

# MONO LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Winter & Spring 2020



Prescribed Burn to Benefit Gulls

Restoration of Mill Creek

Tioga Inn Decision Nears

Field Seminars

The Mono Basin can feel completely quiet and isolated in winter. Mountain passes close for the season and visitors dwindle to a trickle. Birds have flown to warmer places and it's as if the whole basin is far away from everything else in the world.

But during the prescribed burn on Twain Islet this month I was reminded of how many people see Mono Lake, even in the depths of winter.

Eastern Sierra neighbors hiking north of the lake took photos of the plumes of smoke rising near Negit Island. Locals came into the bookstore to inquire about the activity out on the lake. Someone called to ask if the volcanoes were erupting! Members keeping an eye on the Mono Lake webcams called in, curious about the boat zipping back and forth. I talked to people watching from Big Pine, San Luis Obispo, Riverside, Reno, and the Midwest.

Everyone was thrilled to hear about the prescribed burn, an exciting first step in a long-planned and carefully coordinated effort with the Inyo National Forest and Point Blue Conservation Science to restore California Gull nesting habitat on the islets that has been taken over by invasive weeds.

People saw Mono Lake in the 1970s when David Gaines brought it—via slideshow—to Audubon chapters and Sierra Club gatherings. People saw the Mono Lake Committee through court cases and legal challenges, procedural victories and restoration milestones. People see Mono Lake through droughts and big water years, through lake levels painfully low and lake levels rising.

Thank you for seeing Mono Lake and this work we do to protect it, especially when it feels like we're a million miles away and quieter than the daily news cycle. Thank you for checking on the webcams and following along on social media. Thank you for watching for this *Newsletter* in your mailbox. I hope you enjoy it.

—Elin Ljung, Communications Coordinator



COVER PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN DITTL, JOHNDITTL.COM

ROBBIE DI PAOLO

Mono Lake Committee Executive Director Geoff McQuilkin (left) and veteran Los Angeles Times reporter Louis Sahagun (right) talk with Jeff Karl, Forestry Technician for the Inyo National Forest, during the prescribed burn to restore California Gull habitat on the Negit Islets. For more on the burn, and this historic effort, see page 3. For the LA Times article, go to <http://bit.ly/bassiaburn>.

### 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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Founded by David Gaines in 1978

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## MONO LAKE NEWSLETTER

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# A burning solution to the *Bassia* problem

by Bartshé Miller

In a monumental effort, the Inyo National Forest, in partnership with the Mono Lake Committee, conducted a series of prescribed fires with the specific goal of restoring California Gull breeding habitat on the islands in Mono Lake. Working between episodes of wintry weather, the Committee and Inyo fire personnel raced to mitigate the impact of a troublesome invasive plant, *Bassia hyssopifolia*, that has grown to cover over 70% of the Negit Islets and is preventing California Gulls from nesting successfully.

Despite an initial, discouraging assessment of how well the weeds might burn, in mid-February a long-planned prescribed fire moved forward and resulted in a mosaic burn across much of Twain Islet. In addition to planning the project with the Inyo, the Committee captained our new 16-foot research boat to transport equipment, volunteers, and Inyo fire personnel to and from the islet in order to make the burn possible.

## Cascading ecosystem changes

*Bassia* is an annual weed, now common throughout the West and rapidly expanding in the Mono Basin. Growing over three feet tall, it has transformed the formerly open-ground nesting habitat for California Gulls into an inhospitable, brushy thicket.

The California Gull has a long history of suffering impacts due to human activity. Mono Lake has traditionally been home to the second-largest breeding population of this species in the world after Great Salt Lake. Because of last century's excessive water diversions and the changing habitat wrought by a falling lake level, today's generations of California Gulls are struggling with the cascading ecosystem changes that now include this noxious weed (see Winter & Spring 2019 *Mono Lake Newsletter*).



BARTSHÉ MILLER

Last fall Committee staff ferried Inyo National Forest fire personnel out to Twain Islet to see if the invasive plant *Bassia* would burn.

According to Point Blue Conservation Science's 2019 annual report on the population size and reproductive success of California Gulls at Mono Lake, the estimated number of breeding California Gulls has declined steadily since 2016. The population is inversely tracking with the sudden expansion of *Bassia* across the Negit Islets during that same timeframe. The 2019 study estimated 22,150 breeding gulls, the lowest number in the 37-year history of the research project.

## Fire resistant, but not fireproof

There is not much documented research on the burn behavior of *Bassia*, so last November Committee staff ferried Inyo fire personnel to Twain Islet to evaluate the fuel conditions of dense *Bassia* stands. Approximately half of the

*Continued on page 11*



The *Bassia* caught fire better than expected in February's warm, dry weather, so the Inyo fire crew burned as much as possible over two days.



PHOTOS BY ROBBIE DI PAULO

The Inyo fire crew assessed the results of the prescribed burn, which opened up bare ground for California Gulls to nest once again.



# Revised water license for DWP on the horizon

*State Water Board expects finalization in 2020*

*by Geoffrey McQuilkin*

Over the past year, the California State Water Resources Control Board has been effectively advancing the long-running project of revising the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power's (DWP) water license to include a set of next-generation stream restoration requirements agreed to in the 2013 Mono Basin Stream Restoration Agreement with the Mono Lake Committee.

Signed in fall 2013, following 15 years of stream studies and three years of intensive legal negotiations, the Agreement was a significant milestone for Mono Lake. It marked the completion of a major area of study required by the State Water Board and the launch of a new period of restoration at Mono Lake in which the Los Angeles Aqueduct serves the new additional purpose of healing streams. In this new era, the important ecological, wildlife, scenic, and economic values of Mono

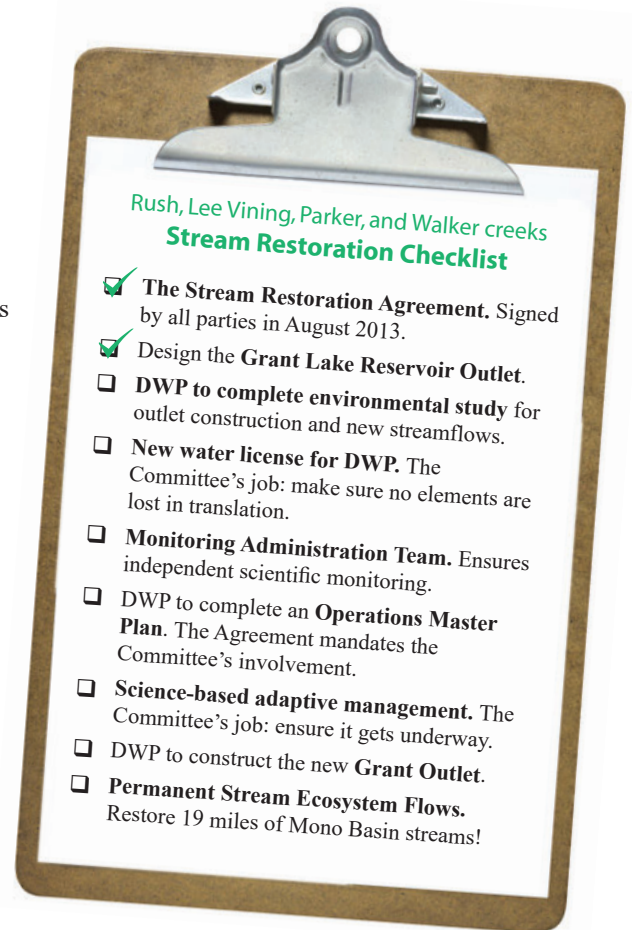
Lake and its tributary streams will be recognized equally alongside the water needs of Los Angeles.

## **Persistence pays off**

In the years since signing the Agreement, the Committee has maintained constant pressure on the process through gentle prodding, helpful support, conference calls, additional technical analysis, letters from lawyers, and persistent communication with every party involved. Some delay is understandable, but the Committee has never lost the sense of urgency to move forward, given how important the Agreement's new streamflow specifications are for stream restoration success.



*Mono Lake's tributaries will get streamflows that better mimic natural runoff patterns when DWP's water license is amended to reflect the 2013 Mono Basin Stream Restoration Agreement.*



In the last year, monthly progress checks and a clear vision of the schedule and goal have kept the license revision process on track. Soon the State Water Board will seek public input on the license terms, which will be a key opportunity for Committee members to offer support for the process (see page 24). Before summer, DWP is scheduled to deliver its long-promised environmental review document describing the Grant Lake Reservoir Outlet construction project and associated streamflow changes.

## **Full implementation of new SEFs**

At the heart of the Agreement are Stream Ecosystem Flows (SEFs) that mimic natural runoff patterns and activate the natural processes that will continue the restoration of Mono Basin streams. SEFs are the engines that run effective stream restoration—affecting

*Continued on page 24*

# Decision on Tioga Inn project nears

*Public input on controversial proposal still key*

*by Bartshé Miller*

This spring, Mono County will decide whether to approve an unprecedented, large-scale development project that threatens to permanently alter the visual resources of the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area and the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve and erase the small-town, rural character of Lee Vining (see Fall 2019 *Mono Lake Newsletter*). A Final Subsequent Environmental Impact Report (FSEIR) for the Tioga Inn Specific Plan Amendment is scheduled for release in late February 2020, shortly after this *Newsletter* goes to press. The Mono County Board of Supervisors will ultimately decide the fate of the project in the coming months, but as of press time a date for that meeting has not been announced.

The Tioga Inn project proposes to add a new 100-unit/150-bedroom housing development comprised of roughly 16 two-story buildings on top of a bluff overlooking the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area. Increased parking, new roads, additional gas pumps, and a wastewater treatment system are proposed to be added to the formerly-approved restaurant and two-story hotel planned at the junction of Highway 120 West and Highway 395, adjacent to the existing Tioga Gas Mart (often called the Mobil Mart).

