

MONO LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

Winter & Spring 2024



Will DWP Increase Diversions?

California Gulls Rebound

Beavers on Rush Creek

Field Seminars

Nora starts her article on page 20 with the classic John Steinbeck quote about how people forgot about the rich years during the dry years, “and during the wet years they lost all memory of the dry years.”

Working on this issue of the *Mono Lake Newsletter* it occurred to me that the same could be said for the stream diversion rules that currently govern how much water the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power can export from the Mono Basin each year.

The current rules have no memory of the wet years or the dry years. They cannot take into account the need to preserve Mono Lake’s rise during wet years and so they allow the lake to drop back to dangerously low levels during droughts. In spite of being developed to restore the lake, they don’t remember how low the lake can get during the dry years and so they don’t take advantage of the wet years to minimize the losses.

Steinbeck was writing in a different time. I think we are starting to remember.

Everyone I’ve talked to this winter remembers last winter acutely. It’s almost the answer to any greeting: “How are you?” “Good! Glad for an easier winter. This time last year we were so exhausted, and the avalanches hadn’t even happened yet!” But if you chat for a few minutes, people also clearly recall the droughts, and fires: “I would actually be okay with a couple more snowstorms, to be honest. Just to be safe.”

We need to build memory into the stream diversion rules too. We need a system that will allow Mono Lake to keep rising because it takes into account how important the wet years are and has a mechanism for preserving the lake’s rise after big winters. We need the rules to prevent the lake from dropping all the way back to critically low points.

In the pages that follow you’ll see a concept the Committee has been developing to improve the diversion rules so they can remember the wet years and dry years, and protect Mono Lake accordingly.

—Elin Ljung, Communications Coordinator



After the record-breaking winter a year ago, this winter started out dry (see page 14). Snow finally reached the lakeshore in January and February, leaving a dusting at South Tufa.

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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Will DWP increase diversions this year?

Better operating rules needed for Mono Lake to rise

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

Water diversions to Los Angeles—and away from Mono Lake—began just after noon on January 31. With the turn of a control wheel, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) opened the aqueduct, sending Mono Basin water into the Mono Craters tunnel and on a 300-mile journey down the aqueduct system.

Mono Lake, of course, would be better off with that water flowing down Rush Creek instead, entering the lake and helping maintain the significant—but far from complete—lake rise of last year.

This spring DWP faces an even bigger choice. On April 1, the maximum limit on water exports will increase nearly fourfold. Will DWP choose to maintain the same export level as recent years? Or will it choose to quadruple its water diversions—and push Mono Lake's level downward?

This year is also shaping up to be the year for action on the California State Water Resources Control Board's rules that govern the DWP diversions, and the flaws that have become visible over the

For three decades, DWP diversion operations have been frustratingly blind to the requirements for Mono Lake's protection. This year could be different if LA chooses wisely.

30 years since those rules were set forth. The Mono Lake Committee is exploring new dynamic concepts to fix those problems, and the State Water Board is moving closer to holding the hearing necessary to make changes.

Local water for Los Angeles

Three days after water exports began in January, an atmospheric river storm swept into California, highlighting

DWP's opportunities to meet the city's water needs with local supply rather than continuing the damage of decades of excessive water diversions at Mono Lake.

By February 3 the Los Angeles River was rushing with stormwater. In just four hours the equivalent of the entire volume of 2023 Mono Basin diversions flowed past downtown LA. That stormwater went straight to the ocean.

Water leaders, the mayor, city council, and the Mono Lake Committee all support expansion of stormwater capture—and other sustainable local supply projects—to meet the city's goal of securing 70% of supply from local water sources by 2035.

Indeed, DWP is making progress on achieving the mayor's goal of gathering 150,000 acre-feet of the city's water through local stormwater capture (see page 7). Yet at Mono Lake, DWP decided to set aside consideration of the State Water Board's now decade-overdue lake level requirement and simply divert the maximum amount of water the Board's operating rules allow.

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Thirty years since Decision 1631 “saved” Mono Lake

Today we saved Mono Lake,” announced California State Water Resources Control Board member Marc Del Piero back in 1994 upon the unanimous approval of Decision 1631, which established the mandate to protect Mono Lake at the 6,392-foot level.

We are celebrating the 30th anniversary of that decision throughout 2024. Its consequences have been tremendous. Without the limitations D1631 placed on DWP's excessive water diversions, stream habitats

and fisheries would be gone, and Mono Lake would have plummeted in level to near 6,335 feet today, raising lake salinity beyond the tolerance of the brine shrimp and alkali flies at the core of the ecosystem and ending the lake's vital role in the lives of millions of nesting and migratory birds.

On the other hand, Mono Lake has yet to recover to the sustainable level required in D1631. The Mono Lake Committee has always viewed D1631 as a promise written on a piece of paper. True success for

Mono Lake comes when the decision's expectations become landscape realities, with a thriving ecosystem, safe bird habitat, clean air, and secure future. Today the promise is unfulfilled.

We will celebrate the anniversary of the visionary decision this year by reaffirming our commitment to implementing the protections promised in D1631. It's a celebration, and an effort, that requires the loud and clear voices of all of us who care for Mono Lake.

DWP's choice to maximize diversions

DWP has chosen to take the maximum amount of water it legally can every year since the State Water Board decision was made 30 years ago. DWP often implies it must take the maximum amount of water away from Mono Lake, yet the official water rights require no such thing. They say DWP has an *opportunity* to divert, not a *requirement*, and the amount can be any amount “up to” the year’s specified maximum.

For three decades, DWP diversion operations have been frustratingly blind to the requirements for Mono Lake’s protection. This year could be different if LA chooses wisely.

The formula to allow Mono Lake to recover from DWP’s history of excessive water diversions is simple: maximize the gains during wet years and minimize losses during dry years that inevitably follow. Big lake level gains, like last year’s, are eroded by diversions in subsequent years, setting back the restoration effort.

For example, DWP diversions at maximum levels will consume three feet of Mono Lake level over the next decade. And it adds up. Mono Lake would nearly be at the Public Trust protective level today but for the diversions DWP has taken since the 1994 State Water Board decision.

The choice facing DWP

DWP has a big decision to make in 2024. A higher Mono Lake means State Water Board diversion rules, unfortunately, will nearly quadruple the maximum allowance for water diversions. Experience shows this formula isn’t working. Lingering low lake levels perpetuate ecological, Tribal, economic, and air quality harm that DWP’s decades of excessive diversions have caused.

The city is already running on 4,500 acre-feet of diverted Mono Basin water, and even did so during the height of the drought back in 2015. And that’s on top of the 5,500 acre-feet of Mono Basin groundwater that flows to LA every year



BARTSIE MILLER

On April 1, 2024 Mono Lake’s elevation will be above the 6,380-foot threshold that allows—but not requires—DWP to nearly quadruple its annual water diversions.

on average (see Winter & Spring 2022 *Mono Lake Newsletter*). Coming off the very wet 2023 winter, reservoirs and supplies are ample. Stormwater capture is at an all-time high and per capita use is low, reflecting the successful conservation efforts of Angelenos.

