believes: DWP is unable to deliver the required flows with the current infrastructure. To make matters worse, Grant Lake Reservoir is now close to full capacity and unless action is taken immediately it will spill this winter—potentially subjecting the fishery in Rush Creek below the dam to detrimentally high flows. ♦

Lisa Cutting is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director. Last summer she ventured outside the Mono Basin to eastern Nevada in search of native Great Basin cutthroat trout.

Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua soars on

by Bartshé Miller

Birds made Mono Lake famous. Brine shrimp and alkali flies have their followers, but they are outnumbered by those who care about birds. From the plight of the nesting California Gulls in the early 1980s to the desperate Willow Flycatcher situation in 2011, birds have been a rallying point for protection and restoration of Mono Lake and have propelled a history of grassroots conservation.

It helps that the Mono Basin is also one of the premier locations to bird in California and the West. It also helps that the Mono Basin is among the remaining large and well-preserved natural areas left in the state, isolated from densely populated parts of California. The basin's extreme saline waters, its dramatic geology, and relatively intact ecosystem have inspired a legacy of scientific research and artistic work. We created the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua to embrace it all.

In 2011 the Bird Chautauqua soared through its tenth season with roughly 230 participants, 45 leaders and presenters, friends, and family. The event fills the small town of Lee Vining and spills over into the nearby towns of June Lake and Bridgeport. During the weekend's field trips participants

sighted over 173 species of birds, with over 60 species seen on the Bridgeport Reservoir field trip alone. In addition, the weekend included a picnic with live music at County Park, an in-the-hand, catch-and-release look at a number of local chipmunk species, stewardship projects, owl-hooting, campfire stories, tracking skills, journaling, sketching, and more.

Funding research and conservation

At Mono Lake, research and science increase understanding, contributing to the protection of Mono Lake and conservation and management decisions. This is why proceeds from the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua are dedicated to the Jeff Maurer Chautauqua Research Grant. This grant is named in honor of Jeff Maurer, a past Chautauqua field trip leader, biologist, educator, and friend. Jeff passed away in a climbing accident in 2009, but his enthusiasm for birds, biology, and conservation science lives on through this grant.

In 2011, the Jeff Maurer Chautauqua Research Grant awarded \$2,000 to Chris McCreedy of PRBO Conservation Science for his work with Willow Flycatchers on Rush Creek. These birds began breeding at

Rush Creek in 2001 and their numbers increased to 16 individuals by 2004. Unfortunately, due to nest predation by an artificially large population of Brown-headed Cowbirds fed by local bird feeders, Willow Flycatchers have been nearly extirpated from the Mono Basin (see page 16). This research grant was even more critical in 2011 since funding originally committed by the Inyo National Forest was dropped.

Dedicated people make it work

We owe the success of the Chautauqua to those who take the time and effort to get it off the ground. Strong partners—Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve, PRBO Conservation Science, the Inyo National Forest, Yosemite National Park, Friends of the Inyo, the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, Eastern Sierra Audubon, and the Yosemite Conservancy—create a pool of resources that keep the Chautauqua a high-quality, affordable event.

These partners spend the year before each Chautauqua planning an exciting program. The researchers, leaders, and presenters who come, each year, for little or no compensation, lend years of experience and knowledge to make the event authentic, engaging, and educational. Partner resources and staff come together with volunteers to pull off a diverse schedule of programs.

The support of local business owners also factors into the Chautauqua's success. Local businesses offer discounts to participants and the donation of a dozen nights of rooms from motel owners helps to keep the presenters well-rested and eager to lead early morning field trips.

Without the collective efforts of local businesses, dedicated individuals, and contributing partners, Chautauqua ticket prices would be in the hundreds of dollars.

Continued on page 11



PHOTO COURTESY OF JONAH MATTHEWSON, BRISTLECONE MEDIA

Lisa Fields, state parks wildlife biologist, spotting Osprey with Chautauqua participants.

Native seeds: 1, invasive sweet clover: 0

by Julia Runcie

Little by little, as water courses down Mono Lake's tributary streams, the riparian vegetation is recovering. Each year we see fewer invasive weeds along the creeks and a healthier community of willows, cottonwoods, aspens, and native shrubs and grasses.

Here at the edge of the Great Basin these stream settings form vital oases for desert life, and varied plant life is essential to maintaining diversity at every level of the ecosystem. Yet invasive plants are a threat not only in riparian corridors but also in any area that has experienced extensive soil disturbance.

One of the most sensitive sites in the Mono Basin is Old Marina, where dropping lake levels and an old road bed have left the land vulnerable to takeover by exotic weeds. Last summer, weed removal efforts focused on combating the monoculture of invasive sweet clover that has grown up around the State Park boardwalk at Old Marina over the past few years.

Every other week throughout the summer, Mono Lake Committee interns met a group of dedicated volunteers at the Scenic Area Visitor Center. Following a short orientation to restoration in the Mono Basin, the group headed to Old Marina to pull weeds. By the end of the season we had cleared nearly the entire boardwalk of sweet clover. Restoration, however, is about much more than the removal of elements that are destructive to an ecosystem. It's equally



Volunteers pulled invasive sweet clover plants and watered young Jeffrey pines throughout the summer.

important to foster the growth of native plant species.

In an exciting new phase of the invasive plants project, volunteers collected seeds from native plants at Old Marina this September and planted them where sweet clover had been removed. With any luck, next spring will bring new growth along the State Park boardwalk where Great Basin wild rye, foxtail barley, muhly grass, rabbitbrush, and blazing stars are slowly emerging to take the place of the weeds. ❖

Julia Runcie was a Mono Lake Intern in the summers of 2010 and 2011. She is now living in Bishop and continuing to explore the Eastern Sierra.

Thank you National Forest Foundation

The Mono Lake Committee is grateful to the National Forest Foundation for a generous grant which funded much of our restoration and monitoring work this summer. Awarded to support resource stewardship in the Mono Basin, the grant has made it possible for us to remove invasive weeds, water Jeffrey pine seedlings, coordinate volunteer cleanup events, monitor stream flows and groundwater levels along Mono Lake's tributary streams, and involve local and visiting students in stewardship projects.

Chautauqua from page 10

Concern for future partnerships

The Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua's success is measured by the number and vitality of its partners. The Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve has been a founding, organizing partner of the event, yet the State of California has put the park on the closure list (see page 3). The Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area, managed by the US Forest Service, has been a steadfast and valued partner, providing a modern visitor center and its resources. Sadly, a continuously shrinking budget, staff, and visitor center hours have been a real challenge for the Inyo National Forest.

In the case of the Mono Basin and Eastern Sierra, our

public lands management, resource protection, and visitor services are suffering from increasing staff cutbacks. Volunteers can only fill so many gaps. Ranger sightings are rarer than Sabine's Gull sightings, and as the Chautauqua turns eleven in 2012, we wonder if we will have fewer partner staff and resources to benefit from.