Over 1,000 comment letters of concern were written in response to the Draft Subsequent Environmental Impact Report (DSEIR) last year. While the final report has not yet been released, it appears likely that the significant and unavoidable adverse impacts to the visual character of the Mono Basin and its dark night-sky resources, as outlined in the DSEIR, will remain. These extraordinary scenic impacts, in addition to the adverse, unmitigatable impacts on deer, traffic safety, development connectivity, and the broad concern in the community about a 300% increase in the population of Lee Vining, compelled the Mono Lake Committee to submit a lengthy comment letter.

The original Specific Plan for the hotel and restaurant

was approved in 1993. In the 27 years since, because so much has changed with the project and the community of Lee Vining, Mono County would be better served by a new environmental impact report that adequately analyzes project alternatives that cover the full scope of the entire project. The Committee and others raised this concern in 2016, and our legal counsel submitted pointed comments regarding this shortcoming last summer.

The Committee is advocating for a balanced project alternative that would achieve Mono County's high development standards for protecting natural landscapes while also providing decision makers with realistic options from which to choose. In December, the Committee urged for such an alternative during public comment at Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission meetings. Such an alternative was not available in the DSEIR, and only the "No Project" alternative avoided serious damage to the scenic assets of Mono Lake. While the FSEIR may yet reveal an alternative with no significant adverse impacts to the Scenic Area and the Natural Reserve, this possibility seems unlikely.

The project is up for consideration and public discussion this spring. The Mono County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors must decide whether a large-scale housing development perched prominently in the Mono Basin, tripling the size of Lee Vining, is appropriate and worth the many irreversible adverse impacts that it would bring. For all who care about Mono Lake, Lee Vining, the Mono Basin, and the eastern gateway to Yosemite National Park, this is an important time to let decision makers hear your comments about the Tioga Inn.

There will be lots of movement on this issue in the coming months, so stay tuned to [monolake.org/today](http://monolake.org/today) for the latest updates and how to get involved. Learn more about the Tioga Inn project, see visual mock-ups of the project area, and read the Committee's comment letter [monolake.org/tiogainn](http://monolake.org/tiogainn). ♦



A Mono County Planning Commission meeting took place last fall at the site of the controversial proposed Tioga Inn project.



# Progress on Mill Creek flow

*Southern California Edison operation delivers*

*by Lisa Cutting and Robert Di Paolo*

Last year was a pivotal one for Mill Creek, with Southern California Edison (SCE) fully implementing operations consistent with the long-established water rights that define Mill Creek water distribution in the north Mono Basin. Mill Creek is Mono Lake's third-largest tributary and represents tremendous potential for riparian restoration.

2019 was the second year SCE used the rehabilitated Mill Creek return ditch to return water back to Mill Creek after hydropower generation, following the adjudicated water rights decree. It was the first year that SCE actively forecasted, tracked, and distributed snowmelt runoff on a daily basis. While SCE has always produced an annual forecast for this drainage, they are now working with water rights holders and settlement parties to refine their operation to accurately anticipate and follow the rules for water distribution.

The forecasted runoff for April 1–September 30, 2019 was 151% of average, and the observed runoff was 139% of average. The main reason the observed runoff was less than the forecast was the lack of regular summer rain and drier-than-average conditions during the summer months. Overall SCE found that the forecast helped them achieve a greater level of precision in their operations. As a comparison, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power has been doing similar forecasting, tracking, and distribution for decades in the south part of the Mono Basin per its requirement to accurately meet State Water Board-ordered streamflows.

The 2019 water year was similar to 1997, with approximately 23,400 acre-feet of water coming into Lundy Lake Reservoir between April and September. In 1997, when the water used to generate hydropower could not adequately be returned to Mill Creek, the creek received 25% of the water released from the reservoir and 75% flowed down the Wilson system. Compare that to 2019 when SCE followed the long-established water rights properly, having made return ditch rehabilitation and infrastructure improvements: Mill Creek received 65% and the Wilson system 35% of the water released from the reservoir. Adhering to the legal distribution of water benefits Mill Creek as the natural stream without impacting the high-priority water rights associated with Conway Ranch lands and the resulting year-round, stable water supply for the Wilson system.

Reestablishing more natural flow patterns on Mill Creek—like the ones delivered in the past three years—has already demonstrated the significant potential for Mill Creek's restoration. Peak flows have provided the energy necessary to recreate and reoccupy former side-channel habitats in the Mill Creek bottomlands. Those side channels are spreading water, recharging groundwater, and allowing cottonwood-willow riparian vegetation to spread across a wide area—restoring what was once critical wooded-wetland habitat in the Mono Basin. The fact that these channels have persisted even during low-flow winter months is further validation that Mill Creek's most degraded reaches are beginning to heal and function once again. ❖



ROBBIE DI PAOLO

*Mill Creek channels rewatered as a result of high flows over the past three years are now being maintained at lower flows. These channels recharge groundwater and allow cottonwood-willow riparian vegetation to spread across a wide area, which is critical to restoration.*

# Mono Basin streams eligible for Wild and Scenic River status

*Focused engagement achieves desired outcomes in new Inyo Forest Plan*

*by Bartshé Miller*

In October 2019, Inyo National Forest Supervisor Tammy Randall-Parker signed and released the Final Record of Decision for the Inyo National Forest Land Management Plan. Developed over more than five years of planning and public process, the new Forest Plan provides comprehensive management direction for Inyo's two million acres. The Mono Lake Committee was involved in the Inyo Plan revision process since 2014, and focused on elements of the plan that relate specifically to the Mono Basin.

The complete Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Management Plan is included within the Record of

Decision, Executive Summary, and four-volume Final Environmental Impact Statement. In addition, the new plan includes the Forest Service's determination that approximately 75 miles of Mono Basin streams are newly eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

## **Advocating for the Scenic Area**

While a broad coalition of groups, including the Committee, advocated for important forest-wide plan elements covering wilderness, fire, recreation, and wildlife, Committee staff focused on the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area and surrounding Inyo land within the Mono Basin watershed. Committee priorities included that the Scenic Area's designation and management plan be reauthorized and institutionalized within the new Forest Plan and not modified.

The Committee also prioritized

consideration of Mono Basin streams for Wild and Scenic eligibility.

## **New Forest Plan recognizes stream restoration**

The Committee advocated for Wild and Scenic River eligibility for Mono Basin streams through public meetings and written comments, and by presenting incisive stream information and photo documentation through the formal objection process. Continued Committee engagement and other interested parties, including Friends of the Inyo, Mono County, Sierra Club, and Steve Evans from the California Wilderness Coalition, helped make the case that Wild and Scenic River eligibility was warranted for Mono Lake's tributary streams.

Because of the extensive restoration that has occurred on the creeks over the last 20 years, they were clear candidates

*Continued on page 24*

## Eligibility vs. designation

The Wild and Scenic River eligibility ruling means the Inyo National Forest recognizes that these Mono Basin stream segments possess "outstandingly remarkable values." These values, as listed in The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, are "scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values." While rivers may only be *designated* as Wild and Scenic by Congress or the Secretary of the Interior, *eligibility* in the Inyo Forest Plan is the first step for future consideration of designation. The eligibility rule also requires that the Inyo manage Mono Basin streams "to protect the values that support their inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System until Congress makes a final determination on their designation."



PHOTO COURTESY OF SALLY MILLER

*The new Inyo National Forest Land Management Plan includes approximately 75 miles of Mono Basin streams as eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation.*



# Committee helps restore habitat below Tioga Lodge

by Elin Ljung

Last November, Mono Lake Committee staff and Mono Lake Volunteers lent a hand to the restoration effort along Mono Lake's west shore below Tioga Lodge. Just before the first snowstorm of the winter blew in, we planted 300 willow cuttings along Post Office Creek's original, rewetted channels between Highway 395 and Mono Lake.

The willow-planting followed extensive work to restore the sensitive and valuable habitat below Tioga Lodge, which was damaged in October 2016 by unpermitted clearing and grading and the diversion of Post Office Creek.

A habitat restoration plan dictating the rehabilitation and monitoring work was agreed upon in 2017 by Tioga Lodge, California State Parks, the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, and Mono County (see Fall 2018 *Mono Lake Newsletter*). The Committee played a role in reporting the damage and urging law enforcement action and we applauded the resulting restoration plan. Consulting botanist Jim Paulus is overseeing the work as the Restoration Specialist for the project.

While the majority of the restoration work on the 7.61 disturbed acres was done in 2018, Paulus had been seeking volunteer help and a good weather window for planting willows to enhance the recovering riparian forest habitat. Refreshments to fuel the group were thoughtfully provided by Tioga Lodge owner Gloria Ma.



Last November Committee staff and volunteers planted 300 willow cuttings below the Tioga Lodge to enhance the recovery of the riparian habitat.

Working in teams of two, the group cut willow stems from existing, healthy plants, carried the cuttings in buckets of water to designated planting locations, and then pushed the cuttings into foot-deep holes dug with pry-bars. Minimizing the exposure of cut ends to the air increases the chance of survival, so the teams worked quickly to get the willows into the ground.

Paulus and the group had hoped to squeeze in another work day to plant more willow and black cottonwood cuttings. The arrival of the first winter storm put the kibosh on further planting for the year, but provided a good layer of snow to help the willow cuttings establish.

The 300 newly-planted willows should be visibly thriving by late spring, and monitoring will continue through 2022 to ensure that all the restored vegetation recovers according to plan. ❖



Committee staff and volunteers were eager to help with riparian habitat restoration taking place below the Tioga Lodge.





