

MONO LAKE



NEWSLETTER

Fall 2023

Mono Lake's Rise May Not Last

Wet Year Stream Restoration

Free Drawing

Fall Catalog

It has been a truly remarkable year seeing Mono Lake rise so fast and so much—five feet so far in 2023!

The last time Mono Lake had a similarly impressive rise, back in 2017, I remember the elation we felt and the excitement visitors expressed. I remember it as such a joyous summer.

This year feels different. It’s wonderful to see the lake rise so much... What a relief that Mono has so much water this year... How cool to see so much dry shoreline submerged...

But.

Will the impressive rise stick? Doesn’t this mean DWP can divert more water? What happens if next year is dry? How do we preserve this rise? What about the State Water Board hearing?

People walking into the bookstore and calling on the phone have asked these questions. We ask them as a staff every week. As you’ll see in the pages that follow, leaders in Los Angeles and members of the media have been asking them too.

While these follow-up questions have dampened the joy of Mono Lake’s rise this year, they actually feel reassuring to me, because they’re all things we can do something about. As you’ll read in this *Newsletter*, our policy team is modeling scenarios that show how it’s possible to preserve the lake’s gain. Community groups in Los Angeles are asking their elected officials to stop relying on water imported from the Mono Basin. Mono Lake Committee members and staff are reminding the State Water Board that their hearing to revisit stream diversions is key to keeping Mono Lake on the rise.

There’s a lot of work to be done. Thankfully, joy and determination go together well. We can visit the lakeshore and marvel at the rising water, which strengthens our resolve to keep saving Mono Lake.

—Elin Ljung, Communications Coordinator



COVER PHOTO COURTESY OF RICK WATTELMANN

SMITH/IMPT

Short tufa towers were submerged, the lake’s water cleared up, and the shoreline changed all summer as Mono Lake rose 4.8 vertical feet from its December 2022 low point.

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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The Mono Lake Committee is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, also known as the Mono Lake Foundation. Tax ID: 77-0051124

MONO LAKE NEWSLETTER

Fall 2023
Volume XLV, Number 2

The *Mono Lake Newsletter* is a publication of the Mono Lake Committee. ISSN #0275-6633. Copyright © 2023 Mono Lake Committee.

Mono Lake's impressive rise will be tempered by increased exports

by Maureen McGlinchy

As Mono Lake rose nearly five vertical feet this year, visitors and residents in the Mono Basin marveled at Mono Lake's fast-changing shoreline. Driving along Highway 395, we witnessed a peninsula become an island at Old Marina. Osprey nests built on land-locked tufa at South Tufa are again protected by watery moats. Long-dry brackish and freshwater lagoons along the north and east shores resurfaced. The surface area of the lake has increased more than four and a half square miles, shrinking the landbridge and increasing the distance between predatory coyotes and California Gull nesting grounds.

The lake rise is cause for celebration and began at a time when the lake level was dangerously low. Unfortunately, the achievement comes with a downside: under current rules a rising lake allows the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) to increase diversions from Mono Basin streams. In April 2024, the lake's elevation will be well above the 6380-foot threshold at which DWP's allowance will nearly quadruple to 16,000 acre-feet. By contrast, this year's export allowance is 4,500 acre-feet because Mono Lake's elevation was a hair below that threshold on April 1, 2023 (see Winter & Spring 2023 *Mono Lake Newsletter*).

The coming winter will determine whether the lake resumes its rise or if this summer's high point is just one more peak in the ups and downs Mono Lake has experienced since the California State Water Resources Control Board issued Decision 1631 in 1994. This decision modified DWP's water rights in the Mono Basin with the mandate requiring the lake to reach the ecologically healthy level of 6392 feet above sea level—the Public Trust lake level.

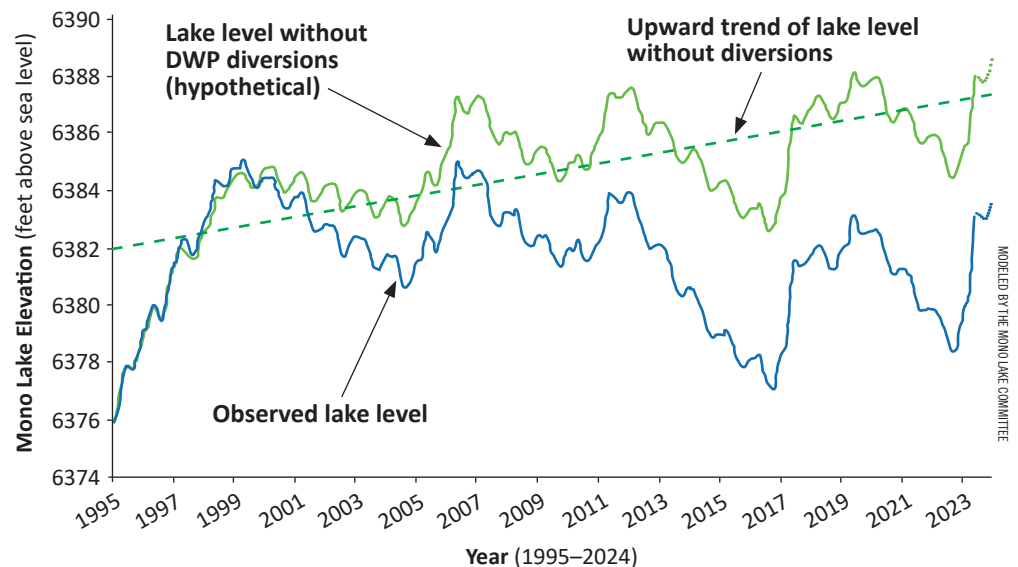
While year-to-year variability in runoff is the main determinant of lake level fluctuations, DWP's stream diversions have, year-by-year, prevented Mono Lake from rising to the Public Trust lake level. In a wet year, diversions eat into the lake rise; in a dry year, diversions exacerbate the lake's fall. Since Decision 1631, DWP has exported 375,000 acre-feet of streamflow—enough water to

raise Mono Lake's elevation by more than five feet.

DWP has received 16,000 acre-feet—more than five billion gallons—of Mono Lake streamwater in 22 of the 29 years since Decision 1631. This steady export of Mono Lake's inflow has suppressed Mono Lake's rise and the lake's elevation has fluctuated around 6382 feet for nearly 30 years. By contrast, if the State Water Board had paused DWP's stream diversions in 1994, Mono Lake would have left the 6382-foot elevation behind in the late 1990s. Mono Lake levels would have naturally fluctuated in response to wet and dry years, but the average elevation would be steadily rising. This year's epic five-foot rise would have placed Mono Lake's elevation around 6389 feet, within reach of the Public Trust lake level.

If DWP were to pause stream diversions from the Mono Basin, it would continue to receive approximately 10,000 acre-feet of groundwater diversions from the Mono Craters Tunnel each year (see Winter & Spring 2022 *Mono Lake Newsletter*). So even with a pause in stream diversions to allow Mono Lake to achieve the mandated Public Trust lake level, Los Angeles would still receive a consistent delivery of water through the LA Aqueduct in the Mono Basin. ❖

DWP diversions suppress Mono Lake's level



Mono Lake elevation rose an incredible five feet this year. But the lake has peaked in response to big winters four times since State Water Board Decision 1631 in 1994, only to fall in ensuing dry years. Had DWP paused stream diversions in 1994, the lake would be following an upward trend—it would rise in wet years and fall in dry years, but each peak would be higher than the last. This summer's rise would have put the lake in reach of the 6392-foot Public Trust lake level.

LA leadership recognizes low lake concerns

Technical discussions will explore diversion scenarios

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

Mono Lake has been the topic of important discussions in Los Angeles in recent months, focusing on the challenge of ensuring the lake rises to the 6392-foot Public Trust lake level. This level was mandated by the California State Water Resources Control Board to secure the lake’s ecological health, protect millions of nesting and migratory birds, end toxic dust storms, protect cultural resources, and ensure future generations can enjoy the lake.

Mayor’s office meeting launches technical discussions

In April, Los Angeles Deputy Mayor for Energy & Sustainability Nancy Sutley convened a meeting with Mono Lake Committee and Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) leadership. The productive discussion focused on Mono Lake, the Public Trust lake level required in the City’s water rights, and the need to better understand what paths lead there.

The meeting produced a commitment to assemble a technical group to explore, compare, and present a variety of stream diversion scenarios and evaluate their effectiveness in raising Mono Lake to the 6392-foot level. Hydrology modeling of stream diversions and lake level response is essential to identifying options, and technical experts at the Committee and DWP have collaborated successfully in years past.

The technical discussions will include the Committee and DWP, the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, California Trout, and the Mono Lake Kutzadika’a Tribe, along with representatives from the State Water Board. A 30-person kickoff meeting was held in August and a smaller workgroup of hydrology and model experts is now meeting monthly.



The Mono Lake Committee and East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice gave an update about Mono Lake to the LA City Council Energy & Environment Committee in June.

The workgroup is expected to develop a report in April 2024.

The technical discussions are not a forum for negotiations, and running the models does not mean any specific stream diversion scenario is endorsed by participants—a point DWP’s attorneys have emphasized. The Committee agrees, as the goal is to jointly develop information useful for comparing scenarios. That means the workgroup is expected to look at everything from continuing the same problematic stream diversions of the past 29 years to fully pausing DWP diversions until the lake reaches the Public Trust lake level. For the Committee, one interesting opportunity in this work is to explore how concepts for dynamic diversion rules that adjust over time can preserve gains in lake level from wet years.

City Council updates on Mono Lake

The Los Angeles City Council showed its interest in Mono Lake’s situation this summer, requesting an update on the current status before the Energy & Environment Committee,

which is chaired by Councilmember Katy Yaroslavsky. On June 23, I was joined in the City Council chambers by Committee Board member Martha Davis and mark! Lopez, Special Projects Coordinator from East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice. We spoke about the importance of Mono Lake and the historic commitment to set aside disputes and implement the State Water Board’s 1994 Mono Lake decision, including the critical lake management level. mark! discussed “the imperative to stop relying on imported water—and Mono Lake is imported water,” for the sake of Los Angeles, because “the more that we become free of that the stronger we get in our communities when it comes to resilience.”

As fall colors arrive in the Mono Basin we are encouraged by the progress made over the summer. The continued vigilance of the Committee and Mono Lake supporters is making a difference. Although the road is long and winding, implementation of the protections the lake—and all Californians—have been promised can be achieved. ❖

Many calls for a State Water Board hearing

by Arya Degenhardt

After digging out from under the exceptionally snowy winter, Mono Lake Committee staff were exceptionally curious—how much would Mono Lake rise this year, and will the rise stick this time?