The good news is that we are all committed to bringing you another event next year. Mark your calendars now for June 15–17, 2012. Check birdchautauqua.org for updates and program information. ❖

Bartshé Miller is the Committee's Education Director. This year he did a trans-Sierra hike ... from his doorstep.

Free Drawing to protect Mono Lake

Deadline extended! Tickets due by December 9th

Many thanks to the generous sponsors who donate all the prizes. Send in your tickets today (find them in the center of this Newsletter) for a chance to win!

Win...

- an Apple iPad 2 with built-in speakers, video-mirroring, and multi-touch operation
- a Canon EOS Rebel T3 camera with 12.2 megapixels
- lift tickets and rental ski or snowboard gear at Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, lodging at the Mammoth Mountain Inn, and local historian Robin Morning's book, *Tracks of Passion*, signed by the author and Mammoth Mountain Ski Area founder Dave McCoy
- a camping package from Wilson's Eastside Sports that includes gear from Mountain Hardware, Cascade Designs, Osprey, Big Agnes, MRS, and Black Diamond
- a private flight over San Francisco Bay, a yacht trip with Captain Kirk's Sailing Adventures, and lodging at the Golden Gate Hotel
- a \$250 shopping spree at the Mono Lake Committee's Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining
- dinner and lodging at Yosemite's Wawona Hotel
- a Yosemite Conservancy field seminar, with lodging at the Sunset Inn in Groveland
- a Lake Tahoe escape at Sorensen's Resort in Hope Valley
- a stay at Rainbow Tarns Bed & Breakfast with dinner at Giovanni's Pizzeria and a movie at Minaret Cinemas
- a wilderness trip, one-year membership, and T-shirt from Friends of the Inyo
- a framed scenic art print by local photographer Dave McCoy
- Wave Rave Snowboard Shop's signature Steepwater 164 snowboard
- a tour of Muir-Hanna Vineyards with a wine and cheese tasting for eight people
- Patagonia clothing: men's and women's lightweight R-4 jackets
- a massage at InTouch MicroSpa with dinner at the Base Camp Café and a movie at Minaret Cinemas
- a half-day kayak tour on Mono Lake with Caldera Kayaks and dinner at Burger's Restaurant
- bike park passes and biking rental gear at Mammoth Mountain Ski Area's bike park with dinner at Giovanni's Pizzeria
- tickets to the 2012 Tahoe Adventure Film Festival
- W6 Series 10 x 26 compact binoculars and a Trail 25 daypack from REI
- Mono Lake gift packs: a Mono Lake T-shirt, tote bag, coffee mug, baseball cap, 2012 calendar, and the new book, *Mono*, by author David Carle

INTOUCH
MASSAGE • MICRO SPA • BOUTIQUE

Wave Rave
snowboard shop

FRIENDS OF THE INYO



Mammoth



Wilson's Eastside Sports



MUIR'S LEGACY

RAINBOW TARNs BED & BREAKFAST
At Crowley Lake



Giovanni's

TAHOE ADVENTURE FILM FESTIVAL

Mono Basin Watershed Project

by Santiago M. Escruceria, John Simeon, and Jean Dillingham

A great connection between the Mono Lake Committee and local Lee Vining schools has been restored through the Mono Basin Watershed Project. The Watershed Project is a hands-on scientific investigation of the health of local streams through a series of watershed monitoring activities.

The high school and elementary school in Lee Vining have recently made a deeper commitment to project-based service learning, and the project allows local students to make practical applications of their studies. Through the Watershed Project they make a contribution to local community groups as well as larger regional institutions that focus on watershed protection and restoration.

For the first outing Outdoor Education teacher Howard Stern had 15 students collecting data on lower Mill Creek. Mono Lake Committee Outdoor Experiences Program Manager Santiago M. Escruceria and local volunteers Jean Dillingham and John Simeon facilitated the project. Students were busy all day examining water quality and exploring the stream life and surrounding environment.

The students document their findings in a long-term database of scientific information that can be used to make



SANTIAGO M. ESCRUCERIA

Lee Vining students learning to monitor ecosystem health on Mill Creek.

decisions with regard to restoration, preservation, and resource conservation.

The Committee is excited to help the Lee Vining schools make more connections between school learning and the real world applications. It is these connections that promote civic education and the knowledge that every student can create positive change in the world. ❖

The Forgotten Season

Winter Photography in the Mono Basin

January 13–15, 2012

\$220 per person / \$200 for Mono Lake Committee members

Winter at Mono Lake: a lifting morning poconip fog, tufa towers jacketed in snow and reflected in the mirror of the lake's surface, ice sculpting crystalline filigree along creek and lake banks. This photography seminar will be based in Lee Vining and will explore locations along the lake to photograph the serenity and beauty that is the Mono Basin in winter.

Instructor Rick Knepp is a former Mono Lake Committee staff member, popular seminar leader, and veteran of Mono winters. His experience will allow participants to take advantage of many winter photographic opportunities.

Come prepared for cold winter weather. This seminar will take place regardless of weather or road conditions. There will be no refunds due to weather. Cost is for tuition only; participants must arrange their own accommodations. This seminar is limited to 15 participants.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD KNEPP

to sign up, call (760) 647-6595 or visit monolake.org/seminars

Streamwatch

Peak flows strain infrastructure, invigorate ecosystems

by Greg Reis

On July 4, Mono Lake Committee Education Director, Bartshé Miller, sent an email on his Blackberry while observing Mill Creek's high flows:

Flume reading between 123 and 155 cfs this am, hard to read accurately. Dam culvert by flume is in danger of washing out if water goes much higher. No sandbags there this am.

Southern California Edison (SCE) quickly repaired the road, allowing it to make it through the peak snowmelt runoff without completely washing out. Water from the Lundy Lake Reservoir spillway roared down Mill Creek to Mono Lake, requiring Mono County Public Works to take action to save Cemetery Road. The much-needed water spreading on the Mill Creek floodplain occupied normally dry channels and recharged groundwater, supplying a burst of growth to the

slowly recovering riparian area.

Lee Vining Creek's peak flow was maximized thanks to the late snowmelt and SCE operations this year coincidentally being in line with new flow prescriptions for higher peak flows. This resulted in a peak average daily flow—around 530 cubic feet per second (cfs) on June 24 and again on July 5—that has only been exceeded twice since 1980. These flows threatened to overtop Saddlebag Lake Road, flooded campsites in Lee Vining Canyon, and exceeded the capacity of a measuring flume at the diversion dam. They also washed out a section of the Lee Vining Creek Trail and caused major channel changes, adding much-needed dynamism to the recovering bottomlands area near Mono Lake.