## Success stories from Los Angeles

**T**he Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center (OEC) creates strong, lasting connections between the Mono Lake Committee and the people of Los Angeles. OEC staff visit LA in winter to meet with past participants, experience firsthand how the OEC program has impacted their lives, and visit new prospective groups.

This winter, Outdoor Education Center Manager Santiago Escruceria and Los Angeles Education Coordinator Herley Jim Bowling gave over 35 presentations to LA high school students, environmental and community groups, university students, school administrators, as well as some unexpected groups like the School of Aerospace Engineering and an assisted living home. Each visit ignited curiosity about Mono Lake, opened conversations, and inspired stories.

At Roosevelt High School, Santiago reconnected with Marcela, a student who visited the OEC as a high school sophomore. Marcela was excited to share that she is a first-generation college student and is pursuing a degree in Environmental Studies. Her trip to Mono Lake helped inspire her to apply to college and also steered her to the environmental field.

Santiago, Herley Jim, and I attended a meeting with the community group Pacoima Beautiful, where we met with OEC alumnus Susana Carmona, who now works on the staff of Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez. Seeing Susana was a reminder of what the OEC program is all about—past participants making real, inspiring change in LA.

The OEC calendar is almost completely booked for the 2020 season with 24 groups on the schedule so far. It's exciting to think about the stories the program will inspire this year.



## A “powerful” thanks

**T**he threat of California wildfires has prompted Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) across the state during high wind events, and these power outages also affected groups staying at the OEC last fall who needed a functioning home base to make the most of their trip. To help mitigate the effects of PSPS events, Mono Lake Committee Board member Sherryl Taylor and her husband Tony donated a Goal Zero brand battery backup to the program. The battery backup can be charged using power offset by the OEC's existing solar panels and will help keep the fridge and a few lights on during a PSPS event. Thank you, Sherryl & Tony!

If you are interested in ways you can help the OEC, please contact Education Director Rose Nelson ([rose@monolake.org](mailto:rose@monolake.org)) at (760) 647-6595.



**O**ur mission is to build understanding and appreciation for the Mono Basin/Los Angeles watershed through education programs and muscle-powered recreational activity; to demonstrate that balanced solutions are possible for meeting the water needs of people and the environment; and to kindle stewardship through service projects that restore and improve the quality of the Mono Basin watershed.

[monolake.org/education](http://monolake.org/education)  
[facebook.com/mono.oec](https://facebook.com/mono.oec)

PHOTOS BY ROSE NELSON, AMA STAVROS

# Policy notes

by Elin Ljung and Geoffrey McQuilkin

## **Lee Vining's first car charger installed at Solar Pavilion**

Last September, a level two universal electric vehicle car charger was installed on the curb in front of the Pioneer Solar Pavilion, the community-built covered outdoor gathering space in Lee Vining's Gus Hess Park. Using power offset by the 21 solar panels that make up the Solar Pavilion's roof, the new charger can charge two cars at once.

The charger is metered to provide usage information, and it shows that approximately 63 electric vehicles have been plugged in since it was installed, using a total of 326 kilowatt hours (kWh) of power. So far the charging has been offset using power generated entirely by the Solar Pavilion.

On a sunny summer day, the solar panels can generate 40 kWh, which offsets five hours of charging for a car that requires 7.6 kilowatts per hour.

With shorter days, a lower sun angle, and snow on the pavilion's roof in the winter, the panels can offset only one hour of charging per day.

Constructed in 2018 (see Fall 2018 *Mono Lake Newsletter*), the Solar Pavilion provides an example of integrating solar panels into small projects, and with the addition of the car charger, it also offers a sustainable service to visitors and locals alike. As the only charger in town, it's an important demonstration of Lee Vining's commitment to sustainable energy.

## **Efforts toward a sustainable recreation future**

An effort is underway in the Eastern Sierra to discuss and plan for a sustainable recreation future across the region. Supported with state Proposition 68 funding through the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, the \$619,000 initiative

seeks to bring together federal, state, and local agencies and governments with non-profits and other stakeholders. The purpose is to discuss current challenges and identify projects that would "improve and maintain recreational opportunities as well as restore ecosystems to their natural resiliency and functions."

The Committee is participating in the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Tourism and Recreation Initiative to advance solutions that protect ecological needs in an era of increasing visitation, diminishing agency budgets, visitor service reductions, and degrading facilities that challenge sustainably supporting the hundreds of thousands of people who visit Mono Lake each year. The effort will run through the year with numerous meetings and conclude with a list of coordinated projects that are prioritized for future funding. ❖



ANDREW YOUSSEF

Electric car drivers can now charge their cars at Lee Vining's new level two universal charger at Gus Hess Park.



# Committee to join Motus network

by Anna Christensen

This summer, the Mono Lake Committee will be installing a powerful new data gathering and tracking tool to learn more about the behavior of birds on and around Mono Lake.

In the upcoming months, the Committee will join the Motus Wildlife Tracking network by erecting several receiving stations to detect the movement of birds near Mono Lake. The network operates using automated radio telemetry and identifies animals in the vicinity that have been tagged with lightweight radio transmitters. The Motus network spans much of the globe with 872 receiving stations on four continents in 28 countries. Despite this robust network, there are few receiving stations in the western United States and none currently in the Great Basin region, leaving big gaps in information about bird migration.

By participating in this global wildlife tracking program, the Committee will be able to further research partnerships with scientists interested in flying creatures at Mono Lake, including birds, bats, and even insects. These partnerships

have the potential to span continents by linking information gathered through Motus receivers all across the world.

In particular, phalarope researchers are considering the benefits of Motus because of the potential to gain critical knowledge about the tens of thousands of Wilson's and Red-necked phalaropes that feed and molt at Mono Lake before they head to South America.

The Motus tracking stations have a small footprint and will be tucked in three locations triangulated to detect birds at any location on Mono Lake. The stations are lightweight, portable, can be solar powered, and won't impair scenic views at Mono Lake.

Funding for the first Motus tracking station was provided by a longtime Committee member in Washington, DC. For more information about Motus at Mono Lake, or to support this exciting project, please contact Philanthropy Director Anna Christensen ([anna@monolake.org](mailto:anna@monolake.org)) at (760) 647-6595. To learn more about other Motus projects or see a map of receiving stations, go to [motus.org](http://motus.org). ❖

## Burning solution from page 3

total nesting California Gulls at Mono Lake use Twain during the summer breeding season, making it the top priority site for action. Despite warm late-fall conditions, dry stands of *Bassia* did not burn well. This fire resistance, paired with irregular growth density and distribution over the beaches and rocky terraces of Twain, was discouraging for accomplishing a thorough burn over the islet. While the assessment did not eliminate the option to try burning, it complicated the operational logistics required to successfully carry out a prescribed burn.

### A prescription for fire

Finally, in mid-February, with a window of clear, calm, and warm conditions, Inyo firefighters were able to attempt a test burn over large portions of Twain Islet to learn about *Bassia*'s fire behavior. It burned much better than last fall's evaluation suggested it would, so the crews kept going. Afternoon conditions were ideal to burn small, dense stands of the weed, and several acres were cleared—exposing barren ground that was once perennially available to nesting California Gulls.

Using our new donated research boat, Committee staff made up to six trips per day back and forth moving firefighters, fuel, tools, and equipment out to Twain Islet. Additionally, Committee staff pumped water from Mono Lake and sprayed it on hand-removed and burned areas to test whether saturation with the alkaline water might prohibit or discourage remaining *Bassia* seeds from germinating. Committee and Inyo staff mapped and documented burned and sprayed areas for future

evaluation of the weed eradication efforts.

With little time before the gulls return this year, the Committee and Inyo National Forest are pushing to burn as much *Bassia* as possible. Committee staff and volunteers will hand-remove and pile weeds for future burning and spread lake water on test plots, which will be evaluated for *Bassia* re-growth after the nesting season. After a critically low nesting population in 2019, any progress to restore nesting habitat on this islet will provide much-needed relief for California Gulls in 2020 and, hopefully, beyond. ❖



Committee staff pumped water from Mono Lake and sprayed it on Twain Islet to test whether saturation with the alkaline water might prevent *Bassia* seeds from germinating.

## Streamwatch

# Stream Ecosystem Flows released

by Greg Reis

**T**his winter, Stream Ecosystem Flows (SEFs) were released under a Temporary Urgency Change Petition (TUCP) in advance of the State Water Board's pending approval of these flows from the 2013 Mono Basin Stream Restoration Agreement. The new winter flows are lower than those specified in the current license, more like the natural hydrograph, more likely to keep Grant Lake Reservoir higher, and more likely to improve winter conditions for trout.

Aside from a period in October when the TUCP was being renewed, since April 2019 the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) has been releasing SEFs to the extent that its existing facilities can achieve the flows. DWP is expected to renew the TUCP in March, temporarily continuing the improved flow regime in 2020, until the State Water Board permanently approves the SEFs in a new license (see page 4).

The summertime SEFs have only

been partially tested during the wet years of 2011 and 2019, since Rush Creek peak SEFs could not be released due to Grant Lake Reservoir's lack of an outlet to Rush Creek.

With 56% of average snowpack (see article below), and a preliminary runoff forecast of 65% of average, 2020 could be the first non-Wet year-type in which the SEFs are tested, and the first year the SEFs can be fully delivered. A new high-flow outlet will be built at the Grant spillway once the new license is approved, allowing wetter-year peak SEFs to be released in the future.

But as the dry winter days continue, it is looking more likely that this year's flows will be low enough to be delivered using existing infrastructure and allow a full test of the SEFs for the first time. ❖



ROBBIE DI PAOLO

*This winter, Mono Basin streams have received lower flows that are more like the natural hydrograph and better for trout.*

## Lakewatch

# Below-average snowpack could end Mono Lake's four-year rise

by Greg Reis

**M**ono Lake's level always declines in September, with the exception of just a few wet years. Last September, it dropped 0.43 feet, the biggest September drop since 2007, and the biggest September drop in a wet year since a 0.48-foot drop in 1986.