As it turns out, many people are wondering the same thing. It wasn't that long ago that a superlative winter catapulted the lake level upward in 2017, only to be followed by the need for emergency action in 2022 on the lake's behalf after years of continued Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) diversions and drought.

Even those who aren't tracking the lake level closely have seen enough lake rises and falls to understand that this pattern will continue unless the California State Water Resources Control Board steps in and holds a hearing to adjust stream diversion rules. The 1994 mandate to raise the lake called for a hearing if the Public Trust lake level wasn't reached by 2014. A reasonable extension, to 2020, has also passed, and many are chiming in on a familiar refrain: When is the State Water Board going to hold the Mono Lake hearing?

Chorus of concern

In February the State Water Board held a pivotal workshop to investigate the status of Mono Lake and plan next steps. The five-hour workshop, which was attended by 365 people and solicited 3,000 public comment letters—resonated strongly with the Board (see Winter & Spring 2023 *Mono Lake Newsletter*).

As the winter snow and rain kept coming, the pressure for locking in lake level gains and achieving the mandated healthy lake level only got stronger. "There are not many big water users who have given up water for the environment. This may

be an opportunity for Los Angeles to take credit for such a decision," former State Water Board member Felicia Marcus said in the *LA Times* in February.

DWP's presentation at the workshop dashed hopes that it might, in the face of over-full reservoirs, opt out of diversions this year. "If DWP won't voluntarily cooperate in finding a way to protect Mono Lake, then the State Water Board needs to step up and save Mono Lake—again," wrote Martha Davis, Executive Director of the Mono Lake Committee from 1984 to 1996, in *CalMatters*.

Los Angeles chimes in

Ruth Galanter, LA City Councilmember from 1987 to 2003, reminded Angelenos of the commitment the city made to protect Mono Lake: "What kind of a city are we if we cannot keep our commitments and care for the environment?" she asked in an *LA Times* letter to the editor in February.

In April, leaders of Los Angeles community-based organizations, including Communities for a Better Environment, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, and Pacoima Beautiful met with City Councilmembers' staff. "It was really powerful," said Outdoor Education Center Manager Santiago Escruceria. "The community group leaders engaged the City Council staff by telling their stories of the connection to Mono Lake and why Angelenos' sustainable water use is deeply important to them. If Councilmembers didn't know about Mono Lake before, they do now."

In an *LA Times* op-ed, LA Waterkeeper Executive Director Bruce Reznik wrote, "Los Angeles has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore one of California's ecological treasures and begin to reverse a century-old habit of relying on water from afar to quench our thirst." See page 6 for the full editorial.

In July Mono Lake rose 1.26 feet, beating the previous (1967) record by about a quarter of a foot. California Secretary for Natural Resources, Wade Crowfoot, saw it in person, tweeting, "Toured the globally unique Mono Lake to learn about the progress—and continued challenges—to restore the lake to a healthy level. [It] is under threat without adequate inflows. Eager to work with the State Water Board and others on this effort."

A crescendo

As the snowpocalypse became the big melt the Mono Lake Committee got more calls from journalists asking what it all meant for Mono Lake, and ... when is the hearing?

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SANTIAGO M. ESCRUCERIA

The LA-based group East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice has been coming to Mono Lake for many years, through several generations of families.

LA should let Mono Lake be a lake again

by Bruce Reznik

Bruce Reznik is the Executive Director of Los Angeles Waterkeeper. This article was originally published on June 27, 2023 in the Los Angeles Times opinion section. It is reprinted here with permission.

Los Angeles has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore one of California's ecological treasures and begin to reverse a century-old habit of relying on water from afar to quench our thirst.

State regulators are considering a pause on water imports from the Eastern Sierra Nevada's Mono Lake watershed to allow the fragile ecosystem to recover after decades of diversions to the LA Basin. Local leaders should embrace the chance to do the right thing for the environment and the Indigenous people who have stewarded this resource since time immemorial.

LA's water managers should also take this step for the region's sake because importing water from far-flung places is a gamble at this point. As we live through longer and more intense droughts, depending on piped-in water leaves us at the mercy of forces beyond our control. Instead of improving our water security, imports leave us vulnerable to increasingly erratic precipitation.

The best way to ensure every Angeleno continues to have access to clean water is to greatly expand local, resilient water supplies through better planning, education and the best available science and engineering. Local water resilience depends on the "four Rs": reducing water waste, recycling purified wastewater, restoring contaminated groundwater and reusing urban and storm runoff.

The Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) has made huge strides on all these fronts in recent decades. Thanks to public education and a communitywide commitment to making the most of this limited resource, LA residents reduced water use by 29% between 2003 and 2020. We can continue this trend with rebates and other policies that help residents replace lawns with drought-resistant landscaping.

The DWP and other local water agencies have also recognized the need to dramatically increase investments in water recycling, which has been growing for decades the world over. The DWP, in partnership with LA Sanitation & Environment, expects to generate up to 217 million more gallons of reclaimed water every day by 2035. That's more than 243,000 additional acre-feet of local water

each year, which is about half the city's annual water use. The California Legislature can help speed up that effort by moving forward with a proposed water resilience bond.

Addressing contaminated groundwater is another key element of shoring up LA's local supplies. The DWP is nearly done with a \$600-million effort to clean up the heavily contaminated San Fernando Valley groundwater basin. Once that is complete, the basin will be able to meet a fifth of the city's water needs.

The region is also finally recognizing that stormwater and other runoff is an essential source of local water. Through the voter-approved Safe Clean Water Program, LA County is investing \$280 million a year to clean and capture stormwater. The DWP has been quick to take advantage of the program, using the money to support projects that will add 1,700 acre-feet a year to the San Fernando Valley groundwater basin—enough for almost 19,000 Angelenos.

But a truly secure, resilient and equitable water future requires more than shoring up local water supplies. We also must wean ourselves off imported water.

The easiest place to start is Mono Lake, an internationally critical haven for millions of migratory and nesting birds as well as a scenic recreational destination for Angelenos and other Californians. The DWP made promises to help restore this natural treasure three decades ago but has yet to fulfill them.

After excessive diversions into the LA Aqueduct led to the infamous near-collapse of Mono Lake's fragile ecosystem in the 1970s, a comprehensive review led by the State Water Resources Control Board spurred regulators to limit DWP diversions from the watershed. The board's order was designed to ensure that the lake would be able to reach and sustain a minimum surface level of 6,392 feet above sea level.

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DWP made promises to help restore Mono Lake three decades ago but has yet to fulfill them.

Clearing up the “green lake” phenomenon

by Robbie Di Paolo

This summer, the water in Mono Lake appeared noticeably clearer than it has during most summers over the last decade. Historically, the clarity of Mono Lake’s water fluctuates seasonally, appearing green and opaque in the winter as algae grows and then clearing up in the summer as brine shrimp hatch and eat the algae. However, starting in 2014, researchers and recreationalists alike noticed the lake stayed green with algae during the summer, greatly reducing water clarity and visibility.

This “green lake” phenomenon of summers with significantly decreased water clarity persisted until 2017, another exceptionally wet year akin to this year. 2018 and

2019 were somewhat in-between years with regards to water clarity, and the remaining years until 2023 have had exceptionally opaque, green water. Anecdotally, 2023 appears to have even greater clarity than 2017, but data are still being collected and processed.

“Why is this happening?” is the question the Mono Lake Committee, researchers, and visitors have been asking.

In the big picture, for decades Mono Lake has been below the level the California State Water Resources Control Board set to ensure a healthy salinity level for the lake’s overall ecosystem function. When the lake stayed green in the summer of 2014, Mono Lake had dropped to a low level, and high salinity, not seen since the mid-1990s. Since then the lake has been fluctuating around that low level, including the summers when the water remained green and opaque. How the low lake level and higher salinities influence the many different limnological factors tied to the green lake condition is not yet fully understood.

Other important factors to consider when investigating the green lake phenomenon include: brine shrimp abundance, size, grazing patterns, and life cycle changes; algae composition and abundance; water temperature; stratification within the lake; and, as in this year, large inputs of fresh water to the lake.

Excitingly, the Committee has secured grant funds from the California Department of Fish & Wildlife to fund UC Santa Barbara limnologists to shed some light on the green lake phenomenon. This project will seek to solve this Mono Lake mystery as a supplement to the ongoing limnology research at Mono Lake required by DWP’s water license. ❖



ELIN LIUNG

This summer, the water in Mono Lake appeared noticeably clearer than it has during most summers over the last decade.

Let Mono Lake be a lake from page 6

That is generally agreed to be the minimum for keeping the ecosystem healthy.

In 1994, the DWP and city leaders agreed to the state’s plan to save Mono Lake. State officials required more water flow to the lake but allowed continuing diversions of up to 16,000 acre-feet annually, which was expected to allow the lake to recover to the target level by 2014. Despite the reduced diversions, however, the lake continues to languish far below the required level. Mono Lake’s return to health is now a decade overdue.

With the lake now benefiting from a tremendously wet winter, advocates have again approached the State Water Board with a request to pause DWP imports from the area until the target level is achieved. The Kutzadika’a Tribe, the traditional caretaker of Mono Lake and the lands around it, is supporting the effort as a means of protecting its cultural

heritage and future.

The harm of continuing to export water from the Mono Lake watershed far outweighs the small benefit to the DWP’s customers. Water diverted from the lake accounts for only about 1% to 3% of LA’s water. Keeping it in Mono Lake will protect the ecosystem and, as importantly, fulfill LA’s commitment to do so.

The LA region needs a radical new approach to water. Importing it from distant watersheds is expensive, energy-intensive and unsustainable. We have the water we need, provided we make the most of every drop.

On bringing the Eastern Sierra’s water to LA, William Mulholland famously declared, “There it is. Take it.” A more modern, responsible and ethical approach to water management requires a new motto: “It is here! Use it wisely.” ❖

An exceptional year for stream restoration

by Robbie Di Paolo

The Mono Basin has had a very wet runoff year (more than 200% of average), but from a stream restoration perspective, what matters is how quickly the runoff melts, because the resulting flows dictate what kind of ecosystem processes occur.