On Rush Creek, Grant Lake Reservoir started spilling in March

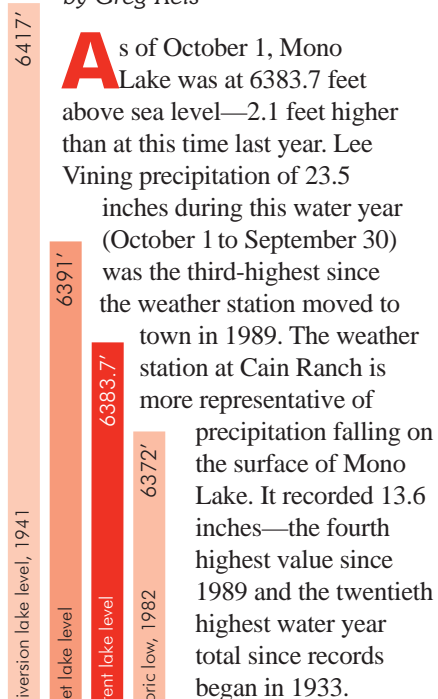
and kept spilling until mid-August, except for the three days immediately following the peak flow released through the return ditch during the spill. A measuring flume installed last year at the bottom of the spillway was overtopped but did not wash out.

SCE kept Gem Lake Reservoir low past July 1—when it is normally required to be full—and thereby avoided spilling until after the peak flow. This minimized the Rush Creek peak, resulting in a release below Grant almost 200 cfs short of the proposed 650 cfs required release in a wet year. SCE's water management is at cross purposes with the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power's—something we've seen for over a decade and was made even more clear this year. Therefore, a new outlet for Grant Lake Reservoir is the only way to feasibly achieve the new flow prescriptions. ♦

Lakewatch

Mono Lake rises over two feet!

by Greg Reis



The 1.4-foot rise

above the April 1 level is more than halfway to the 2.2-foot rise predicted by April 2012. Mono Lake rose 0.7 feet in June and 0.6 feet in July. This is the biggest two-month rise since June–July 2006. The June rise was similar to the remarkable months of June 2006, July 1995, and February, June, and December 1983 that had as big or bigger rises. Mono Lake peaked at 6384.0 feet around August 11, beginning its drop a week-and-a-half early because the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power resumed exporting water out of the Mono Basin.

When late-summer snowfields disappear and runoff decreases, Mono Lake's water also warms, causing evaporation to increase, with the combined effect being a seasonal decline in lake level. Mono Lake almost always falls in August—except five

times since 1978: in 1982, 1983, 1984, 1995, and 1998. Add 2011 to that list—this year it was at 6383.9 feet on both August 1 and September 1.

Mono Lake typically continues its decline through the fall until the first big winter storms occur. The low point usually happens between October and January, about a half foot below the September level, followed by usually at least a half-foot rise to the following March 31 (the end of the runoff year). With almost all of the water export for this runoff year taken in August and September, more water will enter Mono Lake this winter, making the predicted level of 6384.5 feet next April 1 all the more likely to be achieved. ♦

Greg Reis is the Committee's Information & Restoration Specialist. He has been enjoying hiking with his new baby.

Mono Basin Journal

A roundup of quiet happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



Geoff McQuilkin

On a recent summer day, I found myself and my family out at the very edge of the Mono Basin and up 12,000 feet in the sky. We were climbing the great granite peak that is awaiting an official new name: Mount Andrea Lawrence, a tribute to local environmental visionary, Olympic double gold medal winner, Mono Lake champion, and kind friend Andrea Mead Lawrence.

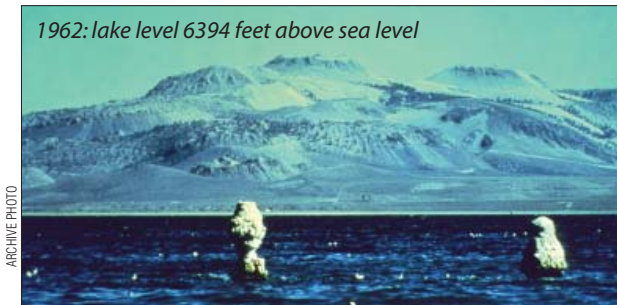
As we climbed among car-sized boulders, the columbine faded away, then the whitebark pine, and it appeared likely the top would be devoid of vegetation. Crossing a lingering snowfield to the summit we found incredible views, with the

great peaks and soaring ridges of the seemingly unending range of light stretching away on all sides.

A memorable moment, but not in comparison to what we saw next: vigorous yellow flowers growing in a scattering across the summit, their petals bobbing in the summer breeze, their roots digging in to hold tight to the peak. My daughter and I looked close. We checked the flower book, then rechecked in surprise, then smiled. What cosmic twist had put the perfect flower here? For scattered atop a towering mountain named for an Olympic skier was the perfect flower, the hardy yellow composite known as Alpine Gold. ❖

Benchmarks

1962: lake level 6394 feet above sea level



Archive Photo

1968: lake level 6387'



Archive Photo

2008: lake level 6383'



Arya Dezenhardt

2011: lake level 6383.7'



Russ Taylor

Policy notes

by Geoffrey McQuilkin, Lisa Cutting, Morgan Lindsay, and Chris McCreedy

Rush Creek Willow Flycatcher population down to six

In 2011 the Rush Creek Willow Flycatcher population suffered another year of zero productivity, meaning that adults failed to raise young to fledging. This is the second time this has happened in the last four years, and it means that the Willow Flycatcher population is now down to six individuals.

While this number is unchanged from 2010, several adults in the population are quite old (including an at least 12-year-old female, the oldest known Willow Flycatcher on record). One male disappeared mid-season and may have simply succumbed to old age.

Bright notes included a returning female that hatched and was banded as a nestling in 2010, and a returning third-year male whose photograph appeared in the Fall 2009 *Newsletter*. In addition, an unbanded female appeared and nested late in the summer—she is the first immigrant to nest at Rush Creek since 2007.

For the population to survive, we need to cross our fingers that these new arrivals stay, that at least a few of the old adults survive to return, and that one or more immigrants show up next summer. Most importantly, we must limit young chick losses to Brown-headed Cowbird predation. Two effective strategies include cowbird egg addling and continued effort by Lee Vining's residents to limit cowbird food subsidization by using thistle-sock feeders instead of open bird feeders (see Winter & Spring 2010 *Newsletter*).

If you are a Lee Vining or Mono City resident and are interested in trading in your open bird feeder for songbird-friendly thistle-sock feeders (and a supply of seed!) please contact Lisa Cutting (lisa@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595 x142.