This large September decline in lake level is an indicator of dry conditions—little or no precipitation fell at most Mono Basin weather stations August–October. On average during these three months about 1.5 inches of precipitation

falls along Highway 395 and 2.5 inches falls in the Sierra.

Mono Lake had a near-average drop in October–November, and a near-average rise in December. Then the seventh-driest January since record-keeping began in 1935 resulted in the third-smallest rise in the three decades since the end of excessive water diversions. This resulted in a February 1 lake level of 6382.6 feet above sea level, slightly below the lowest likely forecasted level we predicted one year ago.

At the end of January, Cain Ranch, a precipitation station representative of Mono Lake, had recorded the 11<sup>th</sup>-driest winter on record—39% of average. An October–January period this dry only occurred four times in the 59 years prior

to 1990. However, with a significant drying trend observed in recent decades at Cain Ranch, this is the seventh time it has occurred since then. Precipitation in Lee Vining was slightly higher at 48% of average.

On February 1, Mono Basin snowpack was 56% of average for the date and 35% of the April 1 average. Snowpack typically peaks on April 1 after the usually-wet months of February and March; however, as of press time there are no significant storms in the forecast. The preliminary runoff forecast is for a Dry year-type, which would cause Mono Lake's level to decline this year for the first time since the end of the 2012–2016 drought. ❖

6417'

6392'

6382.6'

6372'

Prediversion lake level, 1941

Management lake level

Current lake level

Historic low, 1982



# Mono Basin Journal

A roundup of quiet happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



Geoff McQuilkin

The sun shone warmly for February, but the breeze still chilled us as the Mono Lake Committee boat pushed across the waters of Mono Lake toward the islands. Calm weather made it a great day to fight the invasive weeds that have been crowding California Gulls out of their nesting grounds. The boat ferried two Committee staff, two firefighters, drip torches, bright red tanks of fuel, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, and me.

We had a destination to get to, but Mono Lake always has something interesting to share and three miles out a crunching sound filled the air as the boat crossed through a broad skin of ice. Salt lakes, of course, don't like to freeze; this ice must have originated at west shore freshwater springs and slowly

drifted east, undertaking its own journey across the lake's silvery waters.

We arrived at the gull nesting islet beneath columns of smoke, the results of a fire crew already in action burning off the unwelcome botanical intruder. Flames danced around tufa and people roamed the islet. Thirty days later people would be gone, ashes blown to the wind, and gulls would be circling overhead, looking for nesting spots to raise new families. With acres of new choices, we're pretty sure they will like what they see. ❖

*Geoff McQuilkin is the Committee's Executive Director. He is enjoying assisting his daughter Ellery with her study of the movement of Mono Basin glaciers.*

## Benchmarks



February 9, 2019: Snow blanketed the Mono Basin all the way down to the shore of Mono Lake last February. Mono Basin snowpack for February 1 was 101% of average and Mono Lake stood at 6381.5 feet above sea level.



Photos by Andrew Youssef

February 11, 2020: One year later, Mono Lake is more than a foot higher at 6382.6 feet above sea level. After a mostly dry January, however, Mono Basin snowpack on February 1 was just 56% of average.



## MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

### INFORMATION CENTER & BOOKSTORE



#### SOLAR INFLATABLE LANTERN

Let this lantern illuminate your next outdoor adventure! This 75-lumen lantern is solar powered, collapsible, waterproof, and custom printed with the Mono Lake Committee logo on the bottom. Each lantern also includes a USB cable for charging in the absence of sunlight.

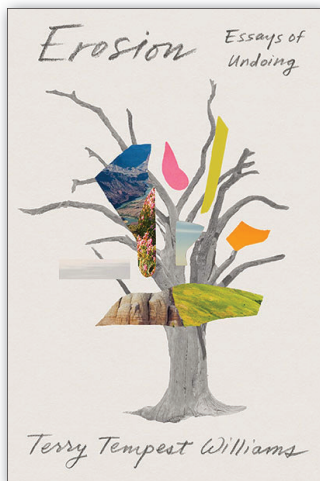
*Mono Lake Committee exclusive.*

*Solar inflatable lantern, 5"x 5"x 5", packs flat: \$24.99*

#### MONO LAKE COMMITTEE GLASS TRAVEL MUG

Enjoy your favorite hot beverage on-the-go in this beautiful 16-ounce borosilicate glass mug. Designed to keep hands comfortable and beverages hot, it has a removable navy blue silicone lid and thermal sleeve with the Mono Lake Committee logo. Dishwasher and microwave safe, it's a great way to reduce consumption of single-use cups. *Mono Lake Committee exclusive.*

*Mono Lake Committee glass travel mug, 16 ounces: \$24.00*



#### EROSION: ESSAYS OF UNDOING

BY TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

This new collection of essays from Terry Tempest Williams is timely, highlighting the erosion we struggle against in many different facets of society. Spanning environmental, political, and cultural issues, this collection is a call to action intended to inspire a way forward through difficult times.

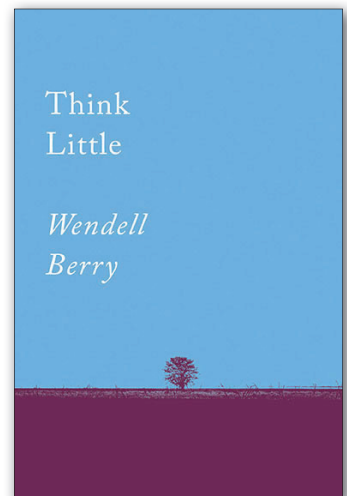
*Erosion, hardcover, Sarah Crichton Books, 336 pages, 5¾"x 8½": \$27.00*

#### THINK LITTLE

BY WENDELL BERRY

This short but powerful pairing presents together two essays by agrarian, environmentalist, cultural critic, and influential author Wendell Berry. Originally written in 1970 and 1968, respectively, "Think Little" and "A Native Hill" are freshly back in print and resoundingly relevant today. "Think Little" addresses our culture as it relates to the environment, oppression, war, and greed; "A Native Hill" is an exploration of the ideas of place and home as a means for a greater understanding of ourselves.

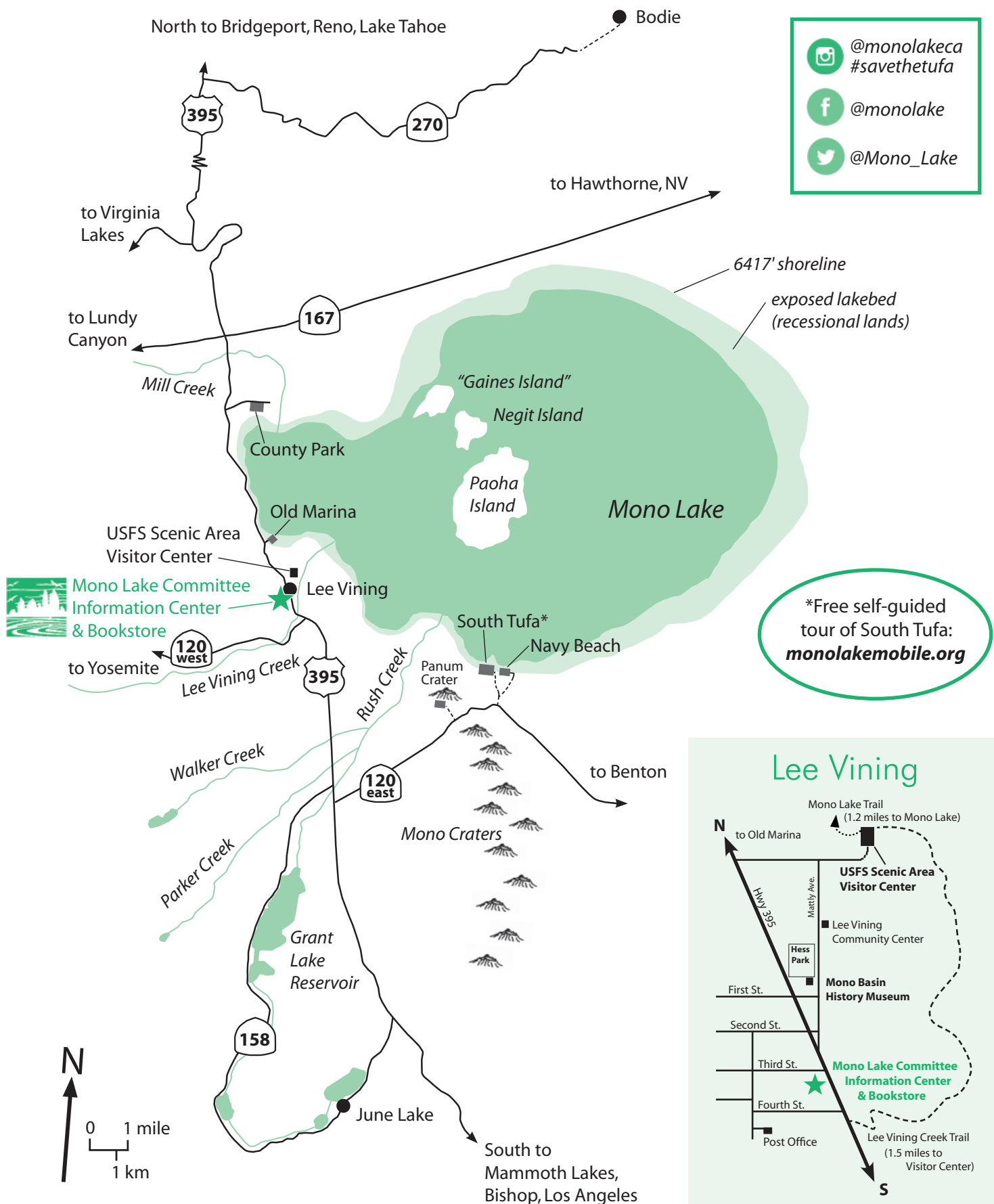
*Think Little, paperback, Counterpoint, 128 pages, 4"x 6": \$10.00*



order at [monolake.org/store](http://monolake.org/store) or (760) 647-6595



# Mono Lake map



# The capacity to care

by Caelen McQuilkin

*Editor's note: Each year we ask a writer to contribute to the Mono Lake Calendar—this essay appears in the 2020 calendar.*

Born and raised in Lee Vining, I have lived and breathed Mono Lake, and the Eastern Sierra, from before I learned to walk. I remember family backpacking trips to Cascade Lake, where I would sit on the cooling granite and watch the sun sink below the Sierra crest, staining the swooping granite pinnacles with rosy pink. I remember floating in Mono Lake on warm summer days, gazing up at the soft blue sky and letting the sun soak into me.