Mild temperatures throughout the spring and the early summer months produced a somewhat diminished peak flow compared to what could have occurred. Even though 2023 had more snow than 2017, streamflow gauges and preliminary field data suggest that the 2023 peak flow events were similar to 2017 for most of the creeks in terms of flow magnitudes and channel activation, with one notable exception (see Mill Creek box).

But let's be clear, 2023 was an exceptional year for stream restoration. In the Rush Creek bottomlands, large and small ponded areas formed as water fanned across floodplains and reoccupied dry side channels. In Lee Vining Creek below town along the creek trail, the usually dry channel that hugs closest to the trail was flowing with enough force to mobilize cobbles

and woody debris. These occurrences only happen in wet runoff years. And in extremely wet runoff years like 2017 and 2023, flood events have the power to alter the shape and structure of the creeks in ways that can allow water to flow to these hard-to-reach areas more readily in the future.

Exactly how the shape and structure (i.e., morphology) of the creeks change over time, especially after a wet year, is complex. In 2017, large flows opened channels on Rush Creek that have since stayed open and flowing with water even during low flow periods in winter and drought years. But not all channels can and will respond this way. To track the condition and trajectory of the stream restoration ordered by the California State Water Resources Control Board, Stream Monitoring Directors Bill Trush and Ross Taylor measure stream morphology conditions and fishery population health annually. The Mono Lake Committee assists with these efforts by collecting and sharing stream temperature data and groundwater depth measurements. Data and technical reports point to a couple of

broad takeaways regarding the ongoing stream restoration.

First, multiple decades of restoration have not resolved the ecological damage that occurred in the streams resulting directly and indirectly from the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power's (DWP) 50 years of excessive diversions, but conditions are improving dramatically in many areas. The simple fact that Rush and Lee Vining creeks have riparian habitats that can withstand 900 cubic feet per second (cfs) and 600 cfs peak flow events, respectively, and produce dramatic restoration benefits for the stream ecosystem is a testament to progress. Even 20 years ago there would have been concern about releasing flows at these magnitudes into the creeks, but through thoughtful restoration and monitoring approaches over the years, the creeks have robust vegetation and strong root systems that provide bank stabilization during more natural, sometimes extreme, flood events. A multitude of challenges still exist both for the fishery as well as each stream's morphology, but overall, the ecological processes that promote a healthy stream ecosystem have been secured thanks to the 2013 Mono Basin Stream Restoration Agreement and are now being delivered as part of the 2021 amended water license for DWP.

Second, the stream ecosystem is recalibrating and likely will be for some time. Lee Vining and Rush creeks are clearly going through a midlife crisis of sorts; after having been relatively stable for thousands of years, stream diversions and low lake levels over the last century forced destructive changes onto all of Mono Lake's major tributaries. While in 2017 and 2023 we can observe major alterations occurring in these creeks, such as the establishment of apparently new channels and wetlands, over time and after additional wet years, we expect that each stream system will



GREG REIS

The Mono Lake Committee and Stream Monitoring Directors kept a close eye on Mono Basin streams as unusually high peak flows reshaped channels, wetlands, and streambanks.

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eventually settle and experience much less change during extreme-wet years. Tracking these changes is, therefore, critical in the coming years as we seek to understand how these systems are adjusting and identify restoration

successes as well as shortcomings.

So, there's more work to be done. Policies are in place that require streamflow release patterns that seek to maximize stream health, but thankfully, those rules include critical "flexibility

provisions." Called out in the amended license, the Stream Monitoring Directors can utilize new data and information to adaptively adjust how DWP releases water into the streams on a year-to-year basis if it would promote better stream restoration outcomes, and therefore, their monitoring continues to be a critical element of the stream restoration effort. And as this runoff year ends and the creeks transition to their lower fall and wintertime flows, we will continue to learn what restoration opportunities exist and how they can be optimized, no matter how wet or dry next year will be. ❖

Robbie Di Paolo is the Committee's Restoration Field Technician. This fall he has been observing Mono Lake from his favorite vantage point—1,000 feet above the lake in the Eared Grebe survey airplane.



FLOW TRAVERS

With over 200% of average runoff this summer, Mono Lake's tributary streams, including Lee Vining Creek, pictured here, experienced an exceptional year for stream restoration.

Mill Creek's dramatic runoff season

Mill Creek is Mono Lake's third largest tributary stream and it experienced a much more dramatic runoff season below the Lundy Lake Reservoir dam in 2023 compared to 2017. Water releases from Lundy into Mill Creek were larger and lasted longer in 2023 with a peak flow that reached approximately 240 cubic feet per second (cfs) compared to 195 cfs in 2017. The larger flows opened historic side channels in Mill Creek and a rapid expansion of riparian and meadow habitat has been establishing as a result.

Unfortunately, culverts on Cemetery Road are not big enough for the larger flows that occur in wet years, let alone extremely wet years like 2017 and 2023. To make matters worse, these small culverts are Mill Creek's only defense in preventing nearly 15 feet of streambed incision from traveling upstream through the Mill Creek bottomlands, which would occur if the culverts were to blow out due to high

flows. This amount of streambed incision would threaten the survival of hundreds of trees that have been re-establishing along Mill Creek over the last three decades.

Thankfully, land managers worked hard to protect these culverts for most of the season, diverting water into usually dry historic channels, but there were times (inevitably on a weekend) when Mono

Lake Committee staff had to mobilize on a moment's notice to sandbag and fortify the culverts from large flows. The Committee is hoping to work with land managers to identify a long-term solution that will make management less cumbersome in future wet years, while also providing more long-lasting protections for Mill Creek.



ORIGRENS

Mill Creek's peak flows had to be diverted around too-small culverts at Cemetery Road.

Grant Lake Reservoir outlet update

Spillway upgrade construction tentatively planned for next spring

by Bartshé Miller

One of the few dams without an outlet in the state of California is soon to get one—modification of the Grant Lake Reservoir dam may begin as early as next spring. The Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) has not confirmed a construction start date but is working toward an April 2024 timeframe as project bidding, permits, and reservoir levels allow.

The successful restoration of Rush Creek depends on the modification of Grant Dam. The dam was built without a direct way to pass water downstream into Rush Creek except for an emergency spillway. The aging 20th century structure was built on the premise of 19th century water rights values—that water flowing naturally in a stream was wasted water. DWP built the earthen dam and diversion infrastructure in the 1930s as part of the Mono Basin Extension of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. For decades the dam prevented lower Rush Creek from receiving any water. As litigation affirmed Fish & Game Codes and Public Trust values of both Mono Lake and fish in its tributary streams, small amounts of water were released into lower Rush Creek beginning in the 1980s. Subsequent California State Water Resource Control Board orders mandated increased restoration flows that the current system is unable to deliver in wet years.

Essential to restoration

In 2021 the State Water Board amended DWP's water licenses and ordered that DWP construct an outlet that reliably delivers stream ecosystem flows (SEFs) to Rush Creek. The Board's Order 21-86 was the culmination and implementation of a voluntary Stream Restoration Agreement which the Mono Lake Committee, along with California Trout and the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, signed with DWP to commit to the restoration of Mono Basin streams. Order 21-86 included multiple detailed steps to fulfill the next chapter of science-based stream restoration in the Mono Basin. The construction of an outlet that can deliver the SEFs is essential to achieve that restoration.

The new outlet will be constructed in the existing emergency spillway. DWP will widen and deepen the spillway and install two 14-foot-tall Langemann gates that will allow for controlled releases at lower reservoir levels than the spillway currently allows. DWP completed the project's environmental review in 2020. Earlier this year DWP formally



The required high flows for Rush Creek could not be delivered, even with Grant Lake Reservoir spilling for two months during the summer, due to Grant Dam's limitations.

requested a deadline extension from the State Water Board to begin construction in the spring of 2025. The State Water Board granted the extension, but DWP is planning to begin construction next year.

Fixing an awkward work-around

Moving water around Grant Dam and into Rush Creek has long involved an indirect work-around via an aging valve, aqueduct intake tunnel, modified gate, and return ditch. This system cannot reliably deliver the sufficient volume of water necessary to accurately mimic the natural hydrograph and restore the creek in wetter-than-average runoff year-types. This summer for example, Rush Creek was supposed to receive a minimum of 750 cubic feet per second during the peak runoff for at least five days. The combination of water flowing through the emergency spillway and the return ditch fell short of the necessary peak flow requirements.

When the new outlet is complete, peak flows will be achievable along with greater operational flexibility to mimic a natural hydrograph. Finally, a 20th century earthen dam will be upgraded to enable the Public Trust balancing of 21st century values. For Rush Creek, Mono Lake, DWP, the City of Los Angeles, and the people of California, it's a winning combination for restoring vital stream habitat and modernizing water infrastructure. ❖

Bartshé Miller is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director. He earned his captain's badge this summer piloting numerous research groups on the Mono Lake Committee boat to all parts of the lake.

Rising lake averts coyote threat to nesting gulls

by Bartshé Miller

As Mono Lake rose this year it submerged large sections of the exposed landbridge between Negit Island and Black Point, providing a better buffer between coyotes and thousands of nesting California Gulls. The winter brought so much precipitation, runoff, and resulting lake level increase that the Mono Lake Committee shelved plans to install a temporary electric fence on the landbridge to protect nesting gulls.

Instead, after consulting with Point Blue Conservation Science, Committee staff set up wildlife cameras on both sides of the landbridge to monitor coyote activity before and during the nesting season as the lake rose. No coyotes were detected. In September, a post-nesting season survey of the islands did not find any evidence of coyote predation or presence, either.

Twain Islet, located just north of Negit Island, is home to the largest concentration of nesting gulls at Mono Lake. California Gulls used to nest primarily on Negit Island until the landbridge first connected in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Coyotes reached Negit at that time and the gulls have yet to re-establish the colony. In 2016 coyotes reached Java Islet next to Twain and forced the abandonment of 400 nests; for the coyotes, Twain was a probable next stop. The following winter the Committee installed a solar-powered electric fence on the landbridge, stopping coyotes from reaching the gulls the following spring and summer.

The Committee was prepared to install the fence once again this year, and emergency drought funding from the California

Department of Fish & Wildlife was secured by the Committee to fund the effort. While the electric fence kept coyotes away once before, it is a temporary fix that provides no guarantees. The record-setting winter of 2023 arrived just in time for the gulls. The most effective long-term solution is to raise Mono Lake nine feet higher to its Public Trust lake level of 6392 feet, fully submerging the landbridge and ending land predator access—the most immediate and recurring threat to the viability of California Gulls at Mono Lake. ❖



BARTSHE MILLER

With Mono Lake rising fast after the record-breaking winter, the Committee installed cameras instead of a fence on the landbridge.