—Chris McCreedy, PRBO
Conservation Science Staff Biologist

Airport revegetation plots yield useful results

In 2010 the Lee Vining Airport received both planned improvements and a dose of unplanned, extensive earthmoving (see Fall 2010 *Newsletter*). After intensive involvement by the Committee and others, the large view-obstructing earthwork at the end of the runway was reduced in height and an excessively deep drainage ditch along the runway was resized. What remains now is to complete the revegetation of ten acres of disturbed bare soil left by the project.

Tahoe-based vegetation restoration expert Michael Hogan established test plots in the fall of 2010 to experiment with different native seed mixes and amendment to the excavated soil. In 2011, Hogan returned to evaluate the plots, and the preliminary results show that the “test before treating” approach was a wise one.

Not surprisingly, few plants were found growing naturally on the nutrient-poor, compacted soils of the untreated plots. Even plots of untreated soil that had been seeded were not very successful. Plots that had the highest level of treatment—including the tilling of mulch into the surface soil as well as seeding—did better. But the best-producing plots actually were those that had a medium level of treatment, effort, and expense put into them—some mulch, but not a lot, native seeds, and limited tilling.

This bodes well for successful restoration of vegetation across the airport site within the budget negotiated last year. After final analysis of the test plots, larger-scale vegetation restoration efforts will be underway late this fall so that the seeds can lie dormant through the winter and begin growth in the spring of 2012.

Continued on page 17



This rainfall simulator was used to test runoff quantity and quality from vegetation test plots as part of the revegetation project at the Lee Vining Airport.

GEORGE MCQUILKIN

State funds benefit regional water needs

The Inyo-Mono Integrated Regional Water Management Group (RWMG) has been successful in securing over \$1.7 million in Proposition 84 water-related state funds for the Eastern Sierra.

This summer over \$1 million was awarded from the Department of Water Resources for 7 out of 15 proposed implementation projects from a potable water study in Tecopa in southern Inyo County to water quality improvements for the public school in Coleville in northern Mono County. Two proposed projects in the Mono Basin—repairs to the June Lake wastewater treatment plant and the installation of additional water meters in June Lake—did not receive funding, but are still eligible for future funds.

The RWMG has also received over \$230,000 in a planning grant to refine regional water planning efforts and to build on the group's initial success. With this support, the RWMG is partnering with the California Rural Water Association to help 20 small water districts build capacity and be more competitive with larger urban water agencies when applying for the next round of grant funding.

The Mono Lake Committee continues involvement as a founding member of the RWMG by sharing vital information for new resource opportunities with the two all-volunteer water districts in Lee Vining and Mono City. Immediate water needs in the Mono Basin include a new water main in Lee Vining and additional water storage in Mono City for fire safety.

In the future, the Committee may seek funding through the RWMG for water-related restoration and land management projects that will benefit Mono Lake and its tributary streams.

Swallows nest despite obstacles

When the Cliff Swallows returned to the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic

Area Visitor Center in May everyone anxiously awaited the outcome. Would they be able to nest successfully despite the netting that had been installed last year? Or would they seek out other locations, ending a decades-long tradition?

Surprisingly, the swallows persevered and built their nests just below the netting using just one wall of the structure to secure the mud-like nest material. Other than the swallows shifting their preferred location from the front and back of the Visitor Center to over the employee parking area, and a slight decrease in the overall number of nests, the little iconic birds appeared to have fared quite well.

The netting was installed as part of the Visitor Center renovations that took place in 2010. At that time the Forest Service feared that the wet nesting material was damaging the structural integrity of the supporting roof beams. While the Committee would have liked to see a more creative, accommodating solution we're thrilled that the Cliff Swallows are still part of the visitor experience.

Major Internet capacity upgrade underway

With golden aspen leaves brightly lingering in the Eastern Sierra, a major infrastructure project is moving forward to light up the region in a wholly different way. Digital 395, as it's known, is a fast-moving project that will deliver extremely large Internet and data bandwidth capacity to the area via a new fiber optic line that will stretch 583 miles along Highway 395 from Nevada to Southern California. The project has garnered broad community support because, unlike many urban areas, high speed Internet services are constrained by limited fiber optic and data capacity in the Eastern Sierra.

The project will serve 36 communities including Lee Vining, which means schools, hospitals, university facilities, and even Caltech's Owens Valley Radio Observatory will be able to keep pace with technology



Tenacious Cliff Swallows built nests despite new netting at the Scenic Area Visitor Center.

improvements. Digital 395 is a "middle mile" project, meaning consumers will still purchase their broadband service from a local service provider. The project is primarily funded by federal stimulus dollars, which means construction must be complete by mid-2013, a prospect creating excitement locally for everything from high tech remote medical consultations to simply having fast Internet connections at home. For the Mono Lake Committee, exciting projects may result such as high resolution remote monitoring of bird populations at Mono Lake or the ability to connect a Committee naturalist to classrooms across the nation.

Construction projects do have impacts, and the Committee has carefully followed plans for the buried fiber line placement in the challenging area just north of Lee Vining where the highway, Mono Lake, and valuable shoreline wetlands within the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve are all squeezed close together. Project planners have been thoughtful about this sensitive area and are currently planning to avoid complications by burying the fiber beneath the existing shoulder of the highway. This approach will assure that there are no environmental obstacles in the vicinity of Mono Lake to Digital 395 advancing on schedule. ❖



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MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

HOODED SWEATSHIRT

Outdoor Education Instructor Will and Mono Lake Intern Mila are staying warm this fall in these soft, cozy, hooded sweatshirts made from 80% organic cotton and 20% recycled polyester. This sweatshirt has the Mono Lake Committee logo on the left chest, so you can be comfortable and support Mono Lake at the same time!

Mono Lake Committee hooded sweatshirt, black, S-XL: \$56.00, XXL: \$60.00

MONO LAKE COMMITTEE T-SHIRT

These rust-colored Mono Lake Committee staff T-shirts have been released to the public due to popular demand! Seen here on Canoe Coordinator Russ Taylor and Project Specialist Carolyn Weddle (as well as on all of last summer's intern staff while leading South Tufa tours) this 100% ring spun cotton shirt blends right in with the subtle colors of the Eastern Sierra.

Mono Lake Committee T-shirt, rust, S-XL: \$18.00, XXL: \$21.00



LONG LIVE MONO LAKE TIE DYE T-SHIRT

Yosemite National Park Ranger Clif Ashley and Information Center & Bookstore Manager Jessica Horn are modeling these fun 100% pre-shrunk cotton tie dye T-shirts. The shirts say "Long Live Mono Lake" in white on the front and are a throwback to the Mono Lake Committee's hippie roots.

Long Live Mono Lake tie dye T-shirt, rainbow-colored, S-XL: \$25.50, XXL: \$28.00



MONO LAKE COMMITTEE BILLED CAP

A necessary addition to any hat collection, this adjustable cap makes a great gift. The hat features the Mono Lake Committee logo on the front and comes in two

natural colors: sage green and dark tan. Bring it on all of your outdoor adventures!