As the years slipped by and I began adding more peaks to my summit list and learning the names of wildflowers, I became more and more curious about the world around me. I believed, and still believe, that the basin of knowledge available in my backyard is infinite and ever-changing, that there is always more to discover, always another section of the map to explore, always another lake to swim in. This constant sense of wonder has crafted the lens through which I see the world.

At seventeen, I still fall in love with Mono Lake every day. Driving home from school, I often pull over to gaze at the lake's ever-changing surface and the sweeping sky above it. What I understand about myself and the world around me is an idea that I have pieced together from these views over seventeen years of life, seventeen years of being awed by Mono Lake, glassy and water-colored with dusty pink, or deep and rippling, bright against the snow-covered banks, or flat and silvery, reflecting a sky matted with clouds.

Today, I'm pondering these memories and feelings as I sit here and type on a grassy slope beside the lake's north shore. I've been hiking in this area for all of my life, but the way this place makes me feel has never changed. I remember being seven years old, hiking to this same spot and feeling so incredibly small, just one dot beside the enormous and ancient salt lake resting within a huge basin ringed by towering

snow-capped peaks whose names I had only recently begun to learn. Today, the only noise for miles is the wind's whisper through the grass and the gentle lap of the lake upon the shore. Beside the water, silver-white and barely rippling, and beneath the sky, which stretches in a vast expanse over wide, snow-splotted plains of yellow grass growing out of the once-submerged mud, a sense of clear and all-encompassing freedom drapes itself over me.

I'd feel nostalgic if it weren't for the fact that Mono Lake, too, is a place of constant transition, something that has changed alongside me over all these years. On the days when words don't flow from my heart to my pen like I want them to, or days when I feel as if I am losing sight of who I am, I go back to the mountains or to the lake for my answer.

This is because looking to Mono Lake has never failed to assure me of why, in this crazily complicated world where answers never seem clear, caring matters more than anything else. The story of how Mono Lake was saved from the excessive water diversions that almost destroyed it exemplifies how passion and dedication have the potential to change the world. It shows that using hope and love is more powerful than resorting to hatred, or simply giving in. Looking at the rising lake of today makes this idea so clear it is almost palpable—doing what we believe to be right, even if it feels hopeless or futile in the moment, always means something in the end. Places like Mono Lake matter because they allow us to identify that part of ourselves that gives us the power to care—care with a deep capacity, care in a way that transforms us into more empathetic people. This capacity to care, I believe, is what makes us more than just human, but the genuinely compassionate versions of ourselves.

In today's world, a world facing vast challenges including the descent into climate disaster, we must use passion and dedication similar to that which launched the effort to save

*Continued on page 25*



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD ERB



# Naturalist notes

by Nora Livingston

Winter is a season when most living things in the Mono Basin are dormant (plants), hibernating (animals), working hard to survive, or have already high-tailed it to warmer climes. The cold and half-dark days prevent plants from flowering, of course, and butterflies from flying—most insects for that matter—so we turn to birds and mammals to fill our need to observe the lives that intertwine with ours in this wild basin. We mostly see birds flitting from branch to branch in loose flocks or circling above partially snow-covered fields seeking prey, or a distant coyote sauntering through the rabbitbrush.



*A coyote prowls the lakeshore in winter.*

Winter storms often bring interesting birds that drop into the basin to seek refuge; in early December, a windy gale mixed with snow brought us the gift of 89 Tundra Swans that basked in Mono Lake on the calm, crystal clear day that followed. They preened and napped on the shore—necks tucked elegantly under their wings, or paddled slowly in small groups—hooting softly to tell each other what they knew about who was where or what they heard rustling in the shrubs on shore. That same storm brought in a couple thousand ducks—Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Ducks, and even a handful of Canvasback. Within days they were all gone, scattered down the flyway to other lakes and wetlands on the Eastside.

Every winter since 1900, the Audubon Society has organized the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) all over the country, and now the world, to record the number of bird species and individuals observed on one day in specific areas. We conducted the 40<sup>th</sup> Mono Lake CBC with volunteers on December 17, 2019. We counted 3,306 individuals of 65 species, including three rare birds: a Double-crested Cormorant flew over a team of counters at DeChambeau Ranch, a Northern Mockingbird flashed its white wing-patches at County Park, and a juvenile Northern Shrike made an appearance near Cain Ranch. We submitted our numbers to the Audubon Society, adding to the millions of birds tallied all over the world, and contributing to the longest citizen science

dataset analyzing trends in bird populations and distribution.

In December I had the pleasure of rescuing a female Northern Harrier (formerly called a Marsh Hawk) at DeChambeau Ponds. She was tangled in a rabbitbrush when I arrived so it was easy to wrap her bedraggled, soaking wet body in a towel and slip her into a box, all the while avoiding her incredibly sharp talons. I took her home, warmed her up, and dried her off before transporting her to the Eastern Sierra Wildcare facility in Bishop. They assessed her for injuries and I was able to release her a few days later—she launched herself out of the carrier on powerful legs and flew to the top of a nearby bitterbrush to preen. Each time I go back to the ponds I look for her and sometimes I see her gliding gracefully over the fields near the ponds, scanning for mice. Success.

While I love the quiet serenity of winter, I am excited for spring and what it brings to the basin. For now, I will await the return of the Violet-green Swallows and their delightful overhead chatter—a sign that more birds are on their way with stories of their winters, bringing whispers of spring. ❖



*Nora with a female Northern Harrier that was entangled in some rabbitbrush at DeChambeau Ponds in December. After recovering at Eastern Sierra Wildcare in Bishop she was released back at the ponds.*

# Custom guided trips

**T**he Mono Lake Committee offers custom guided trips for those looking for a personalized experience. Let us do the planning—we will craft a trip tailored to your specific interests, your group, and your schedule. Our staff has over 100 years of collective experience in the region, so whether you are looking for a natural history adventure, a new hiking spot, a special canoe tour, or a birding trip, we've got you covered. See more, do more, and learn more on a custom guided trip!

## Better birding

Working on your life list? Hoping to take great bird photos? We'll take you to the best habitats, help you make the most of your time birding, and dive into the natural history of the birds we see.

## Mono Lake: The whole picture

Alkaline brine and otherworldly tufa towers host myriad mysteries. Spend a day learning about the natural history of the lake while exploring the basin with an expert.



NORA LIVINGSTON



PHOTO COURTESY OF DENVER LIVINGSTON

## Ice & fire

Explore the Mono Basin's fascinating geology and transport yourself millions of years into the past. From glacial moraines to volcanoes, there is plenty to explore.

## Photography

Want to get that early morning sunrise shot? Or the best glowing fall color capture? Let us lead you so you can line up the angles—we know the spots.

**"N**ora is an expert in describing the lake features and the wildlife. She paced our excursions well to meet my needs. Our trip was totally delightful and I feel like I can look at a photo now and 're-live' the experience. The excursions expanded my already deep dedication to the preservation of Mono Lake and its surrounding ecosystems." —anonymous custom trip evaluation



ANDREW VOUSSEF

## A note from the Lead Naturalist Guide

**B**efore I became the Mono Lake Committee's first ever Lead Naturalist Guide, I had a pretty good handle on the birds of the Mono Basin—having birded the area extensively for eight years—and a solid understanding of Mono Lake's ecology. I had bits and pieces of other natural history knowledge, but was by no means an expert on plants or mammals, and had barely even dipped a toe into the world of butterflies and other insects. Passion and enthusiasm for learning new things brought me to where I am today: still not a capital-E expert, but a collector of knowledge, an observer of mysteries, and a gentle guide to seeing and understanding. Each year I pick up more and more about this incredible basin that I can share. Thanks for joining me on this journey.

Yours in nature, Nora Livingston



# 2020 Field Seminars



## Birding Mono Basin Hotspots

May 29 (half day) • Nora Livingston  
\$110 per person / \$100 for members

Mono Basin creeks and canyons are hidden jewels for breeding and migrating songbirds in a region where high desert habitat dominates. This half-day birding trip will explore lush riparian areas that are hotspots for bird activity.

## Breeding Birds of the Mono Basin

May 30 • Nora Livingston  
\$140 per person / \$130 for members

Late spring and early summer are the best times to find breeding birds in the Mono Basin. This one-day seminar will visit several spots in the Mono Basin to learn about the many breeding birds that raise their families here.

## Twilight Birding & Owling

May 31 (half day) • Nora Livingston  
\$90 per person / \$80 for members

Evening in the Mono Basin is spectacular—clouds light up with vivid color, fading light turns the landscape inky blue, and unique wildlife emerges. Spend the twilight hours

with a naturalist guide looking for songbirds, searching for twilight specialists like Wilson's Snipe and Common Nighthawk, scanning trees for owls, and scouring the back roads for poorwills.