Clearly the city doesn’t need to take more. But will DWP do it anyway in 2024?

Can DWP choose to hold itself back from repeating a 30-year pattern of maximizing water diversions? It’s a key moment of opportunity for LA leadership to show commitment to meeting the city’s agreed-to obligation to protect Mono Lake. It will also be a preview of what to expect from DWP at the upcoming State Water Board hearing. Will DWP choose to help solve the problem? Or will they fight to maintain the flawed status quo?

Flawed stream diversion rules

The fact that the lake’s big 2023 rise lifts the cap on the amount of allowed water diversions raises another question: Why would the State Water Board allow that?

Well, the rules were set 30 years ago in the landmark Decision 1631. And a look back reveals a simple answer: based on analysis at the time, the Board expected the rules would work, allowing the lake to rise to the Public Trust lake level of 6,392 feet above sea level in about 20

years, even with as much as 16,000 acre-feet of water diversions allowed by operating rules along the way.

Now, a decade past that delivery date, it’s easy to see that the 1994 diversion rules haven’t worked to get the job done. Hydrologic modeling projects more of the same in the future.

That’s what the State Water Board hearing will be all about: crafting and implementing better operating rules that fix the flaws so that the lake can rise to the long overdue level. It’s a plan the Board itself made, just in case the 1994 diversion rules didn’t work.

The hearing will be a chance for the State Water Board to review the maximum diversion specifications. More than that, it will be a chance to restructure the operating rules to be more dynamic and responsive to the changing climate and changing hydrology of the Mono Basin.

Fixing the flaws

How might the State Water Board fix the flawed stream diversion rules? The Committee has been studying and modeling the question carefully.

Adjusting diversion volumes is part of the answer to be sure. However, we have found that the overall structure of the rules needs fixing too. After last year’s significant lake rise, current rules

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allow DWP to divert until that gain is lost and the lake falls back into critically low levels like 6,380 and 6,377 feet. Only then do cutbacks on diversions activate, and these three-decade-old lake thresholds allow the rollercoaster of lake rise and fall to continue. Thirty years ago it made sense for the 6,377-foot level to trigger a halt to water diversions because back then the lake was at 6,375—below the threshold. But as the lake rises the threshold has never changed.

Rules that control diversions based on lake level make sense, but the thresholds are static and hardwired into the current stream diversion rules. They

don't have to be.

A better approach is to design rules that automatically adjust, so that the lake level thresholds controlling diversions move upwards in response to lake rise. For example, the lake rose nearly five feet last year, and the zero-diversion threshold could dynamically “ratchet” upward as well, moving from 6,377 to 6,382 feet above sea level.

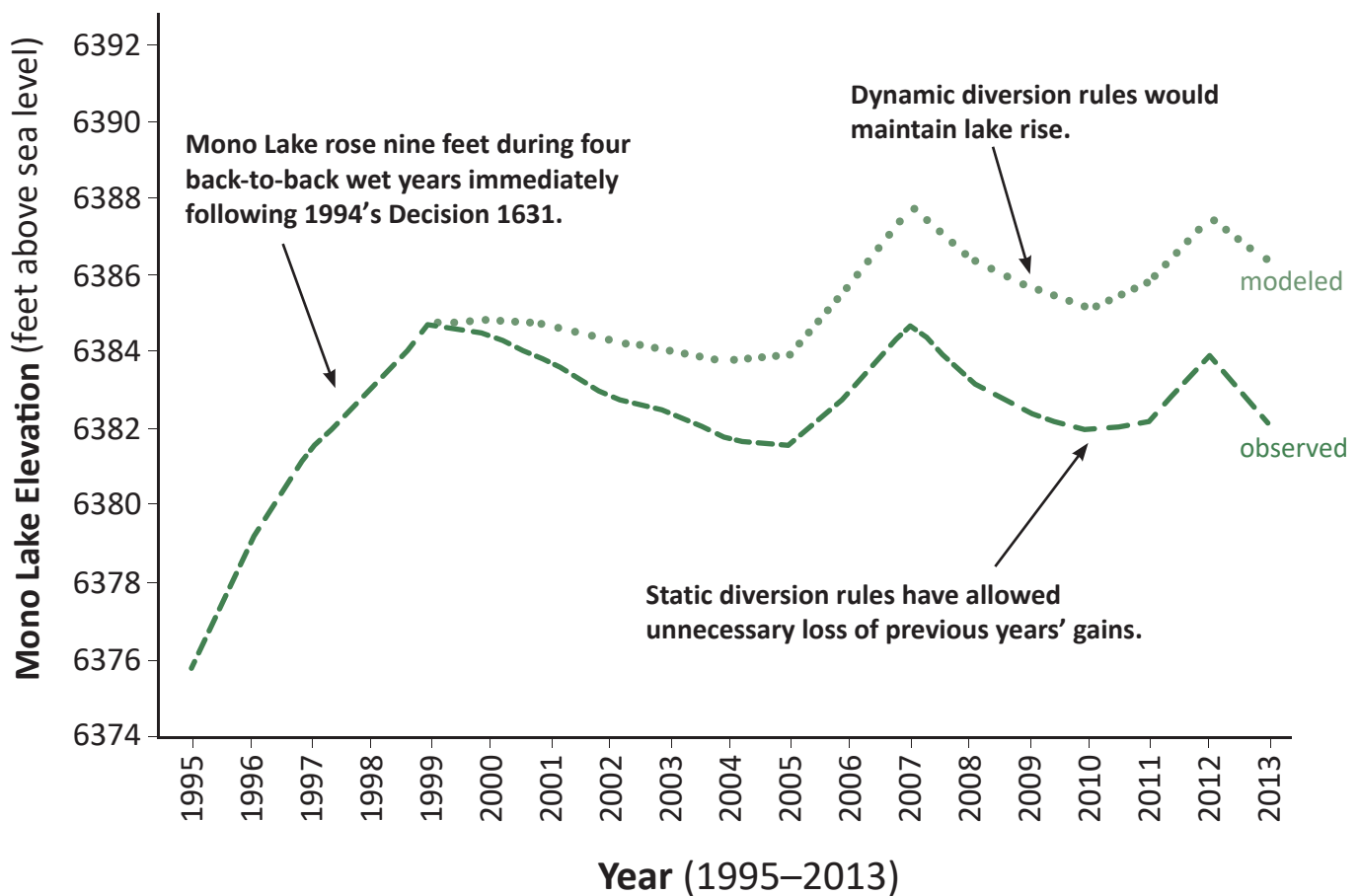
Why let DWP diversions push the lake all the way back down to where it was 30 years ago? Instead, implementing “dynamic” rules of this kind would lock in gains as they happen.

Dynamic rules, with lake threshold requirements that ratchet upward right along with the lake as it rises, have great potential. The Committee team is using hydrologic modeling to explore many scenarios that use the dynamic concept and compare their effectiveness against the static rules. So far the results show that incorporating dynamic rules would be a significant fix to the State Water Board's flawed original rules.