Mono Basin ASO flights get off the ground

by Greg Reis

In the spring, the Mono Lake Committee helped Mono County secure emergency funding from the Governor's Office of Emergency Services for Airborne Snow Observatories (ASO) LiDAR flights that gave us a crucial understanding of the record snowpack. ASO-derived data and model output is the new standard for snowpack assessment and watershed modeling because it provides highly accurate snowpack data for most of the watersheds forecasted by the California Department of Water Resources (see Summer 2017 *Mono Lake Newsletter*).

ASO surveyed Mono County's snowpack on May 27, June 15, and July 2. The results provided an important check on ground-based snowpack measurements, some of which were higher than what ASO indicated. Based on traditional forecasting methods, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power had forecasted that Rush Creek runoff would be 270%

of average April–September, but thanks to the May 27 ASO flight, the Committee was able to revise our expectation more accurately to 224%, which turned out to be more in line with 2017's record 211%. This type of information is important for accurate runoff forecasting and stream restoration every year, not just during a state of emergency, but it is not yet routinely available for the Mono Basin.

The state is the primary funder of ASO flights for California's snowmelt runoff watersheds. Local water agencies also provide funding for ASO, while the Bureau of Reclamation also funds ASO flights in the Central Valley and Truckee-Carson River watersheds. Getting non-emergency funding for Mono Basin flights has not yet been successful; however, the Committee will continue to advocate for this important data collection.

Tracking phalaropes at Mono and beyond

compiled from field reports from Ryan Carle and Kiki Tarr

Phalarope research continued at Mono Lake again this summer, with phalarope surveys taking place for the fifth consecutive year, plus a new effort to tag phalaropes so they can be tracked by Motus towers throughout the Americas (see box). Ryan Carle and Kiki Tarr of Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge coordinated the surveys and the tagging effort.

Phalarope surveys

Twelve phalarope surveys total took place July through September, specifically timed to coincide with surveys at five other major phalarope migratory stops in western North America. “Coordinated surveys help researchers track large-scale patterns in phalarope habitat, population, and movement,” Kiki explained. Surveys happened by boat and on shore at the same time to thoroughly cover Mono Lake’s vast phalarope habitat.

This year, the surveys recorded relatively few Wilson’s Phalaropes at Mono Lake, with a peak number of approximately 6,000 in early July. At the same time, Owens Lake, which normally hosts only a few thousand Wilson’s Phalaropes, had record numbers of



PHOTO COURTESY OF RYAN CARLE

A Wilson’s Phalarope that was tagged in Saskatchewan, Canada this past summer.

approximately 27,000 birds. Owens had substantial water in it due to the record snowpack and runoff, temporarily providing better bird habitat than usual. Ryan said, “When habitat reappears, the phalaropes will use it!”

Red-necked Phalaropes arrived in record numbers at Mono Lake this season. Oikonos recorded 32,618 of them on a late-August survey, which far surpassed the previous published single-day Mono Lake record of 21,000 birds. Other North American survey sites also

reported large numbers of Red-necked Phalaropes this year.

Phalarope tagging

This summer, after years of planning, researchers successfully tagged 25 Wilson’s Phalaropes in Canada and California, but unfortunately efforts at Mono Lake were unsuccessful.

During several frustrating weeks the Oikonos team and Dr. Margaret Rubega from the University of Connecticut tried to capture and tag Wilson’s Phalaropes at Mono Lake. The capture method that had worked for Dr. Rubega in the 1990s was to wait until the birds had gained enough weight from eating shrimp and flies that they couldn’t quickly take off from the water, making them easy to scoop up with a net. This year the team’s timing was off and the phalaropes remained agile, flying away when boats approached. Next year, altering the timing and possibly the method of capture should result in some tagged phalaropes at Mono Lake.

Signals from phalaropes that were tagged this summer have so far been picked up by Motus towers at Great Salt Lake, the Salton Sea, in Baja California, and in Jalisco, Mexico. The birds are making their way toward South America for the winter! ❖

Motus comes to Mono Lake

by Robbie Di Paolo

The Mono Lake Committee constructed and activated the first Motus system at Mono Lake on July 1, 2023. Motus is an automated radio-tracking antenna system that detects and records radio-tagged organisms that pass within nine miles of it. The system currently consists of a single array with plans to add three more at different locations near Mono Lake.

Our goal is to detect tagged phalaropes on the lake to aid and enhance ongoing phalarope research. The system will also support science

by detecting any organism tagged with Motus-capable tags, which are actively deployed on birds, bats, butterflies, and all kinds of animals throughout the Americas and worldwide for a variety of research projects. The current Motus array will detect any tagged organism that passes by its field of view, confirming the organism’s presence at Mono Lake. As additional arrays are set up in the coming years, researchers will be able to infer distributions and movement of tagged organisms throughout the lake.

Phalaropes unite us

Small bird continues to forge international connections for Mono Lake

by Nora Livingston

Have you ever seen a bird costume contest? Picture a runway leading through an audience to an open stage but instead of fashion models there are curious-looking creatures. Adults and kids with face paint markings, knee-sock bird legs, tarp wings, and makeshift paper towel roll beaks—all flapping their way to the front of the crowd. It is a sight to see, with lots of applause, giggles, oohs, and aaahs from the crowd.

This was the scene at the first ever Phalarope Festival in Lee Vining in June. The festival celebrated the vital connection between Mono Lake and our sister saline lakes—Laguna Mar Chiquita in Argentina and Great Salt Lake in Utah—as well as the tiny shorebird that links us together: the Wilson’s Phalarope.

After visiting Laguna Mar Chiquita in Argentina last fall (see Winter & Spring 2023 *Mono Lake Newsletter*), the Mono Lake Committee’s connections to that lake have been going strong. The 20th annual Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua focused on saline lake ecology with presentations from researchers, educators, and park rangers from Laguna Mar Chiquita and Great Salt Lake. Chautauqua organizers swapped the post-festival picnic with the Phalarope Festival, which included the phalarope costume contest, the debut of a bilingual phalarope song, international speakers, and the dedication of four new phalarope murals in Lee Vining painted by Argentinian muralist Franco “Vato” Cervato. More than 300 people toasted to these beautiful additions to town and the international collaboration that has resulted from our joint work to protect these essential bodies of water and the wildlife that rely on them.

For the Chautauqua, we hosted seven colleagues from Argentina and four from Utah on field trips to learn about the Mono Basin, bird life, and the challenges facing Mono Lake. We brought together Mono Lake researchers and managers in a meeting about collaboratively moving research and conservation efforts forward at our respective lakes. Efforts that work to span the length of the phalarope migration route and depth of the hemispheric habitat issues facing migratory birds require fierce determination. Celebrating with a lighthearted yet salient festival allows our creative best to come out while we work to find solutions for the challenges that saline lakes face.

The connections with Argentina have also led to the development of a new education initiative that links Lee Vining students with students at Laguna Mar Chiquita. We have connected Lee Vining High School students with Experiencia Ambiental—a program at Laguna Mar Chiquita where students learn about and get involved in research, education, and entrepreneurial experiences that benefit their home lake. We hope to forge a deeper understanding of the importance of protecting and restoring these connected lakes, and even hold a student exchange between the lakes.

These exciting developments would not have been possible without encouragement and support from the US Forest Service International Program, the Mono Lake Volunteers, Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, California State Parks and the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve staff, and key local supporters who generously donated their time, dollars, and energy to make it all happen.

In the words of Marcela Castellino of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, “Why do we have such an international focus in our work to protect saline lakes and shorebirds? It’s because the shorebirds demand that we work together.” ❖

Nora Livingston is the Committee’s Lead Naturalist Guide. She loves when the phalaropes molt into their winter plumage and you can see the tiny feathers they dropped floating on Mono Lake.



The Phalarope Festival celebrated the migratory and conservation connections between Mono Lake, Laguna Mar Chiquita, and Great Salt Lake.

Cool summer melts record snowpack slowly

by Greg Reis

This year, the relatively cool spring delayed peak flows until July on the larger streams. If it had melted faster, the record-high spring snowpack could have caused more flooding problems. But except for July, temperatures were cooler than 2017, the last time the Mono Basin had a similarly incredible snowpack.

Airborne Snow Observatories (ASO) data lowered our expectations of record-breaking snowmelt runoff when the late spring flights indicated that in some places the snow water content was not as high as reported by snow surveyors, particularly in the Rush Creek watershed. The runoff volumes and peak flow magnitudes were similar to 2017, although higher on Lee Vining Creek and lower on Rush Creek. April–July runoff was 179,000 acre-feet,

or 204% of average, just shy of the record 211% set in 2017.

Lee Vining Creek peaked at 600 cubic feet per second (cfs), slightly higher than the 2017 peak flow. Grant Lake Reservoir spilled June 6–August 8, delivering a 700 cfs peak flow to Rush Creek, which combined with Parker and Walker creeks to reach over 800 cfs in the bottomlands near Mono Lake. This was lower than the 2017 peak flow, although in both years Rush Creek had about 45 days of more than 500 cfs below Grant Dam. These beneficial high flows recharged groundwater and caused geomorphic changes to the creeks (see page 8).

Near the end of July a problem was detected with the Grant Lake Reservoir outlet valve. Concerning

cavitation noises caused the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) to reduce the flow to less than 200 cfs to prevent potential damage to the 85-year-old valve. DWP is currently evaluating the problem. It had already been planning for the valve's replacement after the construction of the new spillway outlet. Grant Lake Reservoir is being lowered in advance of construction planned to start next year (see page 10).

In August the excitement was not over. Tropical Storm Hilary had no damaging effects in the Mono Basin, but it did drop 0.71" of rain, which made the month the second-wettest August since 1984. In the Owens Valley, on the other hand, flash floods and debris flows closed Highway 395 and temporarily shut down the Los Angeles Aqueduct. ❖

Lakewatch

Record Mono Lake rise

by Greg Reis

Mono Lake set a new record for a July rise—1.26 feet, beating the previous 1967 record by about a quarter of a foot—and was just inches away from beating the June and August records. The September 1 lake level was 6383.2 feet above sea level.

The April through August rise was a record 3.2 feet; the 4.8-foot rise since December 1, 2022 was also a record. In fact, any period since December that includes June–August set a new record for Mono Lake rise. However, the record Mono Lake rise in a single water year is still held by the 5.8-foot rise in 1982–83, even though the 2023 water year (October

1, 2022–September 30, 2023) already has the highest precipitation on record at Cain Ranch and 2017 still holds the record for water year runoff.