## Full Moon Hike

June 5 (half day) • Nora Livingston  
\$90 per person / \$80 for members

There is no better way to deeply immerse yourself in the majestic calm of the Mono Basin than to experience it by moonlight. On this seminar, we will take a natural history hike as the sun sets and the full moon rises. We will find a perch to enjoy moonrise and hear stories about the night.

## Natural History of Mono Basin Woodpeckers

June 15–18 • Steve Shunk  
\$192 per person / \$177 for members

Join this seminar for a dynamic overview of Mono Basin woodpeckers. One of the most specialized bird families in the world, at least nine species of woodpeckers occur regularly in the Mono Basin, making the forests around Mono Lake a perfect stage for observing these amazing carpenters.

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



## En Plein Air at Mono Lake: Beginning Oil Painting

June 26–28 • Penny Otwell  
\$192 per person / \$177 for members

Painting outdoors allows an instant connection with landscape, and the textural possibilities and complete-coverage quality of oil paint allow students to portray their own unique feelings in their work. This field seminar is designed to be an introduction to the sometimes-intimidating subject of oil painting for students who want to learn oil painting outdoors.

## Mono Basin Big Day Birding

June 27 • Nora Livingston  
\$140 per person / \$130 for members

This fast-paced birding seminar will attempt to record as many bird species as possible in the Mono Basin in one day. Over 300 species have been recorded in Mono County, with over 150 species occurring regularly in the summer. Throughout the day, we will visit a variety of lakes, streams, ponds, forests, and fields to build our list.

## Birding Between the Breweries

July 3 (half day) • Nora Livingston  
\$135 per person / \$125 for members

Mono County is notable for spectacular scenery, great birding, and a growing collection of high-elevation breweries. Combine your love for birds and brews on this relaxing afternoon trip, which will introduce you to some great birding at a few local hotspots as well as great beer at hotspots of another kind. Bring your binoculars, proof of age, and thirst for birds (beginners and experts welcome).

## Birding the White Mountains

July 9 • Nora Livingston  
\$140 per person / \$130 for members

The gradient from the Owens Valley to the White Mountains provides a great swath of diverse habitat, from desert oasis to high-elevation woodland. This one-day field seminar will search high and low for a great variety of bird species.

## Mono Basin Natural History: Aquatic & Terrestrial Habitats

July 10–12 • David Wimpfheimer  
\$207 per person / \$192 for members

The Mono Basin is one of the most diverse ecosystems on the continent; this seminar will be an overview of the varied habitats found here. We will enjoy the rich diversity of mammals, butterflies, wildflowers, and trees, and a major focus will be the identification and ecology of birds that breed here. A guided canoe tour of Mono's south shore is included.

## Birding the White Mountains

July 17 • Nora Livingston  
\$140 per person / \$130 for members

See the July 9 description on this page.

## The Art of Wildflower Macrophotography

July 17–19 • David Gubernick  
\$275 per person / \$250 for members

Learn to take creative and beautiful close-up images, further develop your artistic vision, and enhance your



Flocking phalaropes are a breathtaking sight to behold. These tiny birds make the longest journey of all the migratory birds that visit Mono Lake.

[monolake.org/seminars](http://monolake.org/seminars) or (760) 647-6595 to register





PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB VATES

*From plug-dome volcanoes to underwater eruptions, Mono Lake is surrounded by a fascinating and dynamic geologic landscape.*

photographic skills. This seminar will emphasize the artistry of macrophotography and the technical means to render such images; this is not a course in botanical identification.

## Mountain Botany & Ecology

July 17–19 • Michèle Slaton

\$182 per person / \$167 for members

On this seminar we will explore the diverse plant communities from the shores of Mono Lake to the forests and meadows in high elevations of Lee Vining Canyon. We'll learn the basics of flower and plant anatomy and how to use a plant key, discuss soils and geology, and examine the adaptations that enable plants to tolerate the extremes of mountain environments.

## Mono Basin Landscapes & Night Photography

July 24–26 • Jeff Sullivan

\$275 per person / \$250 for members

Summer is a special time in the Mono Basin, with wildflowers blooming, Sierra Nevada peaks catching morning alpenglow, and afternoon cloud formations for potential sunset color, often yielding to clear skies for night photography. This seminar will cover best practices for composing and capturing stunning landscape and night sky photographs.

## Mono Basin Mammals

July 24–26 • John Harris

\$182 per person / \$167 for members

This class will cover the diversity of mammals found in the Mono Basin, from desert sand dunes to forests and alpine meadows of the high Sierra. More mammals occur here

than in many states, and the group will try to see as many as possible by live-trapping and field observation.

## Volcanism at Mono Lake

August 1 • Nora Livingston

\$140 per person / \$130 for members

Mono Lake sits in a geologic bowl formed by ancient volcanic sediments and recent volcanic eruptions. This seminar will visit several volcanic formations around Mono Lake while addressing the overall picture of volcanism in the Mono Basin and its role in shaping the landscape we see today.

## Wildflower Waltz

August 2 (half day) • Nora Livingston

\$110 per person / \$100 for members

Working on your wildflower identification? Early August is the perfect time to practice—the flowers will be out in abundance, taking advantage of plentiful sunlight. On this half-day seminar we will scour meadows and canyons for the plethora of blooms that grace the trails. We will focus on identification and natural history of the flowers we see. Great for photographers and budding botanists.

## Natural History at the Edge of the Sierra

August 8 • Nora Livingston

\$140 per person / \$130 for members

On this seminar, we will make our way up the east slope, stopping at several locations to connect with all that we may find. Throughout the day, we will have moments of quiet reflection to ponder the grandeur and the minutia that envelops us in this amazing place: the edge of the Sierra.

## Falling for the Migration: Bridgeport Valley & Mono Basin

August 13–14 • Dave Shuford  
\$172 per person / \$157 for members

## Falling for the Migration: Crowley, Mammoth, Mono

August 15–16 • Dave Shuford  
\$172 per person / \$157 for members

The east slope of the Sierra Nevada is a major migration route for birds traveling from northern nesting areas to warm southern habitats. As a result, late summer is the time of year to see fall migrants and early arriving wintering birds in the Mono Basin, Bridgeport, Crowley, and Mammoth areas.

## Geology of the Mono Basin

August 14–16 • Greg Stock  
\$182 per person / \$167 for members

From volcanic craters to glacial moraines, earthquake faults to tufa towers, the Mono Basin displays some of the most unique, spectacular, and accessible geology anywhere in the world. If you've ever wanted to know more about the geologic forces that formed the diverse landscapes of the Mono Basin, this seminar is for you.

## Creating the Illuminated Field Journal

August 21–23 • Hannah Hinchman  
\$192 per person / \$177 for members

A field journal is an ideal vehicle to record moments of discovery about the natural world, as well as a quiet way of simply being present outdoors. Through guided explorations of nearby habitats, you'll learn to personalize these experiences through journal entries, both drawn and written.

## Mono Basin & Bodie Photography

August 28–30 • David Gubernick  
\$300 per person / \$275 for members

Enhance your photography skills in the uniquely beautiful Mono Basin and at the world-renowned Bodie State Historic Park. Field trips and classroom sessions will combine to cover a multitude of photographic topics, and the group will visit Bodie for private after-hours evening access.

## Mono Basin Tree Identification

September 4 • Nora Livingston  
\$140 per person / \$130 for members

This seminar will delve into the diversity of trees in the Mono Basin and their identifying features. We will examine,

observe, and even smell the trees to help ingrain the knowledge into our senses.

## A Long Journey: Shorebird Migration

September 5 • Nora Livingston  
\$140 per person / \$130 for members

As birds fly south for winter, we wonder "Where exactly are they going? Where are they coming from? How long does it take them to get there? How do they know where to go?" This seminar strives to answer these questions and more while observing these ultra-lightweight travelers as they fuel up along their migration.

## Restoring Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep

September 11–13 • John Wehausen  
\$182 per person / \$167 for members

This field seminar will involve discussions of the fascinating biology of the federally endangered Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, their relationship with other mammals (including mountain lions and humans), and their conservation in the field. Past participants saw bighorn 15 out of the last 16 years—while there is a very good chance of seeing bighorn sheep during this seminar, there is no guarantee.

## Geology of the Mono Basin

September 18–20 • Greg Stock  
\$182 per person / \$167 for members

See the August 14 description above.



Scientists use radio telemetry to scan for signals from Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep radio collars in the high mountains above Mono Lake.

ANDREW YOUSSEF



## Fall Color Foray

October 2 (half day) • Nora Livingston  
\$90 per person / \$80 for members

Every fall, quaking aspen trees paint the landscape with golden hues as their leaves change. This half-day seminar will visit the most colorful aspen groves during peak season. We will enjoy glittering golden, ruby, and emerald forests while learning about aspen ecology.

## Arborglyphs & Aspen Natural History

October 3–4 • Richard Potashin & Nancy Hadlock  
\$197 per person / \$182 for members

A century of sheep grazing brought Basque sheepherders into the Mono Basin's aspen-bordered meadows, and they left numerous carvings—arborglyphs—on the aspens. Join the instructors for an enchanting journey into the aspen groves at peak color to explore this historic art form and to learn about the wildlife, insects, and birds that are drawn to the groves.

## Fall Color Foray

October 9 (half day) • Nora Livingston  
\$90 per person / \$80 for members

See the October 2 description above.

## Watercolors in the Wild: Autumn Flora

October 9–11 • Andie Thrums  
\$192 per person / \$177 for members

Painting in wild places is powerfully transforming, yet working outdoors can be overwhelming. During guided

studies focused on autumn flora, with a particular emphasis on fall's color palette, we'll carefully observe local plant life, collect ideas, and experiment with drawing and painting techniques using watercolor, gouache, and ink.