Mono Lake Committee billed cap, please specify sage green or dark tan: \$18.00



order at www.monolake.org/store or (760) 647-6595

RECYCLED GLASS COLOR CHIMES

BY LOEY SIERING

Crowley Lake local Loey Siering makes color chimes from fused recycled glass and found wood. Choose from a cool set of three blue glass pieces or a warm set of three yellows and oranges. Each color chime hangs 17" in height and adds a splash of color to windows or doorways.

Recycled glass color chimes, please specify cool or warm color set: \$35.00



HANDMADE MUGS

BY MICHAEL COOKE

Michael Cooke spends his winters elbow-deep in clay creating beautiful and functional pottery. The mugs each hold 14 ounces; the tall coffee mug has Cooke's signature brilliant blue glaze and the pale green café latte mug has brown drip detail.

Handmade mug, please specify blue coffee mug or green café latte mug: \$24.00



COFFEE MUG



CAFÉ LATTE MUG

TULE DOLL

BY MARY HOYT

As a student of traditional weaving master Lucy Parker, Mary Hoyt learned to craft tule dolls. Each doll comes with a different trinket adorning her neck or waist and is right at home on any mantle, windowsill, or side table. Dolls vary slightly in size, but are approximately 9" tall and stand up on their own.

Tule doll: \$16.00



PRESSED WILDFLOWER VASES AND ORNAMENTS

BY CAROL NEEDHAM

Mammoth Lakes local Carol Needham decorates vases and ornaments with wildflowers that she responsibly gathers, dries, and arranges on the outside of clear glass pieces. Each work is unique but features a bouquet of wildflowers from the Sierra. Sealed with a clear resin, the vases are not dishwasher safe, but can be washed with common household cleaners and warm water.

Pressed wildflower short pedestal vase, 5"x 3": \$38.00

Pressed wildflower tall square vase, 8"x 2": \$42.00

Pressed wildflower ornament, 3"x 3", please specify round or square: \$25.00





ANIMAL FOOTPRINT T-SHIRT

Committee kids Ellery and Caelen McQuilkin are simply glowing in this glow-in-the-dark animal footprint shirt. Featuring footprints from mountain lion, mule deer, Sierra bighorn sheep, pika, Raven, pine marten and many more wild critters, this shirt is both educational and fun!

Animal footprint T-shirt, black, youth sizes XS-L: \$15.00

SEA MONKEYS MAGIQUARIUM

Grow sea monkeys, relatives of the Mono Lake brine shrimp, in the comfort of your own home with the Sea Monkey MagiQuarium!

The aquarium comes equipped with a water purifier, instant live eggs, food sufficient for one year, and illustrated instructions. The MagiQuarium is backlit for easier observation.

Sea Monkeys MagiQuarium, 6"x 4½": \$15.95



TWIG COLORED PENCILS

These adorable colored pencils come in a set of 10 and are great for children and adults alike. They are 3½" tall and make a perfect stocking stuffer for the nature lover in all of us!

Twig colored pencils, set of 10: \$4.00

CLEMENTINE ART SUPPLIES

Clementine Art makes non-toxic and very popular children's art products. The natural paints come in the six colors of the rainbow in individual 17-ounce pots and are appropriate for children ages three and up. The crayon rocks are extremely cute, eco-friendly crayons that are just the right shape for little fingers (ages five and up).

Soy crayons are easy to grip and don't have any annoying paper to peel off. Each crayon is 2½" long and is appropriate for children ages three and up.

Natural paints, pack of 6: \$18.50

Crayon rocks, pack of 9: \$6.50

Soy crayons, pack of 6: \$6.50



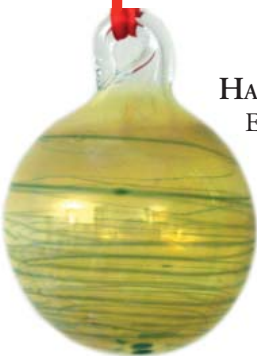
NATURAL PAINTS

CRAYON ROCKS

SOY CRAYONS

order at www.monolake.org/store or (760) 647-6595

❧ Fall Catalog ❧



HAND-BLOWN GLASS ORNAMENT

Each hand-blown glass ornament has an individual design indicative of the Nepali artist who created it. Ornaments measure 3" in diameter and come in a sage-green box topped with a silver Mono Lake Committee logo.

Hand-blown glass ornament: \$14.00

NATURE'S LEAF NATURAL ORNAMENT

Real aspen leaves are electroplated with either 18-karat gold or rhodium silver to make these unique ornaments. The leaves vary slightly in size, but are approximately 3" in height and are strung with either a silver or burgundy ribbon for hanging. Add a little sparkle to your home this winter!

Nature's Leaf natural ornament, please specify silver or gold: \$16.00



BRINE SHRIMP ORNAMENT

Sure to be a holiday hit, these brine shrimp ornaments by Wild Bryde are a great tribute to the *Artemia monica* of Mono Lake! Measuring 3" in height, each ornament comes packaged in a dark blue envelope and makes a wonderful holiday gift.

Brine shrimp ornament, please specify silver or gold: \$10.00



EASTERN SIERRA FELTED SOAP

BY COLEEN RANDOLPH

Eastern Sierra resident Coleen Randolph handcrafts her colorfully felted soaps from olive oil, coconut oil, palm oil, goat's

milk, and essential oils. The felt adds an exfoliating element to your shower routine—watch as it shrinks with the soap. Each 2½"x 3½" box comes with the Mono Lake Committee logo and mission statement printed on the outside.

Eastern Sierra felted soap, please specify lemongrass, oatmeal, rose, grapefruit, or lavender scent: \$10.00



AROMATIC EVERGREEN SACHETS

Wildcrafted sachets from Juniper Ridge bring the pleasing scent of winter into your home. A perfect gift for friends and loved ones for the holidays and great to have all year long.

Aromatic evergreen sachet, please specify Douglas fir or Christmas fir: \$10.00

NAKED BEE HAND LOTION

One of the most popular items in the Committee's Information Center & Bookstore, Naked Bee hand lotion is the perfect size to keep in a purse or car. It keeps your skin silky smooth and moisturized, and smells amazing! Naked Bee lotion comes in four scents; orange honey, sandalwood, green tea, and chai tea.

Naked Bee hand lotion, 2.25-oz, please specify orange honey, sandalwood, green tea, or chai tea scent: \$5.25



order at www.monolake.org/store or (760) 647-6595



WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCHES

WENDY MORGAN HOLIDAY CARD SETS

Leave it to Wendy Morgan to depict some of nature's cutest critters in her graphic art. Each set comes with 10 cards of the same image and the inside reads "May you have a Happy Holiday and a Joyous New Year!" Choose from White-breasted Nuthatches carrying a sprig of holly and berries or a cheerful pika holding a bundle of gathered holiday grasses in its mouth on these 4½" x 6¼" cards.