DWP's lake level forecast for September 1 was about half a foot too low, and ours was about a third of a foot too high. Our forecast was on track until August, and once we realized DWP's runoff forecast was too high for August, we were able to use ASO data to adjust our Mono Lake forecast to be more on target. Some of the error was due to the Grant outlet valve problem—if August flows out of Grant Lake Reservoir had been maximized to release an additional 9,000 acre-feet of stored snowmelt runoff—similar to what happened in 2017—our Mono Lake forecast for September 1 would have been accurate within about a tenth of a foot.

This table of record monthly lake rises includes 2023 and corrects errors in

the Summer 2023 *Mono Lake Newsletter* (print version) table. ❖

Mono Lake's record monthly rises since 1941 (feet)

Month	Monthly record	2023
April	0.54' (1969)	0.08'
May	0.60' (1969)	0.39'
June	1.37' (2017)	1.17'
July	1.02' (1967)	1.26'
Aug.	0.55' (1983)	0.34'
Sept.	0.20' (1983)	-0.10'

Greg Reis is the Committee's Information & Restoration Specialist. On an August canoe tour with his family he was surprised by the large number of Osprey compared to when he coordinated the canoe tours 25 years ago.

6417'

Prediversion lake level, 1941

6392'

Management lake level

6383.2'

Current lake level

6372'

Historic low, 1982

Mono Basin Journal

A roundup of quiet happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



GEORGE MCQUILKIN

The Mono Lake shoreline moves in fascinating ways in wonderful wet years like this one, as the lake rises rapidly. Capturing that rise using timelapse video is a dramatic way to see the change, and maintenance walks to the camera provided me with a welcome excuse to visit the changing lake regularly. (See the video at monolake.org/2023lakerise.)

What was dry ground at summer's start turned to a spit of sand favored by gulls come September. Osprey were building nests when I placed the camera; their chicks soared overhead when I downloaded photos months later. Peaks that were surrounded by broad white fields of snow glowing in the sun are now dusted with the first snowfall of the winter ahead while still smattered with snow patches from last winter.

The last steps of the walk to the camera are now a knee-deep wade through expanses of alkali flies, floating, walking underwater, eating, and thriving in the new, abundant habitat of submerged grasses, sedges, and the occasional tufa. Gulls on the spit of sand run at them, creating billowing clouds of snacks. Grebes paddle by, plucking flies from the lake, fattening up for their flight southward. The lake rise is a rejuvenation that, with nine more feet to go, shows the promise and potential of protecting Mono Lake. ❖

Geoff McQuilkin is the Committee's Executive Director. He can tell public concern for Mono Lake is increasing based on the number of questions about the lake's health he gets while in the line at the local coffee shop.

Benchmarks



LUPIN AMSTUTZ

June 8, 2023: After a record-breaking snowy winter, by early summer, Mono Lake had already risen 2.1 vertical feet from its December low point. Elevation: 6380.5 feet above sea level.



ANDREW VOUSSEF

September 19, 2023: Mono Lake's shoreline changed daily as the lake rose steadily over the summer. In total, the lake rose 4.8 vertical feet this year. Elevation: 6382.2 feet above sea level.



MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

INFORMATION CENTER & BOOKSTORE

Fall Catalog

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ORG/SHOP](http://MONOLAKE.ORG/SHOP)



MONO LAKE EARED GREBE T-SHIRT

If you've visited the shores of Mono Lake in the autumn, then you are no stranger to the vast numbers of Eared Grebes that flock to Mono Lake each year. This super-soft 100% unbleached cotton T-shirt, worn by Juniper, features a vibrant design of two Eared Grebes amongst the tufa formations and is bound to become one of your favorites. *Mono Lake Committee exclusive.* *Mono Lake Eared Grebe T-shirt, 100% cotton, unisex sizes S-XXL: \$35.00*

USE WATER LIKE YOU'RE CAMPING T-SHIRT

Everyone can use a reminder to conserve, and this *Mono Lake Committee exclusive* T-shirt, worn by Fiona, does just that! This design featuring the conservation message, "Use Water Like You're Camping, Long Live Mono Lake," has been popular among our members for years and is now printed on a soft 100% organic cotton T-shirt in an earthy-purple hue. *Use Water Like You're Camping T-shirt, 100% organic cotton, unisex sizes S-XXL: \$30.00*



SALTY & BASIC TRUCKER HATS

The perfect accessory for the salty and sassy Mono Lake lover in your life. These hats, modeled by Leslie and Maureen, are embroidered with "Salty & Basic Mono Lake" along with the salinity and pH of our favorite inland sea. A little nerdy, a little cheeky, and just right. Available in either hot pink or charcoal grey. *Mono Lake Committee exclusive.* *Salty & Basic trucker hat, unisex, one size, adjustable, please specify hot pink or charcoal grey: \$25.00*



DETAIL

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



MONO LAKE FAIR ISLE KNIT BEANIE

This USA-made custom beanie, worn by Mara, is too fun not to wear this winter! It features a *Mono Lake Committee exclusive* design of tufa towers, gulls, and rippling water on a deep navy-blue background.

This 95% acrylic and 5% lycra beanie is as warm and comfortable as it is unique.

Mono Lake Fair Isle knit beanie, one size fits most: \$20.00



DETAIL



BRINE SHRIMP BEER GLASS

If you've joined us on a tour, then you have no doubt marveled at Mono Lake's endemic brine shrimp, *Artemia monica*, and maybe even scooped them into a cup to take a closer look. You can recreate that experience with this beer glass featuring an all-over print of our favorite shrimp. Enjoy your cold beverage of choice in these 16-ounce glasses. It might look like the shrimpy waters of Mono Lake, but it will certainly taste much more delicious!

Brine shrimp beer glass, 16 ounces: \$16.00



PHALAROPE EARRINGS

Have you seen the thousands of Wilson's Phalaropes flocking at Mono Lake during the summer? These sustainable handmade earrings celebrate these fantastic little birds and feature both a male and female phalarope. Made in the USA from repurposed paperboard with surgical steel ear wires, these earrings are a lightweight and eco-friendly fashion statement.

Phalarope earrings, 1": \$15.00

LETTERPRESS HOLIDAY CRITTER CARDS

Spread some cheer with these whimsical letterpress cards, hand printed in the USA. Each playful card is sold individually with a corresponding colored envelope. Choose from the following blank-inside cards or grab a few of each: slopeside nuthatch, jolly old coyote, candy cane chickadee, and winter beanie downy woodpecker.

Letterpress holiday critter cards, individually sold, envelope included, please specify animal, 4 1/4" x 5 1/2": \$6.00



NUTHATCH



COYOTE



CHICKADEE



DOWNY WOODPECKER

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

Fall Catalog



GOURD ORNAMENTS

These natural hand-carved and colored gourd ornaments will add a touch of whimsy to your holiday décor. Choose from quail or mini owl designs. Each gourd is handmade and unique—colors, sizes, and design will vary.

Gourd ornaments, handmade and fair trade.

*Please specify quail, 3" tall: \$18.00
or mini owl, 2" tall: \$13.00*



BRINE SHRIMP ORNAMENT

Liven up your holiday decorations with a brine shrimp ornament. These shiny ornaments measure 3 inches long and serve as a festive tribute to the endemic *Artemia monica* of Mono Lake. This *Mono Lake Committee exclusive* is available in either silver or gold.

Brine shrimp ornament, 3", please specify color: \$12.50



KIDS' BINOCULARS

This small set of binoculars is the perfect introductory pair for young birders. With 8X magnification and a 1,000-yard field of view, young nature enthusiasts will get a closer look at feathered friends on the trail and in their backyard. This set includes a carrying case and a small introductory birding guide.

Kids' binoculars, 3.5"x 2.5"x 1": \$25.00

DUAL MAGNIFIER

Featuring both 10X and 5X magnification, this magnifier is a great way to observe insects and plants close up. Compact and portable, this lens is great for exploring the miniature wonders of nature in the backyard and beyond.

Dual magnifier, 4": \$14.50



PLUSH PIKA

Snuggle up with a favorite Mono Basin mammal made with recycled PET fill. It doesn't matter how old you are—these plush pikas are cute, soft, and make excellent cuddle buddies.

Plush pika, 7" tall: \$17.00

*See all the products featured in this catalog and more in full color
online at [MONOLAKE.ORG/SHOP](https://www.monolake.org/shop).*

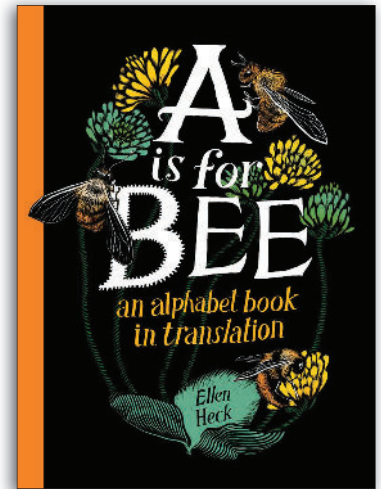
order at [monolake.org/shop](https://www.monolake.org/shop) or (760) 647-6595

A IS FOR BEE: AN ALPHABET BOOK IN TRANSLATION

BY ELLEN HECK

This new take on an alphabet book lets the reader experience the alphabet beyond the confines of the English language. Featuring languages from across the globe and colorful lino-print illustrations, this alphabet book is bound to become a favorite for children ages 3–9.

A is for Bee, hardcover, 40 pages, Levine Querido, 8¼" x 11": \$17.99



MY FRIEND EARTH

WRITTEN BY PATRICIA MACLACHLAN, ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID DIAZ AND FRANCESCA SANNA

Children ages 3–5 will delight in fun flaps and peek-through pages that reveal surprises on every page. With lots of colors and details, the story follows a year of life on Earth from the perspective of the Earth personified as a girl, teaching kids to see the world we inhabit as a living thing.