We're also taking the concept to the collaborative technical workgroup meetings, underway since last year, that bring together model experts from

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Dynamic diversion rules could preserve lake level gains



The State Water Board implemented a set of diversion rules in 1994 it expected would raise Mono Lake's elevation to 6,392 feet above sea level in 20 years. Unfortunately, these rules have not been successful and 30 years later Mono Lake remains 8.5 feet below the Public Trust lake level. The Mono Lake Committee is exploring dynamic rules that would adjust to preserve lake rises during wet periods. In the example of dynamic rules above, modeled by Committee staff using historical runoff data, the thresholds that allow diversions from the Mono Basin rise as the lake rises, preserving lake level gains. From wet cycle to wet cycle, Mono Lake's level would ratchet up to the Public Trust lake level.

Gull productivity rebounds, coyotes kept at bay

Species recovery depends on raising Mono Lake

by Bartshé Miller

Mono Lake rose an impressive amount in 2023 and so too did the productivity of nesting California Gulls. According to the Point Blue Conservation Science report, “Population size and reproductive success of California Gulls at Mono Lake: 2023,” productivity (chicks fledged per nest) increased, exceeding the long-term average and dramatically rebounding from the previous year.

Big winter rescues gulls

After continued stream diversions and drought pushed the lake to a critically low level in 2022, the news about the gulls was welcome. The low lake had exposed the gulls to predation via a landbridge, and the Mono Lake Committee planned to rebuild the gull protection fence across the landbridge to prevent coyotes from reaching nesting gulls. Fortunately for the gulls, record snowfall in the Mono Basin and a rising lake reduced the urgent need for the fence in early 2023. Wildlife camera surveillance and a follow-up survey by Point Blue after the 2023 nesting season did not detect any evidence of coyote predation, and by September, Mono Lake had risen enough to protect the gulls from predation into 2024. While this dire threat to the gull colony was averted for the second time in six years, it has been a recurring problem that has plagued California Gulls for decades.

Shrimp factors and a green Mono Lake

Coyotes are not the only threat to California Gulls as water diversions continue to keep the lake too low. In 2022, the

gulls endured a near-complete collapse in productivity across all nesting sites at Mono Lake. There are a handful of likely contributing causes, including suspected coyote predation on the Paoha Islets. However during 2022, Mono Lake was critically low, salinity was high, and the lake remained a persistent, turbid green due to high densities of phytoplankton. In mid-June 2022, adult brine shrimp (*Artemia monica*) abundance was five times lower than it was the previous year, and Point Blue stated in their 2022 report, “We believe that adult [gull] fitness and inability to procure sufficient food resources to provision young is probably the most likely cause of the poor chick production.”

With Mono Lake remaining artificially low, causing phytoplankton to persist throughout the water column in recent drought years, there are impacts on the reproductive timing, success, and abundance of *Artemia*. Point Blue observed in their report, “The relationship between brine shrimp abundance and timing and gull chick production is not fully understood.” This is an important question that requires further study, as it also has consequences for other birds like Eared Grebes. Dr. John Melack from UC Santa Barbara, who leads the limnological monitoring on Mono Lake, is pursuing the green lake issue, assisted by grant funding obtained by the Committee through the California Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Artemia distribution and abundance data was not available in time for the 2023 gull report, but conditions in Mono Lake

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Installed as a precaution in spring 2023, wildlife cameras detected no coyotes presence on the landbridge or the nesting islets.



Threats to gulls include invasive weeds (removal effort pictured), and coyote predation.

Stormwater capture in LA hits new high

Los Angeles local water supply strategy gains momentum

by Arya Degenhardt

As Angelenos experience more extreme weather patterns, stormwater capture is stepping into the spotlight as a viable, and valuable, source of local water for Los Angeles.

Between October 1, 2022 and April 4, 2023 the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) reported capturing an impressive 108,570 acre-feet of stormwater. That's roughly 20% of the city's entire water use for a year.

For perspective, LA's current average annual capture is in the ballpark of 60,000–80,000 acre-feet, and the City has a goal of 150,000 acre-feet of stormwater capture per year by 2035.

The 2022–2023 water year was also impressive for rain; LA County Public Works reported it to be the seventh-highest rainfall season in the past 150 years.

From the Mono Basin perspective, between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024 DWP is allowed to divert 4,500 acre-feet of water from Mono Lake's tributary streams, which it began exporting in late January. Starting in April 2024, due to the higher lake level, DWP will be allowed, but not required, to export 16,000 acre-feet from the Mono Basin (see page 3). This makes DWP's 108,570 acre-feet of Los Angeles stormwater capture exceptionally valuable.

According to Los Angeles Waterkeeper, currently only about 20% of stormwater gets captured. While there are real obstacles to bringing full-scale stormwater capture to fruition, the potential to increase the amount of water captured, and

reduce need for imported water from Mono Lake and the Owens Valley, is high. Expanded facilities will capture more stormwater, even in years of average rainfall.

City planners have been working to fund and implement stormwater capture systems for years—2004's Proposition O helped fund DWP's Stormwater Capture Parks Program for nine projects in existing City parks, and 2018's Measure W aimed tax revenue at increasing local water supply through more effective stormwater capture, water recycling, and conservation. DWP's Stormwater Management Plan, the 2020 DWP Urban Water Management Plan, and LA's Green New Deal all include the goal of capturing 150,000 acre-feet per year by 2035.

Large-scale stormwater capture takes the form of spreading grounds, often engineered into green spaces such as parks and wetlands. Small-scale stormwater capture, in the form of rain gardens, rain barrels, and permeable pavers, can be done by individuals. In addition to stormwater capture, these efforts can also alleviate local flooding, improve water quality, improve local parks, provide social and economic benefits, and reduce urban heating.

With the people of Los Angeles calling for a more sustainable, local water supply, and DWP making significant progress in that direction, it becomes increasingly easy for Los Angeles to thrive with less diverted water from the Mono Basin. ❖

Gull productivity from page 6

were very different last summer with large freshwater inputs, lower salinity, and observations of abundant *Artemia*.

Low lake keeps gulls off Negit and prevents recovery

Even with a bump in productivity, the 24,646 gulls nesting last year was the third-lowest number recorded since Point Blue began monitoring the breeding colony 41 years ago; the 2010–2022 average is 33,418. The 2023 report states, “Despite substantial annual variation in nesting population at Mono Lake, there is a clear long-term declining trend in the population size.”

Throughout the entire four-decade span of Point Blue research and prior, California Gulls have struggled to survive and adapt to a declining, or chronically depressed, lake level caused by continuing water diversions. Gulls have briefly returned to Negit Island, their original nesting habitat, only

to be repeatedly driven off, ravaged, or threatened by coyotes crossing the landbridge and shallow water. Gulls have returned to raise chicks, year after year, in an ecologically compromised system that has remained, on average, ten feet below the State Water Board's Public Trust management level of 6,392 feet. Salinity is high, and lake and brine shrimp productivity are vulnerable to drought cycles and large inputs of fresh water from big winters.