Wendy Morgan holiday card set, 10 cards with envelopes, please specify White-breasted Nuthatches or pika: \$13.50

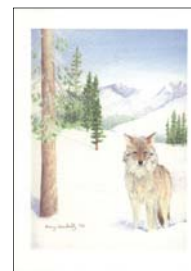


PIKA WITH HOLIDAY GRASSES

NANCY OVERHOLTZ WILDLIFE CARD SET

Local watercolor artist Nancy Overholtz has created a wildlife set featuring a bobcat, cottontail, coyote, snowshoe hare, mule deer fawn, mountain lion, pine marten, and black bear cubs for the holiday season. The cards measure 5" x 7" and are printed on watercolor paper with deckled edges.

Overholtz wildlife card set, 8 cards with envelopes, blank inside: \$23.00



LUNDY ASPENS

MONO BASIN PRINTS

BY PENNY OTWELL

Penny Otwell is a prominent Yosemite painter who loves Mono Lake and the east side of the Sierra too. She has created two prints from her paintings of Mono Lake's Black Point and Lundy Canyon aspens. Penny has generously discounted the prints just for the fall catalog! *Mono Basin print, matted size is 11" x 14", please specify Black Point or Lundy Aspens: \$37.50*



BLACK POINT

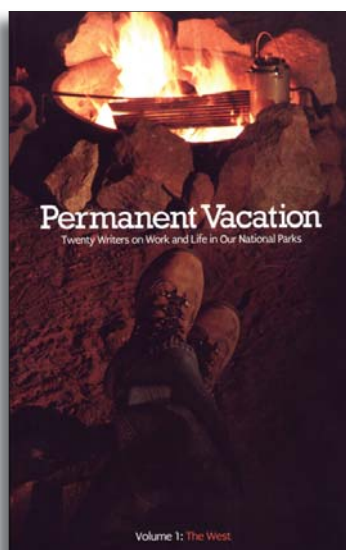
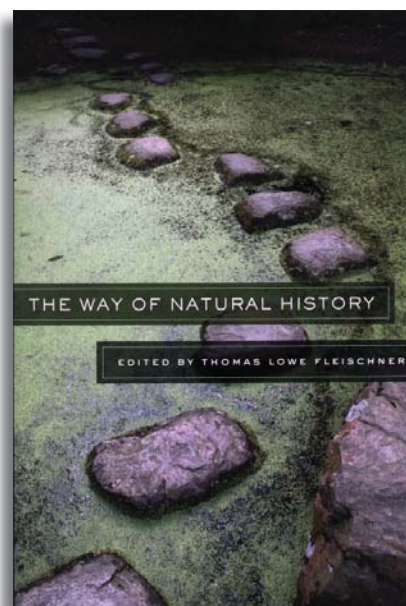
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THE WAY OF NATURAL HISTORY

EDITED BY THOMAS LOWE FLEISCHNER

In line with Buddhism and naturalists' outcry against "nature deficit disorder," *The Way of Natural History* is a compilation of essays emphasizing the importance of mindful attentiveness to nature. Most of the essayists suggest that natural history is a dying practice and can be revived simply by intent observation of one's surroundings. This collection reminds us of our need to go outside, no matter where you are, to touch, smell, listen, and watch.

The Way of Natural History, paperback, Trinity University Press,
218 pages, 5½"x 8": \$16.95

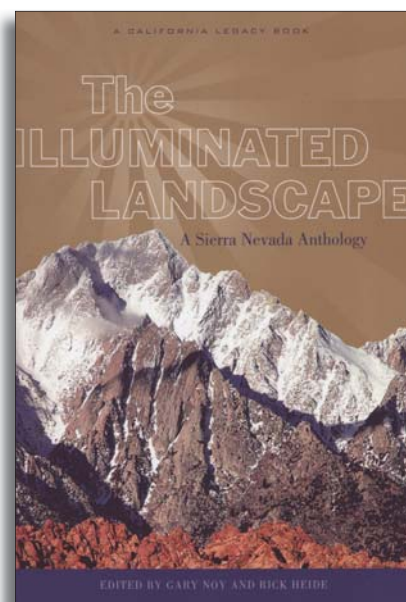


PERMANENT VACATION: TWENTY WRITERS ON WORK AND LIFE IN OUR NATIONAL PARKS

EDITED BY KIM WYATT AND ERIN BECHTOL

Twenty essays give a peek at the various experiences of those who work and live in our national parks. If you have ever wondered what it's like to sleep in a backcountry cabin or encounter an angry grizzly, these stories will undoubtedly entertain.

Permanent Vacation, paperback, Bona Fide Books,
205 pages, 5"x 8": \$15.00

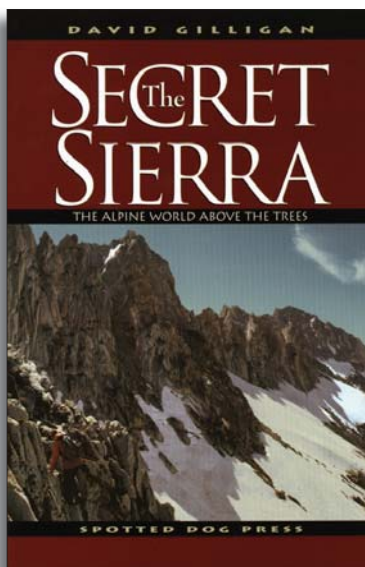


THE ILLUMINATED LANDSCAPE: A SIERRA NEVADA ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY GARY NOY AND RICK HEIDE

Anyone with an interest in literature or California history should own this collection. Great for a quick glance at Gary Snyder's poetry or to read cover-to-cover, educational and pleasure reading experiences abound in this anthology.