My Friend Earth, hardcover, 44 pages, Chronicle Books, 9¼" x 11¼": \$19.99



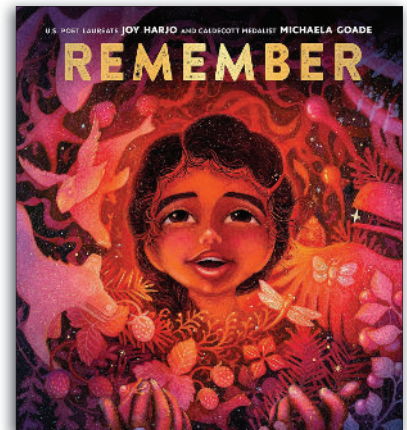
REMEMBER

WRITTEN BY JOY HARJO,

ILLUSTRATED BY MICHAELA GOADE

This picture book is an adaptation of the poem “Remember” by US Poet Laureate Joy Harjo, illustrated by Caldecott Medalist Michaela Goade. It is a powerful reflection on family, nature, and heritage. The Indigenous creators of this collaborative work highlight their respective creative skills and complement each other beautifully, resulting a stunning and powerful picture book for children ages 4–8.

Remember, hardcover, 40 pages, Random House, 10" x 11": \$18.99

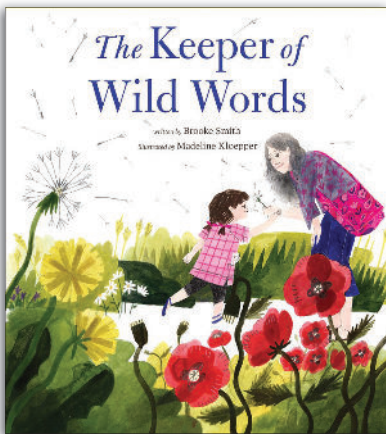


THE KEEPER OF WILD WORDS

WRITTEN BY BROOKE SMITH, ILLUSTRATED BY MADELINE KLOEPPER

This sweet story highlights the special relationship between a grandmother and granddaughter as they work together to rediscover the “wild words.” From pond, to meadow, to forest, the duo encounters the plants and animals that make each place unique and learn their names. Full of delightful illustrations, this book will be enjoyed by children 5–8 and their grandmothers alike.

The Keeper of Wild Words, hardcover, 62 pages, Chronicle Books, 10" x 11": \$18.99

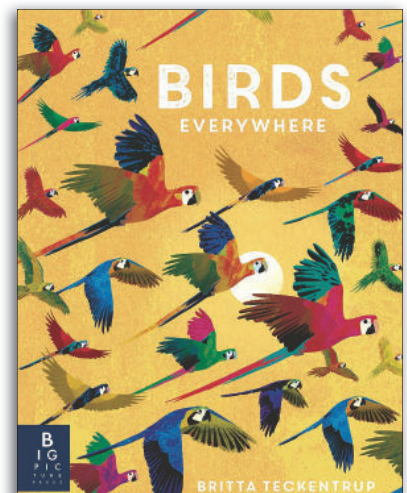


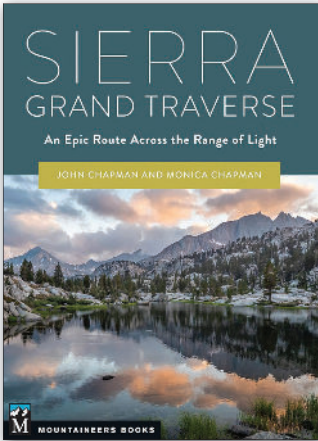
BIRDS EVERYWHERE

WRITTEN BY CAMILLA DE LA BEDOYERE, ILLUSTRATED BY BRITTA TECKENTRUP

Featuring the beautiful illustrations of Britta Teckentrup, this nonfiction book explores many different birds and the places they live. While it is packed with information it also has creative sparks of personality that will make it a compelling book for kids 6–9 years old.

Birds Everywhere, hardcover, 32 pages, Big Picture Press, 9½" x 12": \$17.99





SIERRA GRAND TRAVERSE: AN EPIC ROUTE ACROSS THE RANGE OF LIGHT

BY JOHN CHAPMAN AND MONICA CHAPMAN

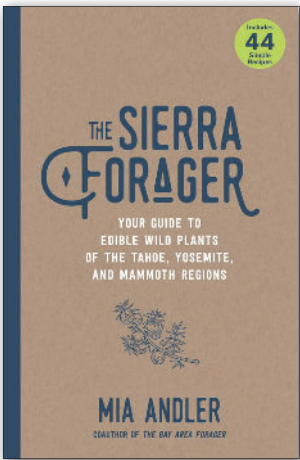
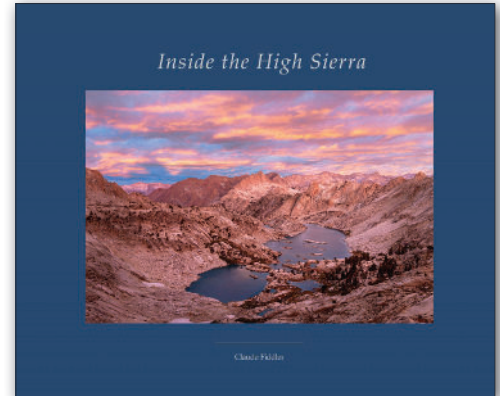
This newly released and detailed guide charts an inspiring route through the High Sierra. The route is a combination of on and off-trail terrain starting in Tuolumne Meadows and ending just south of Mt. Whitney. It encompasses some of the most striking views and locations in the High Sierra. This guide covers everything you need to know, bring, and prepare to accomplish the route, and includes detailed color maps, photos, and helpful hints for planning and logistics, all in a small packable size. *Sierra Grand Traverse, paperback, 224 pages, Mountaineers Books, 5½"x 7¼": \$24.95*

INSIDE THE HIGH SIERRA

BY CLAUDE FIDDLER

This striking photo book by renowned climber and local photographer, Claude Fiddler, features 156 pages of rich full-color images of the High Sierra. It is linen bound and printed on archival paper so these fantastic photos of a climber's view of the Sierra will be a beautiful addition to your coffee table for years to come.

Inside the High Sierra, hardcover, 156 pages, Wolverine, 10"x 12": \$75.00



SIERRA FORAGER: YOUR GUIDE TO THE EDIBLE WILD PLANTS OF THE TAHOE, YOSEMITE, AND MAMMOTH REGIONS

BY MIA ANDLER

Dive into the botanical bounty of the Sierra Nevada with this guide to edible wild plants. Full of knowledge of the different edible species of the region, this guide includes large detailed photographs, plant ID information, and 44 recipes that include foraged ingredients. This guide also includes important information on harvesting respectfully and responsibly and caring for these wild spaces.

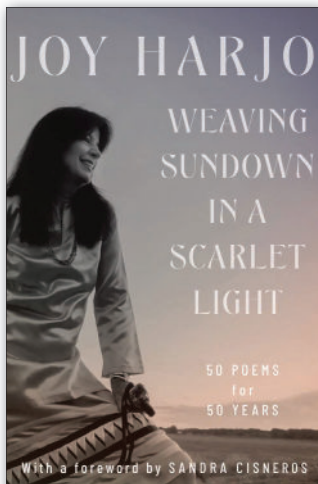
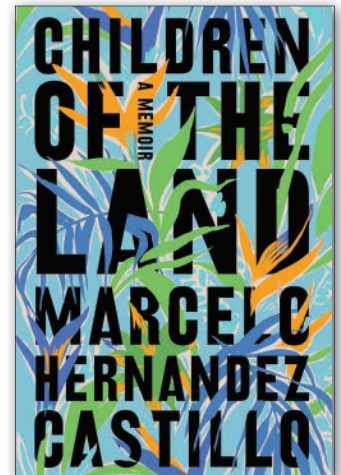
Sierra Forager, paperback, 200 pages, Heyday, 5¼"x 8¼": \$25.00

CHILDREN OF THE LAND: A MEMOIR

BY MARCELO HERNANDEZ CASTILLO

This moving memoir recounts the early life of celebrated poet Marcelo Hernandez Castillo as an undocumented immigrant in California. He was five when he came to California and spent his youth hiding in plain sight, always aware of the precariousness of his family's position, and trying not to stand out. This refreshingly honest recounting of his life exposes the human experiences and vulnerability behind the headlines of "illegal immigrants" and is a remarkable reflection on what it means to be a citizen.

Children of the Land, paperback, 384 pages, Harper Perennial, 5¼"x 8": \$17.99



WEAVING SUNDOWN IN A SCARLET LIGHT: 50 POEMS FOR 50 YEARS

BY JOY HARJO

This compilation of poems from renowned US Poet Laureate, Joy Harjo, spans 50 years of her writing career. Her warm, wise, and compassionate voice addresses difficult times and themes with resilience and love. Notes accompanying the poems provide insight into her inspirations: Navajo horse songs, jazz, her Indigenous heritage, and nature. This volume is a beautiful collection highlighting the career of a gifted poet.

Weaving Sundown in a Scarlet Light, hardcover, 160 pages, W.W. Norton & Company, 5¾"x 8½": \$25.00

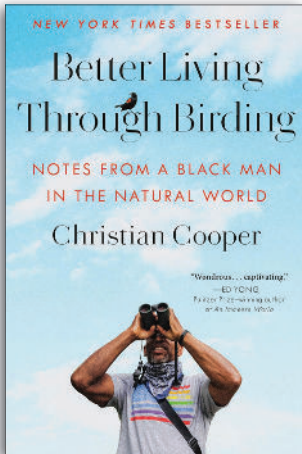
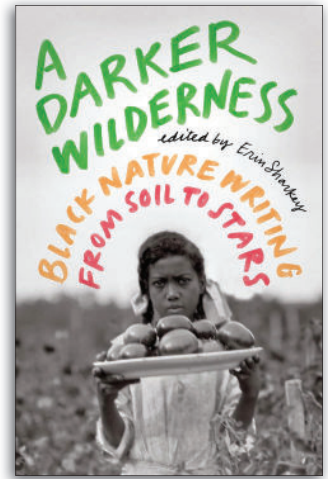
order at monolake.org/shop or (760) 647-6595

A DARKER WILDERNESS: BLACK NATURE WRITING FROM SOIL TO STARS

EDITED BY ERIN SHARKEY

This collection of essays from contemporary American Black writers explores the role of nature in their lived experience. These essays delve into topics from roots to stars and explore what nature means, who owns it, where it is, and how Black people have preserved their connection with it despite a legacy of slavery and modern-day racist policies.

A Darker Wilderness, paperback, 312 pages, Milkweed Editions, 5½"x 8½": \$20.00



BETTER LIVING THROUGH BIRDING: NOTES FROM A BLACK MAN IN THE NATURAL WORLD

BY CHRISTIAN COOPER

This *New York Times* bestseller is equal parts memoir, travelogue, and introduction to the art of birding. This book tells Christian Cooper's story as a self-proclaimed "Blerd" (Black nerd) whose love of birding helped prepare him for and guide him through his life as a gay Black man in America.