## Mono Basin Fall Photography

October 9–11 • Robb Hirsch  
\$275 per person / \$250 for members

In autumn spectacular foliage and skies combine with exceptional light, presenting ample subject matter to photograph. Explore shoreline locations at sunrise and sunset, fall color in nearby canyons, and grand overviews of the Mono Basin in this seminar.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBB HIRSCH

*In fall, Mono Basin canyons light up with dazzling golden aspen leaves.*

## Field Seminar Information

To register for a Field Seminar, please visit [monolake.org/seminars](https://monolake.org/seminars) or call (760) 647-6595.

To see complete Field Seminar itineraries, cancellation and refund policies, seminar leader information, and answers to frequently asked questions, visit [monolake.org/seminars](https://monolake.org/seminars).

*No pets are allowed on any Field Seminars.* Please consider this in advance and find boarding accommodations for your pets or leave them at home; do not leave pets in your car during seminars. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and California state law, service animals assisting people with disabilities are allowed on Field Seminars and must be leashed.

Field Seminars are open to all, but Mono Lake Committee members get to register early and receive discounts. All instructors are experts who have received high ratings from past seminar participants. We emphasize a spirit of learning and camaraderie in this magnificent outdoor setting for a reasonable cost. Proceeds from Field Seminars benefit research and education in the Mono Basin.

All Field Seminars and custom trips operate under Inyo National Forest and California State Parks permits.

everything from fish growth and population health to the regeneration of robust multi-storied streamside forests. A tremendous amount of study, monitoring, and modeling has been done to inform the new flow recommendations, which mimic streamflows in the wide range of possible year types and runoff scenarios. Thus, the implementation of SEFs is the single most important action necessary for stream restoration.

Thanks to Committee pressure on DWP, temporary delivery of SEFs began in 2019. Although high flows in Rush Creek can't be achieved until the Grant Outlet is constructed, the rest of the Rush Creek flow pattern can be delivered along with the SEFs for Lee Vining, Parker, and Walker creeks.

### **Grant Dam outlet**

Peak flows on Rush Creek are currently impossible to deliver due to the aqueduct's World War II-era infrastructure that was built with the purpose of total stream diversion. In particular, the problem is that the dam at DWP's Grant Lake

## Speak up for Mono Lake

In the coming months there will be times when we need concerned citizens to speak up for Mono Lake again. Soon the State Water Board will seek public input on the license terms, which will be a key opportunity for Committee members to offer support for the process. Please make sure we have your email address at [monolake.org/action](mailto:monolake.org/action) so we can let you know when public input is needed.

for wild, scenic, or recreational classification under Wild and Scenic River eligibility.

A number of Mono Basin streams had little to no flow in their lower reaches when the last Forest Plan was crafted in 1988. At the time, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power had been fully diverting these streams for decades, causing the collapse of fisheries and streamside forest habitats. The State Water Board-ordered restoration and habitat recovery of Mono Basin creeks due to Decision 1631 occurred well after the 1988 Forest Plan was adopted.

### **Riding the rapids to decision**

The journey to eligibility was not without obstacles. A draft plan released in August 2018 included recognition of the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area and management zones, but excluded most stream segments that the Committee had originally proposed for inclusion. Additionally, there was not a response to the detailed comments and rationale provided by the Committee earlier in the Forest Plan process, outlining reasons for including multiple segments of Rush, Lee Vining, Mill, Parker, and Walker creeks.

Reservoir was constructed without an outlet, reflecting the outdated expectation that the entire flow of Rush Creek would be continuously diverted into the aqueduct.

Crucially, the Agreement includes a commitment to construct an outlet. A pair of 12-foot-tall Langemann gates will be installed in an excavated notch in the reservoir spillway. The outlet will ensure that at least 750 cubic feet of water per second can move out of Grant Reservoir into Rush Creek in the wettest years—a volume similar to the natural snowmelt peak at such times.

### **The MAT**

The Monitoring Administration Team (MAT) will oversee and manage annual budgeting and contracting for stream, fishery, lake, and waterfowl monitoring. The team will be made up of DWP, the Committee, the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, and CalTrout. DWP will fund a comprehensive list of monitoring tasks—and several previously-ordered restoration actions—at specified levels, and the team will ensure efficient implementation.

The MAT will also oversee the adaptive management restoration process in order to apply the knowledge learned through scientific monitoring for better stream recovery.

### **New era of restoration**

Efforts with outcomes of this magnitude take focused time, energy, and public support. In the end, the new water license will be a symbol of how science-based analysis combines with principled policy negotiations to forge a path to healthier, more resilient streams and habitats at Mono Lake. ❖

The Committee formally objected to the exclusion of these segments and participated in the formal objection process with Inyo National Forest and Regional Forest Service staff in early 2019. The objection process allowed any stakeholders to object to forest plan elements that were linked to a previous history of comments and engagement. The Committee, in cooperation with Steve Evans from the California Wilderness Coalition, presented detailed stream segment information for Rush, Lee Vining, Mill, Parker, and Walker creeks, along with photographic evidence to help make the case for including the additional Mono Basin stream segments for Wild and Scenic River eligibility.

Ultimately, thanks to the thoughtful consideration of the Inyo National Forest leadership team, the additional stream segments were included in the Final Record of Decision. While the new Forest Plan did not provide universally favorable elements to all stakeholders, the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area retained existing Scenic Area Management plan guidelines and Mono Lake's tributary streams achieved well-deserved Wild and Scenic River eligibility determination. ❖



# And the Free Drawing winners are...

by Joslyn Rogers

The day that we draw the winning names for the annual Free Drawing fundraiser is a joyous one—we love to spread the good news to surprised prize winners. Congratulations to those who won! Thank you to everyone who entered the 2019 Free Drawing and also to the generous businesses and organizations who donated prizes—these donations help us protect and restore Mono Lake.

The iPad Mini went to Bob Benson of Lafayette. National Park grand adventure: Sara Harris of Forestville. Mammoth & June Mountain ski pass: Kevin Christensen of Bishop. Mono Basin retreat: Nanci Adler of Carlsbad. A Day on the Bay: Jill Denton of Los Osos. Experience the Channel Islands: Joseph & Mary Volpe of Ventura. Escape to Benton Hot Springs: Otto Hub of Tahoe City. Mammoth Lakes retreat: Pat Overshiner of Richmond. Golden Gate vacation: Ralph Langley of Reno, NV.

Richard Clack & Donna Bower of Cambria won the Yosemite mountain retreat. Death Valley vacation: Dave Millet of Tahoe City. Tamarack cross country ski pass: Carolyn Stave of Fallon, NV. Bodie Heritage Tour: Anne Harvey of San Francisco. Owens Lake Bird Festival: Sharon Miller of San Jose. Eastern Sierra experience: David Staunton of Salinas. Patagonia Nano Puff jackets: Ronald Kvaas of Los Angeles and Doris & Greg Morton of Hermosa Beach. Patagonia Black Hole backpacks: Katherine Fritschi of Diamond Springs and Tracey Tsugawa of San Jose.

The Aquarium of the Pacific experience went to George & Joan Burda of Los Angeles. Explore the USS Midway: Norma

Hupp of Long Beach. Discover the Mono Basin: Bill Johnson of South Lake Tahoe. A day at The Huntington: Rudolph Kosits of San Diego. Mono Lake Committee gift packs: Ralph & Leslie Purdy of Novato and Nancy Parsons of Pacific Grove. Mono Lake canoe adventure: John & Josephine Talhelm of Mammoth Lakes and Michael Nelligan of Santa Rosa. ❖



Nora triumphantly pulls a winning ticket for the 2019 Free Drawing.

## Capacity to care from page 16

Mono Lake over forty years ago. In the same way that the Mono Lake Committee's founders fought to protect a lake whose value they believed in even when it seemed that nobody else did, our ability to care has the potential to change the course of our whole nation and world. When things feel disastrous or hopeless or just downright confusing, I believe that Mono Lake's lessons are some of the most straightforward cures we have: the ability to remain hopeful despite the circumstances, to remain grounded through deep passion, and to persevere despite lack of clear answers or opposition, have the power to initiate movement towards tangible change.

Mono Lake has inspired my passion and hope about the world and its people, and I strive to spend my life sharing these sentiments with others. As I approach the end of my time living in the Mono Basin, I have begun to hold these lessons even more closely to my heart. I am certain that the compassion I have learned living at Mono Lake will stay by my side always, in the same way that the Sierra poetry my parents read aloud to me as a child still informs my view of the world. There's a poem by Gary Snyder which reads "range

after range of mountains, year after year after year, I am still in love." In the same way that ranges of Sierra mountains unfolding out into the distance will always tug at something deep inside me, I am certain that the way Mono Lake's glassy reflected sunsets compel me to look into myself more deeply, will always be central to who I am. I hope that, for the rest of my life, this connection to the lake and the landscape around it will help me share my understanding of the world with others, and create the type of meaningful change that I have grown up admiring and hoping to lead one day. ❖

*Caelen McQuilkin, a 2019 graduate of Lee Vining High School, now attends Amherst College in Massachusetts, where she is focusing on writing, debate, and action to raise awareness about and solve issues relating to climate change.*

*Until college she lived in the Mono Basin for her entire life, growing up with a close connection to Mono Lake and the Sierra. Adventures like night swimming with her friends have made her realize the true value of wild places, something she continues to share with others in her life outside of the Mono Basin.*

# Staff migrations

by Geoffrey McQuilkin and Jessica Schneider

**A**t the time of writing, winter has yet to keep us busy shoveling piles of snow; however, we have enjoyed ice-rimmed Mono Lake, extravagant sunrises, and crisp mornings dotted with those not migrating for the season; a Red-tailed Hawk here, a coyote there. They serve as good reminders that we aren't the only ones toiling away in quiet Lee Vining.