The Illuminated Landscape, paperback, Heyday,
447 pages, 6"x 9": \$19.95

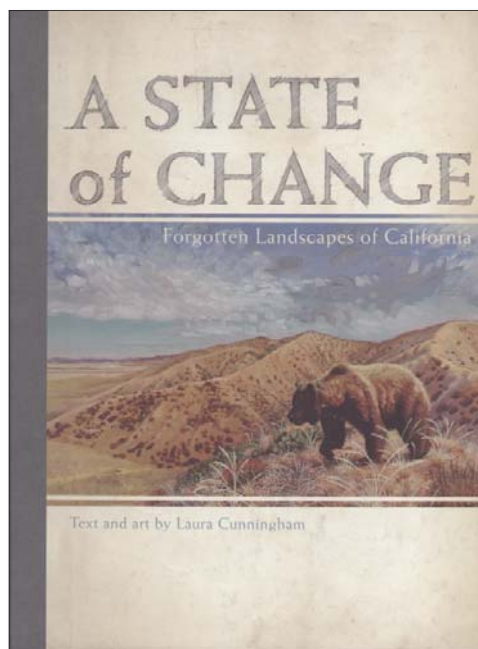


THE SECRET SIERRA: THE ALPINE WORLD ABOVE THE TREES

BY DAVID GILLIGAN

Gilligan approaches the natural history of the Sierra Nevada alpine region as a teacher in a classroom. Illustrating the overarching ideas of Sierra geology, ecology, and climate, it is obvious that Gilligan has spent significant time pondering and explaining these concepts while trekking through the very places of which he writes.

The Secret Sierra, paperback, Spotted Dog Press, 288 pages, 5½"x 8½": \$18.95



A STATE OF CHANGE: FORGOTTEN LANDSCAPES OF CALIFORNIA

TEXT AND ART BY LAURA CUNNINGHAM

Cunningham has created a work that is both spectacularly imaginative and scientifically based. With her background in paleontology and biology, Cunningham traveled California and referenced accounts of some of the first visitors to the state to extrapolate what California looked like before humans drastically changed the landscape. She takes an artist-naturalist approach to a daunting, decades-long project that resulted in a wonderful reference and an enjoyable read.

A State of Change, hardcover, Heyday Books, 350 pages, 8½"x 11": \$50.00

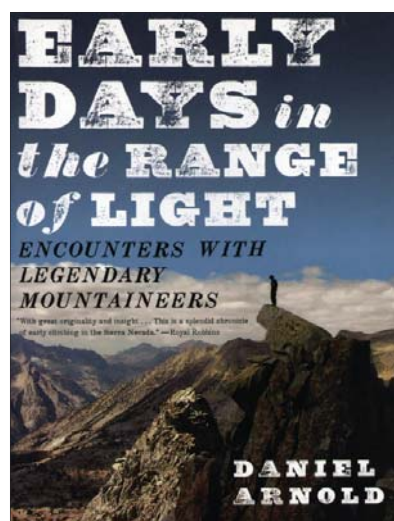
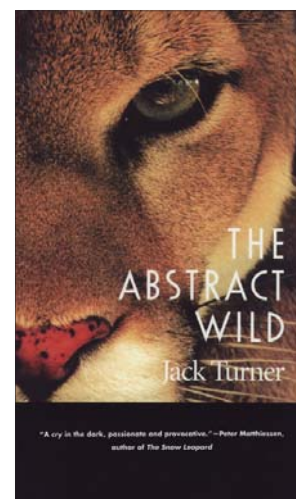
THE ABSTRACT WILD

BY JACK TURNER

Turner's collection of essays about the importance of wilderness and why we should care about our waning experiences with it proves honest and hugely insightful. A world-class mountaineer, Turner is open about his anger

surrounding the destruction of his favorite wild places. However, instead of listing and describing the destruction, he offers philosophical and real-life answers to how and why we arrived at this destruction and what we can do to stop it. *The Abstract Wild* both condemns and inspires naturalists and outdoor enthusiasts, leading to self-reflection of one's wilderness ethic.

The Abstract Wild, paperback, University of Arizona Press, 136 pages, 5½"x 9½": \$17.95



EARLY DAYS IN THE RANGE OF LIGHT:

ENCOUNTERS WITH LEGENDARY MOUNTAINEERS

BY DANIEL ARNOLD

Arnold tells of his experiences climbing in the Sierra range in the same manner as the prominent pre-1931 mountaineers. Retracing the adventures of John Muir, Clarence King, Norman Clyde, and others, Arnold re-climbs 15 of the most notable routes with ropes, clothing, and packs similar to what these men would have used on their first ascents.

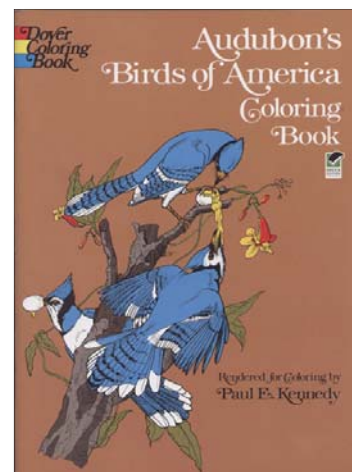
Early Days in the Range of Light, paperback, Counterpoint Press, 421 pages, 7"x 9": \$24.95

AUDUBON'S BIRDS OF AMERICA COLORING BOOK

RENDERED FOR COLORING BY PAUL E. KENNEDY

A fantastic educational tool for birders of all ages, this coloring book features 46 different species of birds from all parts of the United States. The pictures have been redrawn from originals by John James Audubon, the well-known naturalist painter. Each page includes the common and scientific name of each species.

Audubon's Birds of America Coloring Book, paperback, Dover Publications Inc, 46 pages, 11"x 8": \$3.95

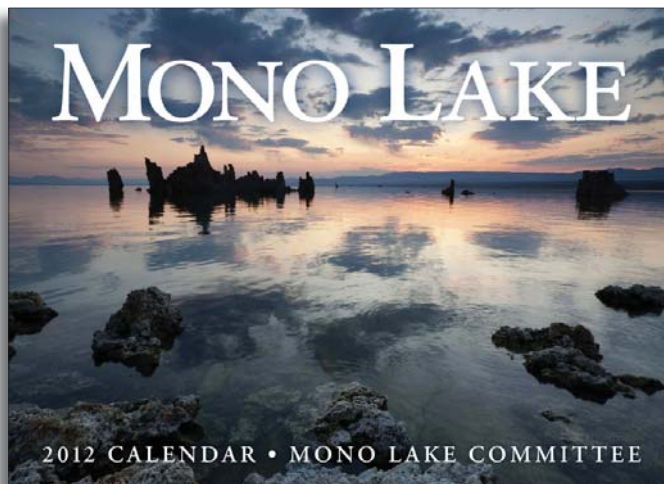


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2012 MONO LAKE CALENDAR

The 2012 Mono Lake Calendar features images of tufa groves, shoreline sunsets, birds, fall colors, winter scenes, and dramatic weather in the Mono Basin. Month grids have inset images of wildlife and scenic photos too. Bring Mono Lake into your home 365 days of the year, and consider our bulk discounts and holiday list options below for gifts this season. Printed in the USA on recycled paper.

2012 Mono Lake Calendar, 13"x 9½": \$11.95



2012 CALENDAR

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MONO LAKE COMMITTEE INSULATED KLEAN KANTEEN

The newest addition to our Mono Lake Committee logo items is a multi-use Klean Kanteen. This double-walled, stainless steel, wide-mouth bottle is suitable for both hot and cold items and is perfect for the office or the backcountry. The insulated Klean Kanteen comes with a spill-proof lid. An additional café lid is available for purchase and is great for sipping coffee and tea. BPA free.