Four decades of research data shows us that California Gulls are both resilient and opportunistic, but they are not invincible. In 1994, the State Water Board concluded, “Based on the evidence in the record... At a lake level of 6,384' or higher, gulls will have abundant nesting habitat on Negit Island and several of the islets.” The wait to verify this conclusion continues—only after Mono Lake rises and persists above 6,384 feet on its way to the 6,392-foot Public Trust management level can we begin to measure recovery. ❖

Beavers get busy on Rush Creek

by Robbie Di Paolo

Wet years like 2017 and 2023 produce some of the most exciting restoration outcomes along Mono Lake's tributaries. The large hydrologic forces during peak flood events in a wet year are unmatched in their ability to move large cobbles, open side channels, inundate floodplains, and reshape a stream system's structure. Initially in 2011, but most dramatically after the 2017 flood, it became clear there was another ecological process at work on Rush Creek: beavers. Beavers were not part of the pre-diversion 1941 conditions on Rush Creek, but they have locally expanded their range from Lundy Canyon. Their presence on the creek has had promising benefits.

Streambed incision

A clear restoration benefit that beavers provide to the Rush Creek bottomlands is that their dams back up water and keep the water table high. This is particularly valuable where several reaches of the stream suffer from incision caused largely by the artificially low Mono Lake levels of the last eight decades.

As the lake dropped due to excessive water diversions by the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, streamflow reaching the delta cut down vertically into the streambed, creating deep incision that has since traveled upstream. Incision lowers the water table, making streamside vegetation restoration in historic riparian corridors challenging and, in some cases, impossible. Beaver dams can mitigate streambed incision by stabilizing the channel, backing up water, and raising the height of the surface water and groundwater, all of

which allow stream ecosystem processes to occur more as they did before the streambed incision occurred.

Large woody debris

Another clear restoration benefit that beavers provide to the Rush Creek bottomlands is that by building dams out of small-diameter willow stems, they physically bring woody debris into the creek. In-stream woody debris provides valuable habitat to trout while also providing resistance to streamflow that can back up water (like a beaver dam). Since large trees take many decades to grow, and longer to fall into the creek, beavers actively bringing wood into the creek functions like an expedited restoration project.

More complex outcomes

While beaver activity seems to be helping stream restoration in the Rush Creek bottomlands, State Water Board-appointed Stream Monitoring Directors Dr. Bill Trush and Ross Taylor are also studying beaver effects that are perhaps less straightforward. For example, a network of beaver dams caused a major, fast-flowing stream channel to fill with cobbles and dry out after the 2017 flood. Since then, water has been forced into a previously dry side channel, which now stays open year-round and is creating a new network of stream channels and meadow habitat in what was previously sagebrush. Since the 2023 flood event the stream is continuing to favor this new side channel system and dry out other parts of the bottomland ecosystem. In addition, conversion of channels to ponds reduces invertebrate diversity. So, every part of the Rush Creek bottomlands may not benefit equally from beaver activity and some areas may be negatively affected.

Continued monitoring

In 2023 Trush and Taylor worked to better understand the complex ways the stream ecosystem is responding to the presence of beavers. In October, after the peak flows subsided, the two directors stood together, knee-deep in newly formed side channels, surrounded by five-year-old willows and drowned sagebrush. Some things were immediately noticeable, like how these new channels offered refuge to young trout during a season with persistent high flows. Other things were less noticeable, like the water temperatures in this exposed channel system.

The beneficial work of beavers is getting a lot of attention in restoration efforts across the West, and California agencies have even changed policies and reintroduced beavers to help fix degraded habitats in other parts of the state. The Stream Monitoring Directors are studying and monitoring beaver activity in the Mono Basin and the Mono Lake Committee will continue to provide on-the-ground support in this exciting phase of Mono Lake's tributary stream restoration. ❖



State Water Board-appointed Stream Monitoring Director Dr. Bill Trush observes changes caused by beavers in the Rush Creek bottomlands.

New project to understand the role of evaporation at Mono Lake

by Maureen McGlinchy

As an endorheic—or terminal—lake with no outlet, Mono Lake loses water naturally only through evaporation. Evaporation is a complex process, influenced by radiation, wind, temperature, and humidity. The rate of evaporation varies across seasons and over the lake's surface. With no long-term observational data of evaporation at Mono Lake, the effect of evaporation on the water balance is not well understood. Longtime Mono Lake Committee hydrogeographer Peter Vorster studied evaporation here for a short period in the early 1980s. He determined Mono

Lake loses nearly four vertical feet of water to evaporation each year. With a more current understanding of evaporation specifically at Mono Lake, the Committee can better estimate lake level fluctuation.

In 2023, researchers from the University of Michigan installed an evaporation pan on the east side of Mono Lake as part of a larger study examining Mono Lake hydrology and geochemistry. The research team worked with the Committee to site the pan on property donated to the Committee in 2021 (see Winter & Spring 2022 *Mono Lake Newsletter*). The team carefully cleared and fenced off the study area, installed the four-foot diameter pan and associated instrumentation, and navigated the unique challenges of the unusually remote location. The instruments attached to the pan measure water lost to evaporation, while accounting for water added by rainfall. Because water in a metal pan evaporates more quickly than lake water, an established calibration term is applied to the data to calculate lake evaporation. In the case of Mono Lake, the calculation must also consider the moderating effect of salinity as saline water evaporates more slowly than freshwater. Establishing an evaporation data collection system at Mono Lake is long overdue. In the short term, we hope to refine our hydrology models and lake level simulations. Over time, the data may provide insight into how evaporation is changing with a warming climate. ❖

Maureen McGlinchy is the Committee's Hydrology Modeling & Membership Specialist. She keeps her skiing skills sharp by chasing her daughters at Mammoth Mountain Ski Area and making the journey to the lake level gauge on skis all winter.



University of Michigan researchers Anne Fetrow and Anna Gossard installed an evaporation pan at Mono Lake in October 2023.

Diversions from page 5

the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, DWP, and the Committee (see Fall 2023 *Mono Lake Newsletter*).

A big year ahead for Mono Lake

It's a big year for Mono Lake, the Committee, and all of us who are committed to seeing the right thing done to protect and restore this special place.

Los Angeles will be making a choice about increasing water diversions—and Mono Lake impacts—in the next few months. You can be sure the Committee team of staff, experts, and attorneys is engaged to advocate for the right outcome for the lake.

The technical modeling collaboration will continue, and we will work to be sure useful information is the result, laying

out scenarios that incorporate new ideas like dynamic rules to identify solutions for the future.

At the same time, we are already mobilizing in preparation for the State Water Board hearing. It's the place to fix the flawed diversion rules, and the broad call for action at last year's Board workshop still resonates (see Winter & Spring 2023 *Mono Lake Newsletter*). Though there is not yet a date on the calendar, the State Water Board elevated Mono Lake and the hearing into its 2024 priority workplan in February, signaling that public and Board concern, and the actual peril of lower lake levels, are compelling reasons for action.