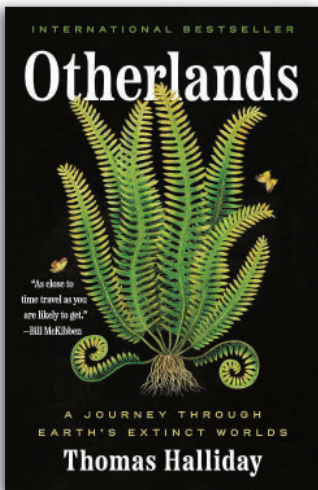
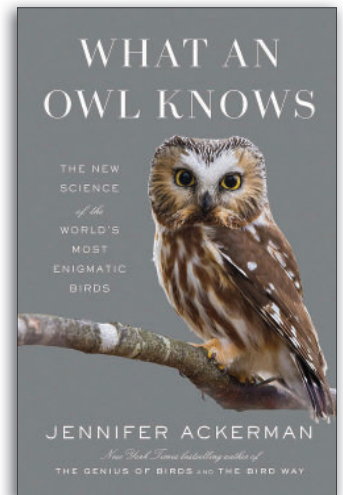
Better Living Through Birding, hardcover, 304 pages, Random House, 5½"x 8½": \$28.00

WHAT AN OWL KNOWS: THE NEW SCIENCE OF THE WORLD'S MOST ENIGMATIC BIRDS

BY JENNIFER ACKERMAN

The earliest known depictions of owls are in the Chauvet Cave paintings, created more than 30,000 years ago, but to this day these birds remain largely a mystery. The enigmatic owl is difficult to study because they are masters of stealth and most active at night. Follow along with author Jennifer Ackerman as she heads into the field to observe owls and explore the new research and technology that's uncovering their secrets.

What an Owl Knows, hardcover, 352 pages, Penguin Press, 6¼"x 9½": \$30.00



OTHERLANDS: A JOURNEY THROUGH EARTH'S EXTINCT WORLDS

BY THOMAS HALLIDAY

Thomas Halliday brings 16 fossil sites bursting back to life in this journey through the history of life on Earth. This immersive exploration of the past demonstrates the radical changes that have happened here, the remarkable adaptations that have allowed life to continue to thrive, and the evolutionary failures that didn't quite make it. From the empty basin that would become the Mediterranean Sea to tropical forests in Antarctica, you'll be amazed by the span of realities that have existed on our planet.

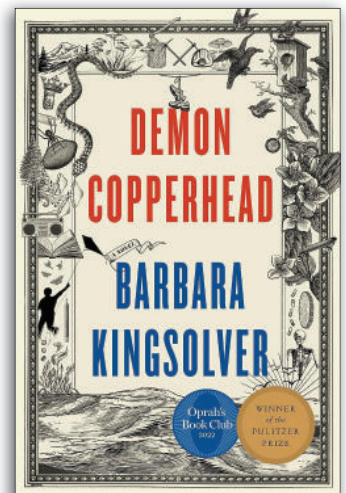
Otherlands, paperback, 416 pages, Random House, 5"x 8": \$20.00

DEMON COPPERHEAD

BY BARBARA KINGSOLVER

This 2023 Pulitzer Prize winning novel is set in the mountains of southern Appalachia and follows the life of a boy, Damon, born into institutional poverty. Through the modern perils of foster care, school, addiction, and love, Damon shows his caustic wit and fierce talent for survival in a world where the rural poor are largely overlooked.

Demon Copperhead, hardcover, 560 pages, Harper, 6"x 9": \$32.50





ENAMEL MONO LAKE CAMP MUG

Cozy up to the fire with this handmade enamel camp mug. These mugs are durable, beautifully crafted, and feature a Mono Lake tufa design and our logo on the bottom. Perfect for camping, travel, or home. *Mono Lake Committee exclusive.*
Enamel Mono Lake camp mug, 12 ounces: \$25.00

**DARK CHOCOLATE COATED
 CHERRIES & ALMONDS**

These California-made small-batch organic confections are the perfect little luxury. They come beautifully packaged and ready for gifting. Choose between tart cherries or roasted almonds coated in a delicious layer of award-winning 65% Belize single-origin chocolate.

Please note that chocolates will be shipped in an insulated sleeve; however, we do not recommend ordering this product if temperatures in your region are currently above 80°F. See monolake.org/chocolate for ingredient lists.

Dark chocolate coated cherries & almonds, organic, 6 ounces. Please specify cherries or almonds: \$16.00



SWEET BIRD SIMPLE SYRUP COLLECTION

This assortment of small-batch syrups comes in beautiful packaging making it great for gifting (or keeping for yourself). Add a splash of these natural and delightfully unique and sweet flavors to drinks of all kinds to transform them from ordinary into a special treat. See monolake.org/syrup for ingredient lists.

Sweet Bird simple syrup collection, assortment of four 1-ounce syrups: honey vanilla chamomile, strawberry basil, marionberry black pepper, raspberry rose: \$27.00

MASALA CHAI TEAS

These teas from Blue Lotus Chai are the perfect warming beverages to enjoy during the fall and winter seasons. Potent and spicy, these powdered teas require only ¼-teaspoon per cup (scoop included), so each tin contains enough tea to brew 65 to 100 cups. Just add boiling water and your preferred milk and sweetener, and you'll have a customized cup of delicious tea. Choose between traditional masala chai, golden masala chai, star anise masala chai, and caffeine-free rooibos masala chai—or get a few—so you can enjoy a tasty cup of chai at any hour. A Mono Lake Committee staff favorite. See monolake.org/chai for ingredient lists.

Masala chai teas, please specify flavor. Traditional masala chai, golden masala chai, star anise masala chai: 3 ounces. Rooibos masala chai: 2 ounces. All teas are gluten free, vegan, and Non-GMO Project Verified: \$18.95



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



2024 MONO LAKE CALENDAR

The 2024 *Mono Lake Calendar* features stunning images of our favorite wild and wonderful watershed. Bring Mono Lake into your home 366 days of the leap year, with views of the Mono Basin’s tufa towers, sunsets, streams, wildlife, storms, fall colors, and winter landscapes as captured by skilled photographers. Printed in the USA on recycled paper. Special bulk pricing is available on orders of two or more calendars.

Mono Lake Committee exclusive.

2024 *Mono Lake Calendar*, 13"x 9½": \$14.95

MONO LAKE CRITTER COLLAGE ORNAMENT

Add the art of John Muir Laws to your holiday decorations with this stainless-steel ornament printed with a vibrant Mono Lake design. This ornament features some of the Mono Basin’s notable animal species and a tufa landscape, all protected under an epoxy coating.

Mono Lake Committee exclusive.

Mono Lake critter collage ornament, 3": \$10.00



MONO LAKE HOLIDAY CARD SET

Artist Wendy Morgan’s original designs make this seasonal card set a beautiful way to send holiday wishes. Each set includes 10 cards with different wildlife illustrations, including four new designs, and the message “May you have a Happy Holiday and joyous New Year” printed in red ink inside. *Mono Lake Committee exclusive.*

Mono Lake holiday card set, 10 unique cards with envelopes, 6¼"x 4½": \$15.95



BEARS



CLARK’S NUTCRACKERS



HAIRY WOODPECKERS



CHICKADEES



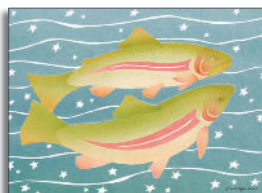
FOX



PIKA



STELLER’S JAYS



RAINBOW TROUT



ERMINE



BALD EAGLES

See all catalog products and more in color and place your order online at MONOLAKE.ORG/SHOP or call (760) 647-6595.

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

2023 Free Drawing to protect Mono Lake

Tickets due by December 9

When you enter the Mono Lake Committee's Free Drawing you get a chance to win one (or more!) of these exciting prizes, and you strengthen our effort to restore Mono Lake to a healthy level. Thank you to all the generous businesses and organizations who donated prizes for this year's Free Drawing, which is one of our largest annual fundraisers. Mail in your tickets today (find them in the center of this *Newsletter*) for a chance to win and see all the prize details at monolake.org/freedrawing.

You could win one of these awesome prizes:

- one-night stay at June Lake Pines, boat rental at Silver Lake Resort, a movie at Minaret Cinemas, dinner at Giovanni's Restaurant, and a gift card to Stellar Brew
- one-night stay at Murphey's Motel in Lee Vining, a Mono Basin Field Seminar for two, plus breakfast at Latte Da Coffee Café
- two-night stay at the historic Wawowa Hotel in Yosemite National Park, plus a National Parks Annual Pass
- Yosemite Conservancy guided outdoor adventures
- June Mountain ski pass
- Tamarack Cross Country Ski Center season pass
- Mammoth Bike Park season pass
- Mono Lake Committee canoe tour for four
- Camp comfort gift packs: REI camp chair, Rumpl puffy blanket, mug, plus a Ridge Merino wool hoodie
- Patagonia Nano Puff jackets and gear
- Mono Lake Committee gift packs: reusable glass cup, T-shirt, hat, bandana, and a 2024 *Mono Lake Calendar*
- one-night stay at El Mono Motel in Lee Vining with a half-day Mono Lake custom trip, a Cooke's Clay mug, breakfast at Latte Da Coffee Café, plus a Mono Lake hat and water bottle
- one-night stay at Lake View Lodge in Lee Vining, plus a Mono Lake canoe tour for two, and lunch at Epic Café in June Lake
- one night at Convict Lake Resort, breakfast at The Stove in Mammoth Lakes, and a gift certificate to Eastside Sports in Bishop
- sailing trip on San Francisco Bay with Captain Kirk's Sailing Adventures
- Island Packers cruise to Channel Islands National Park
- registration for two for the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua
- Bodie Foundation custom tour for four
- Pentax Papilio II 8.5 x 21 binoculars
- Photography books by Dennis Flaherty, Robb Hirsch, and Jeff Sullivan



Tioga Pass Run

by Leslie Redman

On Sunday, September 10, the Mono Lake Committee held the 42nd annual Tioga Pass Run. Ninety-six athletes ran or walked from the Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining, up 3,200 vertical feet over the course of 12.4 miles, and crossed the finish line at the east entrance of Yosemite National Park. Though it stormed the whole day before the event, which made the course set-up challenging, the weather held out for race day, and partly cloudy skies provided cool temperatures for racers as they made their trek.