Mono Lake Committee insulated Klean Kanteen, 16-oz: \$25.95

Klean Kanteen café lid: \$2.00

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Staff migrations

by Rosanne Catron

After a summer abundant with wildflowers, creeks spilling over their banks, and staff migrations, we say goodbye to the seasonal staff with the first layer of snow on the mountaintops.

In July we bid farewell to Book & Map Buyer **Laura Walker**, who retired after 17 years of working for the Mono Lake Committee in many different capacities. Laura is best known as the person responsible for the beloved array of books in the Bookstore. Her dedication to making the Information Center & Bookstore a fun, educational, and unique place showed in her careful book selection, her knack for finding popular and responsible gift items, and her attention to the helpful and friendly atmosphere for members and visitors alike. But don't worry book shoppers, in addition to passing the book-buying torch to Information Center & Bookstore Manager **Jessica Horn**, Laura still lives here so she'll let us know about new books when we see her out and about in the Mono Basin.

Congratulations to Information & Restoration Specialist **Greg Reis** and former Office Director **Erika Obedzinski**, who welcomed new addition, **Charlie**, to the Mono Lake Committee family in August! Charlie, we'll be looking for your intern application in about 20 years.

Birding Intern **Oliver James** applied his boundless enthusiasm to his weekly bird walks. He also led a walk

during the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua, a fun accomplishment after being an attendee since childhood. Intern **Erik Lyon** put a myriad of skills to work organizing the media files in the research library, sorting support letters for the Mono

Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve, and reading groundwater measurements along the creeks. Along with working with the policy team, second-year intern **Sarah Melcher** updated *The Mono-logue* regularly and organized a summer lecture series with local researchers.

Intern **Mila Re** used her knowledge of native plants on weekly restoration walks and in the storefront garden, did research on policy issues, and assisted with creek monitoring. Intern **Abby Rivin** brought her infectious energy to proofreading the research library database, keeping the books in the Bookstore well stocked, and organizing the thousands of letters and petitions in support of the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve.

After a winter as Project Specialist, **Julia Runcie** returned for her second Intern summer planning and implementing weekly restoration walks, coordinating the annual Eared Grebe survey, and updating the Committee's Facebook and Twitter feeds.

Along with leading six canoe tours every weekend of the summer, Canoe Coordinator **Russ Taylor** also led canoe tours with school groups and helped streamline the new online canoe reservation system.

Local resident **Russ Reese** came back for a second summer as Information Center & Bookstore Assistant—putting his understanding of Mono Basin ecology and history to good use. Luckily, Russ will be working part-time this winter as well.

Information Center & Bookstore Assistant **Carolyn Weddle** spent her first summer in the Eastern Sierra diligently field-checking local hikes in her free time in order to help give Bookstore visitors the best advice possible. Happily, Carolyn will be staying on through the winter as a Project Specialist.

If you are interested in a summer position at the Committee, jobs are posted at monolake.org and we begin accepting applications January 1. ♦

Rosanne Catron is the Committee's Office Manager. She is an avid fan of the June Lake Thrift Store.



Congratulations Greg and Erika!



The 2011 Mono Lake Committee staff. Top row, left to right: Bartshé Miller, Jessica Horn, Geoffrey McQuilkin, Oliver James, Will Jevne, Erik Lyon. Middle row: Arya Degenhardt, Lisa Cutting, Elin Ljung, Abby Rivin, Ellen King, Mila Re. Bottom row: Sarah Melcher, Julia Runcie, Russ Taylor, Morgan Lindsay, Rosanne Catron.



From the mailbag

News from members and friends

by Ellen King

Thank you to all of you 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 memory

Anne Moser of Menlo Park gave a gift in memory of **Robin Winston Smith**—“Our last trip together included Mono Lake.” **Randi Zink** of Kirkland, WA sent a contribution in memory of Bob Schneider. We received gifts in memory of **Wilbur Vaughan** from **George Becker** of Hurricane, UT, **Joan Forsyth** of Sacramento, **Robert Harris** of

Sacramento, **Daniel & Mary Illerich** of Friendswood, TX, **Jon & Linda Madsen** of Reno, NV, and **Julie Rose** of Brooks.

In honor

Joyce Breslin of Pasadena sent a contribution in honor of her brother **Robbie Smith**, “who lived in Mammoth for the past 30 years. He loved Mono Lake and hiking in

the Sierra. He passed away on April 10, 2011.” **Margret Lohfeld** of Los Angeles gave gifts in honor of her brother **Martin Engel**. ♦

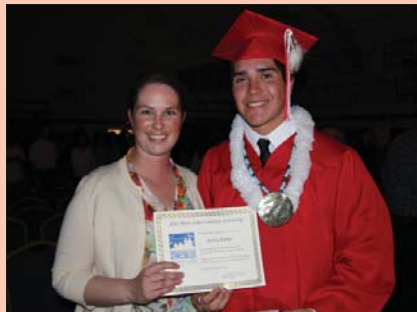
Ellen King is the Committee's Membership Coordinator. As this Newsletter arrives in mailboxes she will be on a 17-day trek in Nepal!

Mono Lake Committee Scholarship supports local grads

This fall two Lee Vining High School graduates are attending college with the help of the Mono Lake Committee Scholarship program. Angela Annett and Quincy Parker both wrote compelling essays that won them each \$1,000 to help with their education expenses.

Both Angela and Quincy answered the following essay questions in order to win the award: How has Mono Lake or the Mono Basin influenced your life and your choice to go to college? What do you expect to do to change the world for the better with particular regard to solving natural resource issues?

Angela wrote, “As I work towards achieving my BFA in Animation and Visual Effects at the Academy of Art University I plan to feature my love for nature and the protection of its natural resources as a main focus within my field of work.” Quincy wrote, “I was born and raised in Lee Vining,



Elin Ljung, Communications Coordinator, presented Quincy Parker and Angela Annett their Mono Lake Committee Scholarships.

California and live next to the great, beautiful Mono Lake. The lake has influenced me to continue in school and one day bring back the knowledge to be a part of helping this place.”

Each year the Mono Lake Committee supports local students pursuing higher education who display a personal connection with Mono Lake and the Mono Lake story through their essays. Mono County resident high school seniors who have firm plans to attend a



two- or four-year college within a year of graduation qualify.

If you are interested in the scholarship program contact Arya Degenhardt (arya@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595. More information on the Mono Lake Committee Scholarship is online at monolake.org/mlc/scholarship. Committee members have been very supportive of the program, sending in donations for the scholarships—thank you!



MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

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