All in all, it will be a very busy year of advocacy for Mono Lake—and new choices and new rules that will lift the lake into a new era of health. ❖

A win for the Mono Basin Scenic Area

CalRecycle accepts settlement agreement and remedies project mistakes

by Bartshé Miller

Last fall the California Department of Resources Recycling & Recovery (CalRecycle) completed earth work on the former Lee Vining Burn Dump site adjacent to the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Visitor Center. The work demonstrates the success of the two-year effort to convince CalRecycle to fix major damage caused by their contractors, which resulted from the absence of environmental documentation and permitting. The earth work is the critical, initial step toward the restoration of the site. Thanks to a focused coalition led by the Mono Lake Committee, expensive and time-consuming litigation was avoided, project missteps were reversed, and remediation and restoration achieved for the Scenic Area.

Inadequate public notice and scoping

The old dump site was largely invisible to the public and had long ago revegetated. However, annual inspections and testing indicated that soil and debris near the surface were out of compliance and requiring clean-up. A joint press release from CalRecycle and the Inyo National Forest announced the remediation project just days before it began in September 2021, but the public was not notified under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Because the project was located within the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area and adjacent to a State Scenic Highway, CEQA was not properly assessed. The public was given no opportunity to comment before earth moving equipment began leveling and clearing approximately three acres of ground. Only after the Committee inquired did CalRecycle post the CEQA notice—two weeks after construction began.

Scenic Area damage

What initially sparked alarm was the removal of a feature of the Visitor Center landscape. Excavators demolished a prominent, naturally vegetated, eight-foot-tall berm adjacent to the Visitor Center parking lot to use as capping fill for the project. The berm was constructed when the Visitor Center was built in the early 1990s and was an important landscape design feature that helped shield the Visitor Center from highway noise, traffic, wind, and drifting snow. The berm blocked views of the highway from Visitor Center guests and blocked the parking lot from passing motorists—it protected the view and focused the visitor experience toward Mono Lake. According to retired Regional Forest Service Architect



CalRecycle contractors and revegetation experts implement innovative soil treatment to reverse the damage done at the former Lee Vining Burn Dump site.

Robert Sandusky, who was engaged with the Inyo on the planning and design of the Visitor Center and was contacted by the Committee after the berm demolition began, “The topography at issue was an essential part of the original design for the landscaping surrounding the area of the Visitor Center building and parking lot.”

Mounting issues

There were other issues with the project too. The contractor for CalRecycle generated unnecessary runoff and erosion. The Tribal monitor onsite for the Mono Lake Kutzadika’a Tribe, Angela Eddy, raised several concerns, including an incident when the contractor’s water truck was left running unattended, flushing sediments offsite toward Mono Lake. The contractor also built the engineered drainages incorrectly, spreading concrete on top of the grouted channel instead of between the rocks, at odds with the specifications agreed to by the Inyo.

More probing by the Committee revealed that CalRecycle had also failed to file a stormwater pollution prevention plan with the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (Lahontan). That plan is a routine, yet critical regulatory step in ensuring that stormwater runoff is planned for and controlled. Lahontan had no knowledge of CalRecycle’s remediation project and was not provided an opportunity to view or comment on the project design and erosion control plans.

Another necessary permit was also missed—CalRecycle did not publicly notice the project, nor submit a Section

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1600 streambed alteration agreement with the California Department of Fish & Wildlife (DFW).

Cooperative solutions better than a lawsuit

Inadequate CEQA compliance, the removal of the berm, and other project shortcomings were unacceptable. The Committee threatened a CEQA lawsuit, which provided time and leverage to also propose a settlement agreement. Working collaboratively with Inyo National Forest, the Kutzadika'a Tribe, Lahontan, and DFW, the Committee advanced an agreement that fully restored the berm, implemented a robust revegetation plan, and ensured the project was in proper compliance with necessary permitting.

Early in the process, when it became obvious that revegetation of the three-acre site would be critical for the restoration of scenic values, the Committee reached out to Michael Hogan, a Tahoe-based soil science expert who helped guide Caltrans' revegetation of the Lee Vining Rockfall Project, a model for successful revegetation in the Eastern Sierra (see Summer 2018 *Mono Lake Newsletter*). The Committee also involved Regina Hirsch from Watershed Progressive, who has extensive restoration and revegetation experience and had worked with the Committee to improve the Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center's landscape. Hirsch and her crew also installed one of California's earliest permitted commercial greywater systems at the Committee's Information Center & Bookstore in 2012.

Revegetation starts with soil

Drawing from decades of experience, as well as input from the Kutzadika'a Tribe, Hogan drafted a revegetation and soil treatment plan that included specifications, prescriptions, and multi-year performance evaluations for successful revegetation. Hogan asserted that loosening, amending, mulching, and seeding the soil would in fact handle runoff more efficiently than the old way of simply compacting the soil and spreading hydroseed and tackifier.

After sharing home-grown apples from his orchard one September afternoon, Hogan demonstrated with his own rainfall and runoff simulator that water running over a compacted surface accelerated erosion and prevented the soil from absorbing water. While it was a new way of doing work for CalRecycle, it was clear that site remediation and revegetation could be accomplished by loosening instead of compacting—allowing water to be retained by the soil and thereby promoting root growth.

The settlement agreement stipulated that an appropriately experienced revegetation inspector would direct the restoration process. CalRecycle hired Hirsch and Watershed Progressive to write and implement the final revegetation plan, in coordination with Hogan, as part of the revised work plan for the site. The revegetation plan was further refined and supported through permitting and compliance with DFW and Lahontan.

Bringing back the berm, healing the damage

With all the parties satisfied with the revegetation and final work plan, the Committee and CalRecycle signed a formal settlement agreement at the end of August 2023. By October the berm was reconstructed, the soil treated, and pine needle mulch and native seed applied throughout the site. While additional monitoring and revegetation work will continue, the heavy work with large equipment is complete. The dump site is stabilized and capped, restoration is on course, and permanent damage to the Scenic Area is averted. The Committee approaches problems, be they Scenic Area damage or water diversions, by standing strong on principles and looking for solutions to create a path forward, and it is rewarding to have these efforts deliver long-term benefits for visitors, habitat, the Scenic Area, and Mono Lake. ❖

Bartshé Miller is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director. As the lead staff member working on this project, he became well-versed in Visitor Center founding documents, soil science, drainage patterns, and CEQA compliance.



ELIN LING

Part of the original landscape design for the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Visitor Center, the eight-foot-tall berm has been reconstructed, mulched, and reseeded with native plants.

Policy notes

by Elin Ljung and Bartshé Miller

Broken valve further delays Grant Outlet construction

Aging Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) infrastructure has further delayed the planned construction of the long-awaited modification to the Grant Lake Reservoir spillway. The 88-year-old aqueduct intake valve has partially failed, and the California Department of Water Resources Division of Safety of Dams has told DWP that outlet construction can't begin until the valve is replaced.

Located 80 feet underground, the valve is the most important piece of equipment controlling the amount of water that can flow out of Grant into the Los Angeles Aqueduct. It also controls the amount of water delivered to Rush Creek through the Mono Gate One Return Ditch.

The valve has been able to release up to 380 cubic feet per second (cfs) in the past, but last summer it began cavitating at flows above 200 cfs—a situation in which the pressure in the valve creates air bubbles that damage the valve. The valve is an original aqueduct fixture that has been operating

for more than 80 years, and DWP purchased a new valve in 2018 to replace it, tentatively planning to do that replacement after outlet construction. Now that the aqueduct intake valve has malfunctioned, DWP engineers are not willing to use it to pass flows of more than 175 cfs.

