
State Water Resources Control Board

NOTICE OF PUBLIC WORKSHOP ON MONO LAKE DROUGHT RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board or Board) staff will hold an informational public workshop to discuss the current status of Mono Lake. The workshop will focus on Mono Lake levels in the context of severe drought and ongoing diversions from the lake's tributaries. This is an informal public workshop where a quorum of the State Water Board may attend, but no formal Board action will be taken. Details of the virtual public workshop are as follows:

Wednesday, February 15, 2023

1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. PST

Remote Participation Only

Register at bit.ly/ML_Feb15

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION

To participate in the workshop, please register at bit.ly/ML_Feb15. You will receive an email with instructions on how to join the workshop. Questions and comments will be accepted during the workshop and should address the agenda topics identified below. The workshop will be recorded, and the recording will be posted on the Mono Lake [webpage](#). Board staff will be accepting written comments on the workshop until 4:00 p.m. on March 17, 2023.

If you have any questions regarding how to participate in the workshop, please email MonoLake@waterboards.ca.gov.

WORKSHOP PURPOSE

The State Water Board received a letter from the Mono Lake Committee on December 16, 2022, urging the Board to temporarily restrict Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) diversions from the tributaries to Mono Lake until the lake level reaches 6,384 feet to protect the nesting gull population from predation, provide a drought buffer, and reduce salinity levels. A December 22, 2022, letter was also submitted on behalf of the Kutzadika'a tribe supporting the Mono Lake Committee's request. LADWP submitted a letter to the Board on January 11, 2023 responding to

Mono Lake Committee. These items are available on the State Water Board's Mono Lake [webpage](#).

Board staff are evaluating the request from the Mono Lake Committee and are convening this workshop to discuss the status of lake levels and solicit input on next steps the Board should consider. The workshop will include an overview of Decision 1631 (D-1631), what goals D-1631 established, the current status of Mono Lake levels in the context of drought conditions and LADWP's reduced export levels, and next steps the Board should consider.

WORKSHOP AGENDA

The following is an annotated agenda of the workshop. Staff would like to emphasize the questions listed after the agenda for input by workshop participants.

- **Item #1: Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Staff from the State Water Board will welcome participants and describe the intent of the workshop. Any Board members present and any elected officials or tribal representatives will be invited to add opening remarks.

- **Item #2: State Water Board Decision 1631 (D-1631)**

State Water Board staff will provide a summary of D-1631, with a focus on lake levels. Topics will include the operating requirements created by the decision, the factors that went into deciding those requirements, and progress on implementing those requirements since 1994.

- **Item #3: Mono Lake Current Conditions**

Information on current conditions will be provided through a series of four presentations. Representatives from the following organizations will provide information related to the recent correspondence received by the State Water Board:

- *Mono Lake Committee (15 minutes)*
- *Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (15 minutes)*
- *California Department of Fish & Wildlife (15 minutes)*
- *Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe (15 minutes)*

- **Item #4: Potential Management Actions Available**

State Water Board staff will provide an overview of what processes could be undertaken and will solicit feedback from workshop participants regarding next steps. The overview will include descriptions of current authorities, processes, and limitations.

- **Item #5: Closing Discussion and Open Comment**

Workshop participants may address panelists and ask questions relating to the workshop items. Participants will have an opportunity to provide feedback and input regarding the “Questions to Consider.” Elected officials and representatives of tribal governments will be invited to speak first, followed by representatives of state or federal agencies, and then other workshop participants.

Questions to Consider:

State Water Board staff would like to know participants’ thoughts on the information presented today by our panelists, as well as the following specific questions:

- 1. How do current Mono Lake levels and hydrology impact the environment and local communities? How will recent precipitation affect lake levels in 2023 and beyond?*
- 2. What new or updated data, modeling, or other information should the Board and its staff consider when making decisions on lake level trajectory, protection of beneficial uses, and emergency responses? What D-1631 assumptions regarding the transition to a lake level of 6,392 feet should be re-evaluated?*
- 3. D-1631 directed the Board to hold a hearing if the lake level did not reach a target of 6,391 feet by 2014 (this date was extended to 2020 when the Board amended LADWP’s licenses to incorporate a stream restoration program agreement). The lake has not reached this target. Considering potential needs for new or updated information, when should the Board begin the lake level hearing process required by D-1631?*
- 4. Where should the State Water Board focus its staff resources with respect to next steps?*

BACKGROUND

Mono Lake is an ancient saline waterbody located at the eastern edge of the Sierra Nevada in Mono County, California. In the early 1940s, the State Water Board granted the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) permits to divert up to 147,700 acre-feet of water from Mono Lake tributaries for use in the Los Angeles area. Mono Lake hosts a unique ecosystem that provides important habitat for millions of migratory and nesting birds, including nesting areas for a substantial portion of the world’s California Gull population. Diversions from the Mono Lake tributaries resulted in a 45-foot decline in the lake level that halved the lake’s volume and impacted the environment and public trust resources, including increasing the lake’s salinity and exposing a land bridge that allows predators like coyotes to prey on the gulls.

In 1994, the State Water Board issued a historic order, Mono Lake Basin Water Right Decision 1631, which amended LADWP’s water rights licenses to establish water

diversion criteria, water export limitations, and stream restoration requirements. The Board's decision recognized the importance of restoring and protecting the lake at an ecologically healthy level and the many natural resources that depend on it, including nesting habitat for gulls. Ultimately, the Board concluded that an average lake level of 6,392 feet appropriately balanced protection of public trust resources and diversions by LADWP. In addition to lake level rise, the ecosystem restoration goals of D-1631 included improving waterfowl habitat, riparian areas, and the fisheries within the four tributary streams used for diversions to Los Angeles. Utilizing models to develop annual water diversion criteria, the Board determined that the lake would rise to a lake level of 6,392 feet in 20 years. However, given the difficulty of forecasting long-term hydrology, the Board's decision also anticipated that further revisions to LADWP's licenses may be appropriate if the lake did not rise within the timeframe expected.

As of December 2022, the lake level was at 6,378.4 feet; 2022 marked the second time the lake dropped below 6,380 feet in the last six years.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please visit the State Water Board's [Mono Lake Basin webpage](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/monolake) (www.waterboards.ca.gov/monolake) for continued updates on potential Board actions. This website will be updated with related documents and additional drought-related information as available. Board staff will be accepting written comments on the workshop until 4:00 p.m. on March 17, 2023. Please submit written comments to MonoLake@waterboards.ca.gov.

HOW TO RECEIVE UPDATES

If you would like to receive email updates, please [sign up](#) for the State Water Board's "Mono Lake Information" email subscription list available at the bottom of the webpage: www.waterboards.ca.gov/monolake

QUESTIONS

Please email questions regarding this notice and related efforts to: MonoLake@waterboards.ca.gov