All competitors were in high spirits as they crossed the finish line, ready to enjoy the post-race party in the high country. Our first-place finishers certainly had a lot to celebrate that day. Having competed in the Granite-to-Granite swim in June Lake on Friday and the Mammoth Gran Fondo bike ride on Saturday, first-place male finisher Patrick Hartman completed the Graniteman Challenge by crossing the finish line at the Tioga Pass Run in 1:54:24. Bishop local Liz Gill followed a few minutes later as the first female runner and second overall finisher, completing the race in 1:58:22.

As always, we had an amazing group

of dedicated Committee staff, enthusiastic volunteers, and generous sponsors who came together to support and cheer on the athletes. Thanks to all who participated in this successful event. We'll see you up at the top of the hill again next year, on September 8, 2024! ❖



Tioga Pass Run director Leslie Redman with second-place finisher Liz Gill and first-place finisher Patrick Hartman.

Calls for a hearing from page 5

We talked to reporters from ABC7 TV News, KPFA Radio, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, PBS Nature, the BBC, and more.

At the front counter of the Information Center & Bookstore, the question, "How much is the lake going to rise this year?" was often followed by "When is the hearing?" As far as we're concerned, everyone who visits Mono Lake should ask, "Has the lake reached the Public Trust lake level?"

State Water Board activity

All roads ultimately lead to the State Water Board, which will hold a hearing to consider new stream diversion criteria to implement the long-established Public Trust lake level. In a May 30 article in *CalMatters*, Alastair Bland wrote, "Samuel Boland-Brien, a supervising engineer with the [State Water] board, said the agency plans to hold a

hearing, though he couldn't say when, to discuss options for recovering Mono Lake."

Though we are still awaiting word on a hearing date, the Board's February workshop has been followed by further action. In the summer, State Water Board leadership traveled to Lee Vining for a formal consultation with the Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe, a key step and an important recognition of the role of the Kutzadika'a and the Board's commitment to meaningful engagement with California Tribes.

The Board has also engaged a team from the University of California, Los Angeles to provide hydrology and model technical resources. The team will participate in the scenario-building technical discussions and provide the Board with model and climate expertise.

The Mono Lake Committee is pursuing every avenue to get a hearing date secured quickly, but we can't do it alone. This chorus of concern is what Mono Lake needs right now. ❖

Arya Degenhardt is the Committee's Communications Director. She is a fan of KQED's recent video report on Mono Lake's alkali flies: monolake.org/kqedflies.

Mono Lake in the news: Go to monolake.org/2023media for links to all the media mentioned in this article.

Staff migrations

by Leslie Redman

Just like every other part of 2023, this summer was one for the record books. Despite storm cycles, road closures, and even a tropical storm, our staff ran a successful summer of field programs, projects, and helping visitors. Summer felt too short, and the time has come to say farewell to staff members as they migrate away.

Though she only spent the summer with us, **Corey Farr** hit her stride as Office Manager immediately and helped guide our staff through the busy field season, gracefully managing the demands of summer operations. After many years as residents of the Eastside, Corey and her husband Bruce moved to Traverse

City, MI this fall. We wish them all the best in the Midwest.

If you visited us in the Mono Basin this summer, you likely talked to or attended a tour guided by our seasonal staff members. We wish them well as they continue learning and growing with the knowledge and experiences they gained this summer in the Mono Basin.

Canoe Coordinator **Juniper Bishop** spent the summer paddling among Mono Lake's tufa, birds, and brine shrimp. After watching the avian visitors of the Mono Basin come and go through the summer, they have migrated south to the Owens Valley for the winter.

Information Center & Bookstore Assistant **Liv Chambers'** calm, friendly demeanor was invaluable in the bookstore throughout the busy summer season. She headed back east for her third year at Williams College.

Mono Lake Interns **Lupin Amstutz**, **Autumn Stock**, and **Kenna Williamson** all added energy and fresh perspectives to the office. After helping monitor the record lake level rise during the runoff season, Lupin started her first year at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Autumn left her mark on the Mono Lake Committee by refreshing the office building with a new mural (see box); she recently began her first year at Colorado College. Kenna helped with communications projects and managed our social media; she just began her third year at the University of Oklahoma.

As for migrations closer to home, we are delighted to welcome **Katie Smith** back for her second season as a Project Specialist. After spending the summer in the Bay Area with Point Blue Conservation Science, Katie is back for another winter in Lee Vining. ❖



ANDREW YOUSSEF

The 2023 Mono Lake Committee staff.

Lee Vining Creek mural at the Mono Lake Committee

Along with Lee Vining's new mural series (see page 13), the Committee office got another new mural, this one painted by Mono Lake Intern **Autumn Stock**.

After more than 22 years of weathering by sun and harsh winter conditions, the previous mural that graced the north wall of our office, "Sage Grouse Mania" by Nick Carle, was fading and in need of a refresh. With Nick's blessing, Autumn designed a new mural that celebrates the lush vitality of the Mono Basin this summer.

The mural depicts peak flows at Lee Vining Creek, amidst a foreground of wildflowers and aspens, and the familiar backdrop of the

Dana Plateau. Autumn's mural will be treasured as a daily reminder of an extraordinary runoff year in the Mono Basin.



ANDREW YOUSSEF

Mono Lake Intern Autumn Stock with her finished mural at the Committee office.



From the mailbag

News from members and friends

by Leslie Redman

All the extra water that made it to Mono Lake this summer continually changed the shoreline and submerged tufa. It fortified the Mono Basin, allowing wildflowers, green grasses, and sagebrush to thrive with color long past their typical seasonal peaks. While our short-lived summer has ended, fall has made its own vivid changes to the landscape.

Thank you to all who donated in honor or in memory of friends and loved ones. Your support is what makes our work possible from season to season.

In honor

The **Albert J. Horn Philanthropic Fund** of San Mateo donated in honor of **Kent Lauder**. **Steve Duff** of Kamas, UT, **Joanna Marshall** of Berkeley, and **Scott Morrison** of San Francisco gave gifts in honor of Mono Lake Volunteer of the Year **Sherryl Taylor**. **Joshua Luke** of Brea contributed in honor of **Wanda Gerken**. **John Luther** of Oakland donated in honor of **Carol & Tom Evans**. **Alec Miller** of Murray, UT gave a gift in honor of **Rafe Miller**. **Ann & Greg Moore** of Valencia contributed in honor of **Jack & Helene Siebert**. **Mary Rohlich** of Los Angeles donated in honor of **Jeremy Steckler**. **Jil Stark** of Pomona gave a gift in honor of Mono Lake Committee Education Program Manager **Ryan Garrett**.

In memory

John & Mary Ann Avera of Pebble Beach, **Maureen Baroni-Boogay & Chuck Boogay**, **Nancy Selfridge**, and **Lucy Ziel** of Monterey, **David Ishizuka** of Thornton, **Buzz Joseph** and **Pat Roberts** of Carmel, the **Padre Trails Camera Club** of Pacific Grove, and **Ronnie Stein** of Bellaire, TX donated in memory of **Richard Bucich**.

Bob Battagin of Woodacre gave a gift in memory of **Rich Stallcup**. **Jim Bidner & Catherine Chiaro** of Fremont contributed in memory of **Larry Woodruff**. **Marsha Blaver** of Costa Mesa donated in memory of **Alan D. Blaver**. **Adrian Harris Crowne** and **Stuart Schleifer** of Portland, OR,

Hunter Quon of Covina, **Hannah Siemens** of Jamaica Plain, MA, **Kelly Siemens** of Davis, and **Mark Siemens** of Yuma, AZ gave gifts in memory of **David Siemens**.

The **George W. Davis Fund** of Novato contributed in memory of **Virginia Davis**. **Gerald Dickinson** of Davis donated in memory of Mono Lake Committee co-founder **David Gaines**. **Brandon, Steven, Blake, & Kyler Evitt** of Somerville, MA gave a gift in memory of **William & Gisela Evitt**. **Ebba Herritt** of Chico contributed in memory of **Steve Fisher**. **Linda Judd** of Windsor donated in memory of **Robert Judd**. **Anne Lane** of San Diego gave a gift in memory of **Debra Kayser**. **Wendy Larkin** of Fallbrook contributed in memory of **Ellie Ross**.

Bob Mandel of Alameda donated in memory of **Bill & Tanya Mandel**.

Carol Mathews of Walnut Creek gave gifts in memory of **Robert Mathews**. **John McClelland** of Evanston, IL contributed in memory of **Phil Lindsay**. **Glenda McKibben** of Chula Vista donated in memory of **Rob McKibben**. **Tamara Messmann** of Yorba Linda gave a gift in memory of **Mary Jane Abeling**. **Matthew Scott** of Palo Alto contributed in memory of **Duscha Weisskopf**. **Judy Rubin** of Los Angeles donated in memory of **Marc Rubin**. **Peter & Caroline Simis** of Fresno gave a gift in memory of **Charles K. Simis**. **Diane Smith** of Henderson, NV contributed in memory of **Eugene I. Smith**. **Nancy Walker** of Arcata donated in memory of **Paul Rosenberger**. ❖

Leslie Redman is the Committee's Membership Coordinator. She's prepared to get buried by another epic winter season—bring it on!

Remembering Joshua Janicki

The Mono Lake Committee is always honored to receive gifts in memory of loved ones—this year a refresh of the sitting area in front of our bookstore was donated in memory of **Joshua Michael Janicki**. On September 30 we gathered with Joshua's family to dedicate the space, which will provide a peaceful place to honor his memory near Mono Lake, which held a special place in his heart.

The family remembers Joshua with the following note:

"Joshua loved swimming in Green Creek, eating burritos from the Mono Market, and hiking up to East Lake. Please share a meal at the new picnic tables and take time to think of our dear son and loving brother."

To learn more about Joshua, visit monolake.org/Joshua.



MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

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“The human and environmental uses of Mono Lake—uses protected by the Public Trust doctrine—deserve to be taken into account. Such uses should not be destroyed because the state mistakenly thought itself powerless to protect them.”

—California Supreme Court, 1983



Find out more in this *Newsletter* about the importance of the Public Trust at Mono Lake and the Mono Lake Committee’s ongoing efforts to raise Mono Lake to the Public Trust lake level 40 years after the historic California Supreme Court ruling on Mono Lake.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN DITTLI