The broken valve imposes real limits on the entire Grant system, notably Grant levels, and the reservoir's ability to deliver mandated stream ecosystem flows for Rush Creek (see page 14). When and how the valve will be replaced, and how long it further delays Grant outlet construction, are urgent questions the Mono Lake Committee is pursuing.

Proposed wild horse gather

Last fall the Inyo National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management sought public comments in preparation for an Environmental Assessment for a proposed project to gather and remove wild horses that have expanded beyond their designated Montgomery Pass Wild Horse Territory into areas not designated for their management, including the Mono Basin. In December the Committee submitted a comment letter.

The horse population has sharply increased in number near Mono Lake in the past decade. Horses have been documented damaging tufa and sensitive spring, wetland, and alkali meadow habitats—resources that are protected by the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve and the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area. In addition, the safety threat to both humans and horses has escalated as more horses have appeared on Highway 120 East, Highway 167, and at visitor sites, including South Tufa and Navy Beach.

The Committee's comments supported the project and provided detailed analysis of horse impacts to the Mono Basin's unique resources and habitats, a reminder of special land management designations, and emphasized safety and welfare concerns for horses and people. The Committee also called for establishing a long-term monitoring and management plan, consulting properly with the Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe, treating horses humanely, and planning for a successful adoption program.

For more information go to bit.ly/gatherproposal.

Over-Snow Vehicle use in the Mono Basin

The Committee commented in October 2023 on the Inyo's Proposed Action for Over-Snow Vehicle (OSV) Use Designation, focusing on the project area surrounding Mono Lake and in the greater Mono Basin.

The Inyo sought comments from the public as part of a process to determine where motorized OSVs such as snowmobiles will be allowed, and which areas should be designated for non-motorized winter activities such as skiing. In the Mono Basin, the Proposed Action designates OSV trails on existing roads around Mono Lake and retains the non-Wilderness areas west of Highway 395 for OSV use.

Continued on page 13



MARA KRISTA PLATO

Wild horses have increased in number near Mono Lake in the past decade, significantly impacting sensitive spring, wetland, and alkali meadow habitats.

The Committee's letter stressed the importance of monitoring and future adaptive management solutions, citing the possibility of climate change bringing unpredictable changes in snow cover and shifting recreation use that may impact soil, vegetation, wildlife, springs, water quality, cultural resources, and scenic values. In particular, the Committee pointed out that Parker Meadows may require additional monitoring given the effort to repatriate Bi-State Sage Grouse there and the possibility for OSV use to occasionally overlap with springtime lekking activity.

For more information, go to monolake.org/osvcomments.

Changes to DWP leadership

The president of DWP's Board of Commissioners, Cynthia McClain-Hill, abruptly stepped down from that position and departed the board in early January 2024, after becoming the target of ethics-related complaints and criticism from the utility's leadership. McClain-Hill had been appointed to the five-member board, which oversees DWP, in 2018 by then-Mayor Eric Garcetti.

McClain-Hill was instrumental in efforts to make DWP's workforce more diverse and was seen as a champion of union workers at the utility. She personally took an interest in DWP's stream restoration commitments in the Mono Basin and made sure that DWP adhered to its settlement agreement commitments.

More change is in store at DWP this spring—longtime General Manager Martin Adams will retire in March. The Committee and Adams have worked together for more than 15 years, and he was key to achieving the Mono Basin Stream Restoration Agreement in 2013, though he subsequently advanced DWP's case to delay raising Mono Lake to the mandated healthy level.

Mayor Karen Bass will appoint a new Board of Commissioners president. Bass' office has been working with a private firm in a national search for DWP's next general manager, who will have an opportunity



DWP General Manager Marty Adams, right, describing plans in 2013 to modify the Grant Lake Reservoir spillway to provide an outlet capable of releasing required streamflows. Since then, DWP has continually delayed the project, impairing Rush Creek's recovery for another decade.

to help Mono Lake rise to its mandated Public Trust lake level. The Committee and fellow environmental groups in Los Angeles called on the mayor to run a transparent process and find a leader with strong capacity to fulfill the city's environmental commitments.

Kern River flows through Bakersfield again

Water is flowing down the Kern River in Bakersfield for the first time in many years, thanks to the combination of abundant snowmelt and an injunction preventing water diversions from drying up the river.

Record runoff from last winter's historic snowpack in the Sierra Nevada brought enough water back to the riverbed that the river flowed through the city instead of drying out upstream of Bakersfield, as it has for most of the last 70 years. And with the water came fish, and echoes of the Mono Lake story.

In November 2023, a Kern County Superior Court judge issued a preliminary injunction requiring 40% of the Kern River's natural runoff to remain in the river to keep the fish healthy and restore the Lower Kern River's Public Trust resources. The injunction was based on Fish & Game Code 5937, which states, "The owner

of any dam shall allow sufficient water at all times ... to pass over, around or through the dam, to keep in good condition any fish that may be planted or exist below the dam."

This exciting development for the Kern River is similar to what happened along Rush Creek, Mono Lake's largest tributary. In the early 1980s, thanks to wet winters and high runoff, fish were swept over the spillway of Grant Lake Reservoir and into lower Rush Creek, where they thrived for the first time since the stream was dried up by DWP some 40 years before. Starting in 1984 temporary restraining orders and injunctions, using the very same Fish & Game code, were issued to keep water flowing in Rush Creek and later Lee Vining Creek for the benefit of the fish population.

Protection for fish populations in the Mono Basin was ultimately made permanent with court and State Water Board decisions that enforced Fish & Game Code 5937; that precedent was subsequently used to restore flows in both the San Joaquin River and now the Kern River. While legal wrangling continues in Bakersfield, recently the judge affirmed that the plaintiffs *can* use the Public Trust doctrine and Fish & Game codes as they persist in their efforts to keep water in the Kern River. ❖

Streamwatch

DWP delays valve upgrade, depriving Rush Creek of peak flows

by Greg Reis

As reported on page 12, the Grant Lake Reservoir spillway modification project slated for this year is now delayed due to the need to prioritize replacement of the failing 88-year-old aqueduct intake valve, which was identified as a needed project at least nine years ago and deemed to be past its reliable service life six years ago.

The failing valve will significantly impair the conveyance of Stream Ecosystem Flows to Rush Creek via the return ditch. Maximum controlled releases to Rush Creek during at least the next two years will be cut by more than 50% and limited to 175 cubic feet per second (cfs)—the highest flow the failing valve can safely convey. 175 cfs

is lower than all Rush Creek peak flow requirements, which range from 200 cfs in Dry-Normal II year-types to 750 cfs in Extreme-Wet year-types.