Office Director **Jessica Schneider** and her husband **Lundy** welcomed their son **Bradley James Schneider** into the world in early November. Congratulations! We couldn't be happier about adding this one to the Mono Lake flock. Bradley's much-anticipated arrival has us all beaming and cooing.



SANTIAGO ESCRUCERIA

Lundy and Jess with new son Bradley James Schneider.

Along with this happy arrival came a significant (but short-distance) migration: Jess embarked on a new adventure as Executive Director of the Bodie Foundation, supporting the State Parks at Bodie and Mono Lake. In her time with the Committee she hired dozens of excellent staff, deployed them to share the wonders of Mono Lake with hundreds of thousands of visitors, and organized all of us on the year-round team so we can make the most protection, restoration, education, and science possible happen for Mono Lake. We will miss her greatly and look forward to working with her on State Parks matters in her new position. Thank you Jess for building a well-oiled office machine that maximizes our effectiveness for Mono Lake!

We said farewell to our two Outdoor Education Instructors who completed the 2019 Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center season in October. Instructors spend each week with

a new group of students, primarily from Los Angeles—introducing them to the northern end of their watershed, the story of Mono Lake, and their role in Mono Lake's protection and restoration.

**Ava Stavros** finished her third season as an Outdoor Education Instructor and is now working for the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association in Mammoth Lakes helping visitors and leading programs for the public. Hundreds of students were lucky to be able to spend time with Ava—exploring not only the fun and adventure of the outdoors, but the deeply human side of connecting with their watershed.

**Miranda Norlin** headed back to western North Carolina to pursue a North Carolina environmental education certification while helping to eradicate massive amounts of invasive plant species at her parents' home. Not only is Miranda a talented educator, but she is also extremely handy, and left the Outdoor Education Center looking, and operating, better than ever. ❖

## Committee members gather at Mark Arax book event

**O**n October 17, Mono Lake Committee staff, members, and friends joined The Bay Institute for an event featuring Mark Arax, author of *The Dreamt Land*. Arax explored literary, political, and historical topics while answering thoughtful questions about water in California. Thank you to The Bay Institute for including our members in your special event!



PHOTO COURTESY OF PETER VORSTER

Mono Lakers at the event: Anna Christensen, Philanthropy Director; Bryan Wilson, Mono Lake attorney with Morrison & Foerster; Peter Vorster, expert hydrologist and hydrogeographer; Greg Reis, Information & Restoration Specialist; and Martha Davis, Mono Lake Committee Board member.





# From the mailbag

*News from members and friends*

by Ellen King

## In honor

**Heidi Hopkins** of Big Sur gave a gift in honor of **Geoff McQuilkin**. **Ann Kreyenhagen** made a donation in honor of **Mary & Mark Scott**. **Margret Lohfeld** of Los Angeles sent a contribution in honor of her brother **Martin Engel**. **Patricia Minor** of Novato gave a gift in honor of **Ivy Phelan**. **Angela Moskow** of El Cerrito made a donation in honor of **Peter Vorster**. **Charlynnne Murphy** of Woodland sent a contribution in honor of her backpacker husband **John Murphy's** birthday. **George Wortiska** of Mountain View gave a gift in honor of **Linda Johnson**.

## In memory

**Mary Jane Baird** of San Anselmo gave a gift in memory of **John Hetzner**. **Lisa Custudio** of Pleasant Hill sent a contribution on behalf of the **Custudio family** in memory of **Vincent & Mary Custudio**. **Louette Easton** of San Diego made a donation in memory of her husband **Jack Easton**. **Patricia Fitzgerald** of Yerington, NV gave a gift in memory of naturalist **Rex E. Burress**. **Ian Geddes** of Blaine, WA sent a contribution in memory of his mother **Huguette Geddes**: "She loved Mono Lake and was upset as LA drained it all those years ago." **Tom Gill** of El Paso, TX sent a gift: "I am making this contribution in memory of the late **Professor Tom Cahill** of UC Davis, one of the scientific heroes in the early struggles to save Mono Lake: he was an unsurpassable mentor who showed me firsthand how hard science can best be used to promote environmental protection." **Robert Jacobs** of Los Angeles made a donation in memory of **Edith Gaines**.

**Bill & Dianna Johnston** of Flagstaff, AZ sent a contribution in memory of

**Dr. Jim Wurgler**. **David Kanner** of Redwood City gave a gift in memory of **Ann Chiller**. **John Knief** of San Francisco made a donation in memory of **Ranger Ferdinand Castillo**. **Quentin Lawrence** of Haymarket, VA sent a contribution to the **Andrea Lawrence Fund**, "in loving memory of Mom!" **Frank Leonard** of Whittier made a donation in memory of **Bill Wakeman**. **Carol Mathews** of Walnut Creek gave a gift "in loving memory of **Robert Mathews**." **Angela Moskow** of El Cerrito made a donation in memory of **Neil Lyons**. **Gerald & Joan Olsen** of Camarillo sent a contribution in memory of **Carol Olsen-Bryan**.

**Don Price** of Palo Alto gave a gift in memory of his wife **Diethild "Dee" Price**. **Liz Rickett** made a donation in memory of **Jay Anderson**. **Nancy Schiller** of Richmond sent a contribution in memory of **William B. Schiller**. **Arthur Slater** of Sebastopol gave a gift in memory of **Norm DeChambeau**. **Leslie Uhrich** of Davis sent a contribution in memory of her parents **Anne & Martin B. Uhrich**.

We received gifts in memory of **Michael Blumlein**, one of the authors of *Naming Mt. Thoreau*, from **Doug Berl** of Piedmont and **Robert Bettinger** of San Diego. We received gifts in memory of **David Casseres** from **Janis Kajita** of Camarillo, from **Geoffrey & Masako Matsunaga** of Palos Verdes Estates, and from **Stephanie Matsunaga** of Malibu. David's widow **Cheryl Oku** sent a note: "David rode on many [Mono Lake] Bike-A-Thons and greatly appreciated the beauty of the Eastern Sierra and your work to sustain the environment." We received gifts in memory of **Bill Hilker** from **Barbara Taaff** of Seattle, WA and **Gail &**

**George Young** of Denver, CO.

## Patagonia matches dozens of year-end Committee gifts

On Black Friday, outdoor clothing company **Patagonia** announced it would match individual donations made to grassroots environmental organizations made between November 29 and December 31, 2019, up to 10 million dollars. The Mono Lake Committee was one of 1,043 organizations that benefitted from this generous initiative. Through social media and email communication the news traveled fast, and the match was achieved in just 17 days. Patagonia's generosity inspired 48 Committee members to make contributions totaling more than \$25,000 to boost our year-end fundraising efforts, which was matched by Patagonia. The donations were made through Patagonia Action Works, which was created to connect donors and supporters with organizations that are tackling pressing issues facing our planet. Thank you Patagonia, and all those who leveraged this generous match!

## New office printer

After more than ten years of printing thank-you letters, mission statements, invoices, new member welcome letters, timesheets, and much more, our workhorse office printer finally wore out. Thoughtful member **Marianne Locke** of McCloud stepped in with a generous gift that enabled us to buy a new printer that is faster, quieter, and uses less toner. Thank you, Marianne! ❖

*Ellen King is the Committee's Membership Coordinator. She is extra-grateful for the deluge of contributions in honor or in memory of your friends and loved ones because we have had very little other precipitation this dry winter.*



# MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

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## *Andrea Lawrence Award Dinner*

**May 15, 2020**

**Parallax Restaurant  
Mammoth Mountain Ski Area**

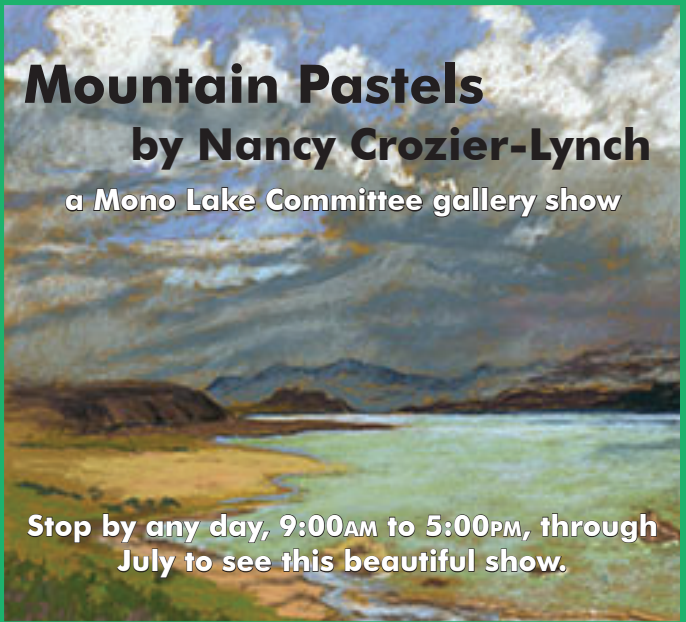
reserve your seat by April 17: (760) 647-6595



## **Mountain Pastels by Nancy Crozier-Lynch**

a Mono Lake Committee gallery show

Stop by any day, 9:00AM to 5:00PM, through  
July to see this beautiful show.



the 19<sup>th</sup> annual

## **Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua**

**June 19-21, 2020**



register April 15 at  
[birdchautauqua.org](http://birdchautauqua.org)

NORA LIVINGSTON

## **Mono Lake needs you!**

**Become a Mono Lake Volunteer and**

- lead tours and help Mono Lake visitors
- rove at County Park and Old Marina
- help maintain trails and pull invasive plants
- share the Mono Lake story

**To sign up, please call  
(760) 647-6595**



CARL DENNIS BUELL