The valve previously could deliver flows up to 380 cfs—a Normal year-type peak flow. The spillway modification project is designed to provide peak flows twice as large. The delivery of those ecologically important high flows between 380 cfs and 750 cfs, previously hoped-for in 2026, will now extend beyond 2027, and the wait for any peak flows over 175 cfs will now apparently extend to 2026 at the earliest.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time DWP has deferred addressing its aging Mono Basin facilities to the detriment

of providing required streamflows. Rush Creek peak releases were limited to 160 cfs until 2003—eight years after higher peak flows were required by the State Water Board—when DWP finally upgraded the return ditch. In 2010, lack of return ditch maintenance caused DWP to limit flows to 350 cfs and install temporary pumps at the spillway to meet the 380 cfs peak flow requirement.

Fortunately for Rush Creek, the water level in Grant Lake Reservoir is high following the Extreme-Wet 2023 runoff year. It will likely spill in late spring, which would increase the possibility of meeting peak flow requirements. ❖

Lakewatch

Resuming water exports threatens Mono Lake's progress

by Greg Reis

On the heels of a record Mono Lake rise last year, this past fall was the driest since 2013, and it was the first time since 1999 that there was no measurable snow in Lee Vining before the end of December.

Very wet conditions in early February raised Mono Lake a quarter-foot to 6,383.5 feet above sea level. A return to dry conditions would limit

Mono Lake's rise to around 6,383.7 feet on April 1. Above-average precipitation the rest of

February and March could push the lake level close to 6,384 feet, about four feet higher than on April 1, 2023.

There's no question that on April 1, 2024 Mono Lake will be above the State Water Board's 6,380-foot

threshold for higher exports, adopted 30 years ago. That will allow—but not require—DWP to almost quadruple exports to 16,000 acre-feet of surface water between April 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025 (see page 3). Leaving that water, plus this year's 4,500 acre-feet of permissible export, in Grant Lake Reservoir would reduce flood risk downstream of Long Valley Dam, allow Grant to spill more easily, both this year and next year, and give DWP a better chance of meeting Rush Creek minimum peak flow requirements. Unfortunately, DWP began exporting the 4,500 acre-feet on January 30.

Leaving both amounts of water in the Mono Basin would also be enough to raise Mono Lake almost half a foot—a big benefit to the ecosystem, and now widely recognized as critical to maintaining the gains of 2023 and raising the lake to the required and overdue 6,392-foot Public Trust management level. ❖

Greg Reis is the Committee's Information & Restoration Specialist. He enjoyed doing the historical research that led to the conclusion that the aqueduct intake valve at Grant has been in service for 88 years.



The Mono Lake Committee checks Mono Lake's level at least monthly.

6,417'

Prediversion lake level, 1941

6,392'

Management lake level

6,383.5'

Current lake level

6,372'

Historic low, 1982

Mono Basin Journal

A roundup of quiet happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



Geoff McQuilkin

Winter weaves itself into the creeks and the aspens, pines, and cottonwoods that follow the waterways to Mono Lake. Classic elements abound, such as snow-capped granite boulders surrounded by rushing water that splashes upward to form long icicles on low-hanging branches. On quiet days poconip ice fog settles in, and Jeffrey pine needles extend in length as crystalline rime ice accumulates, one small layer at a time.

The creek landscape is complex and varied, full of winter surprises. Shaded pools may be covered by thick ice, with fish swimming below, yet south-facing slopes that rise above the water capture the thin winter sun and warm up, snow melts, and the rich aroma of pine needles fills the air.

Storms that lock the winter landscape motionless under snow arrive with incredible energy. One day I came across a freshly fallen, centuries-old pine, but mysteriously there was no stump. Exploration revealed it to actually be the top of a nearby Jeffrey Pine, snapped off four stories high by whipping winds. The moment must have been loud, energetic, and dramatic; now it lay still, bridging the creek atop dormant willows as snow quietly sifted down. ❖

Geoff McQuilkin is the Committee's Executive Director. Amidst an already non-stop year of advocacy for Mono Lake, he appreciates quiet moments walking the streams and lakeshore as reminders of what the work is all about.

Benchmarks



Kristin Weiss

February 12, 2023: Thick snow blanketed the wetlands below the boardwalk at Mono Lake County Park. Mono Lake's level was 6,379.3 feet above sea level.



Elan Lyons

February 14, 2024: While this winter isn't as snowy, Mono Lake's surface is now 4.2 feet higher thanks to last year's record snowpack and runoff. Lake level: 6,383.5 feet above sea level.

Environmental Justice Leader Award

Pacoima Beautiful honors Santiago Escruceria, Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center Manager

by Ryan Garrett

On a lovely October evening at the southern end of the Los Angeles Aqueduct in North Hollywood, Santiago M. Escruceria, the Mono Lake Committee's Outdoor Education Center Manager, received an Environmental Justice Leader Award from Pacoima Beautiful.

Pacoima Beautiful is a grassroots environmental justice organization that works in the San Fernando Valley to advocate for equity, organize youth, improve land use, and uplift the arts and culture of the community. The organization was started in 1996 by a small group of mothers dedicated to cleaning up toxic waste in their neighborhoods. This effort blossomed into an organization that advocates for communities to have clean air, to be free from toxic waste, and to be food resilient.

Pacoima Beautiful has traveled the length of the extended Mono Lake–Los Angeles watershed to bring groups of young people to the Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center (OEC) since 2011. At the OEC, Santiago has helped participants gain an understanding of Mono Lake and inspired them to act for a sustainable water future. At the same time, the Mono Lake Committee has gained an understanding of the meaningful work these participants do back at home to lift up their communities.

Santiago has taught environmental education at the Committee for 25 years, introducing thousands of students to the Mono Basin, sharing the history of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, discussing equity and community, and helping participants see Mono Lake as part of their home watershed. This award came at the suggestion of Pacoima Beautiful youth program participants, and at the award ceremony he was introduced by OEC students Yasmin Ramirez and Luis Orozco.

Pacoima Beautiful's Executive Director, Veronica Padilla, said, "We wish to acknowledge your outstanding leadership, knowledge and love that you have demonstrated to our Pacoima Beautiful youth and so many other visitors to Mono Lake. We value your relentless support and care for our natural wonders and sharing that passion with us."

The event brought together many members of the 30-year-old LA-Mono Lake OEC community. The Committee's LA Education Coordinator Herley Jim Bowling, Executive Director Geoff McQuilkin, and I were joined by Board member Martha Davis and numerous program partners,



Santiago M. Escruceria, the Mono Lake Committee's Outdoor Education Center Manager, received the Environmental Justice Leader Award from Pacoima Beautiful last fall.

including mark! Lopez of East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, educator Ron Ozuna, Roberto Cabrales of Communities for a Better Environment, and Chicano/a studies professor Gabriel Gutierrez.

Other honorees at the ceremony were US Senator Alex Padilla, Rudy Ortega, Jr., Tribal President of the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians, and the organization Trust for Public Land. The Environmental Justice Awards "aim to recognize outstanding individuals and organizations who are making significant contributions to the field of environmental justice."

Each award featured inspiring, personalized artwork by Pacoima artist Kimberly Guzman. The eye-catching award for Santiago included phalaropes, grebes, avocets, tufa, and more, all inspired by Kimberly's own trip to Mono Lake with Pacoima Beautiful, Santiago, and the OEC.

Santiago spoke eloquently at the event about the privilege of having so many program participants share the OEC experience with him, about the value of a shared watershed vision, and about the importance of local water supplies and water solutions that will ensure that Pacoima, Los Angeles, and Mono Lake all have the opportunity to thrive. "We are all responsible for building a sustainable future together."

It was an honor to have this opportunity to celebrate with Pacoima Beautiful. These meaningful partnerships between the Mono Lake Committee and community-based organizations in Southern California build stronger and more sustainable communities for Los Angeles and Mono Lake. ❖

Experience Ambientalia connect students across hemispheres at sister saline lakes

by Ryan Garrett

Thanks to a partnership between the Mono Lake Committee, Lee Vining High School teachers, and our colleagues at Laguna Mar Chiquita in northern Argentina, six Lee Vining High School students are participating in a new international environmental education and leadership program. Named Experience Ambientalia, the program seeks to better connect students to their home ecosystems, introduce them to sister saline lakes across the Western Hemisphere, and practice environmental stewardship.

Mono Lake Committee staff were introduced to Experience Ambientalia in November 2022 while celebrating the designation of Ansenzuza National Park at Laguna Mar Chiquita. Last summer, Experience Ambientalia Executive Director Marina Castellino met with Committee staff and local Lee Vining teachers to establish an international “flock” to the program while visiting Mono Lake during the Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua and the Phalarope Festival.

The Mono Lake chapter of Experience Ambientalia parallels a much larger program and contingent of students in Argentina. Experience Ambientalia was founded in 2021 to engage youth in conserving Laguna Mar Chiquita. Mono Lake is a sister lake with Laguna Mar Chiquita within the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network because of the lakes’ combined role in providing critical habitat for Wilson’s Phalaropes.

The Mono Lake “flock” launched in September 2023 with a virtual cultural exchange between the Lee Vining students and some of their 200 counterparts participating virtually in Argentina. Later that month, the Mono Lake Experience Ambientalia students then took part in a canoe tour at Mono

Lake. On the tour, the students learned about Mono Lake’s political and natural history and the current issues impeding Mono Lake’s rise to the healthy level mandated by the California State Water Resources Control Board in 1994. After the canoe tour, the students cleaned up trash at Navy Beach and South Tufa.

The following month, the Argentinian and Lee Vining students celebrated World Migratory Bird Day in tandem by participating in bird focused activities in their local areas. In Argentina, 50 students celebrated the day by circumnavigating Laguna Mar Chiquita via kayak, boat, horse, and off-road vehicle, and saw more than 70 bird species.

In Lee Vining, in partnership with the Committee, DeChambeau Creek Foundation, Eastern Sierra Audubon Society, Inyo National Forest, and Beaver’s Sporting Goods, students participated in Duck Days, an interagency service day aimed at restoring wetland habitat for waterfowl in the Mono Basin. During the outing, students saw and learned about the natural history of Loggerhead Shrikes, Northern Harriers, American Coots, and more. Students then helped remove overgrown vegetation that was preventing water from flowing into wetland ponds.

Before their winter and summer breaks, the Lee Vining and Argentinian students met virtually to present to one another about their respective lakes. Students at Laguna Mar Chiquita shared about the natural history of the lake and the current challenges threatening the lake, including water diversions and pollution. The Lee Vining students talked about the international importance of Mono Lake for migratory birds and how the lake ecosystem almost collapsed due to excessive water diversions.

The ultimate goal for this program is for students from both locations to travel across the hemisphere to visit their sister lake this summer. In June 2024, students from Argentina will travel to Mono Lake to spend a week with our local students at the Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center and participate in the Chautauqua. And in July, the Lee Vining students intend to travel to Laguna Mar Chiquita. Students in both hemispheres are continuing concurrent environmental stewardship and educational activities while also raising the funds needed to connect with their peers and their sister lake.

If you are interested in supporting the Experience Ambientalia program, please contact Operations & Philanthropy Director Anna Christensen (anna@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595 x112. ❖

Ryan Garrett is the Committee’s Education Director. He is dreaming of flamingoes, phalaropes, and empanadas this summer in Argentina.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SARAH TAYLOR

Experience Ambientalia students in Lee Vining and Argentina are learning about their respective lakes before traveling to visit their sister lakes this coming summer.

Tangled in the Anthropocene

by Stephen Trimble

Editor's note: Each year we ask a writer to contribute to the Mono Lake Calendar—this essay appears in the 2024 calendar.

The great Western writer Wallace Stegner knew that “the Great Basin is a unifying force; wherever you live in it, you flow toward every other part.”

And as you flow across this vast sanctuary of aridity, lakes and marshes capture you. Every runoff-collecting sink—even the ones gone dry—adds syncopation to the 2/4 time signature of the Basin and Range roller coaster (basin, range; basin, range). A vibrant moment of relief, of respite. Of marsh life, of wheeling gull and spinning phalarope. A beat, simply, of water in this arid world.

Visitors often describe the stillness and quiet here as timeless. But deserts are dynamic and their saline lakes fragile, none more so than the two salty pools landmarking the western and eastern rims of the Great Basin, Mono Lake at the base of the Sierra Nevada and Great Salt Lake at the base of Utah's Wasatch Mountains.

These delicate, surprising islands of eco-vitality in the gray-green sagebrush sea survive as fragments of the great lakes that transformed our desert basins in the Pleistocene.

In that changeable past, Mono's beaches with their Seussian tufa columns lay under 800 feet of water. This ancient version of Mono Lake overflowed into Owens Valley and beyond to Death Valley. Icebergs floated across its surface. Mammoths and sloths came to the lake to drink. Short-faced bears and dire wolves lay in wait for them.

And then waves of humans came here to live, as the climate kept warming, cooling, warming again. The big Pleistocene mammals disappeared; our familiar landscape evolved. The lake stabilized. And a newly urban

civilization tapped Mono's water for faraway cities, adding pipes and valves to natural drainages, taking control.

We now live in a new geologic era defined by these human impacts: the “Anthropocene.” Eight billion of us have accelerating power to shape our planet. We scatter our industrialized traces in the rocks. We burn fossil carbon from plants that grew 300 million years ago and tap out aquifers for their ancient water. We blithely divert streams to fields and cities, never mind the consequences.

In the 20th century, we reveled in the Big Build-Up in the American West. Aqueducts and dams, power plants and mines, highways and housing. Now, our 21st century task must be problem-solving, reckoning with our hubris, cleaning up the messes we created during the last century.

In 1989, when I published my Great Basin natural history book, *The Sagebrush Ocean*, Intermountain Westerners had just luxuriated in the wettest decade in the 20th century. Great

Salt Lake hit its historic high in 1987 when rising waters threatened the Salt Lake City Airport. Mono Lake bumped upward from its frightful 1981 low of 6,372 feet when the lake held just half its prediversion volume.

Were we heading into a cozy holiday feast of abundant water, enough for both thirsty Angelenos and withering desert lakes? Alas, the weather normalized, the climate continued to warm. Diversions continued. Both lakes began to decline once again.

And then Mono Lake activists created what looked like a miraculous reprieve.

To catch Mono Lake in its tumble toward collapse, the Mono Lake Committee led legal battles that triumphed in 1994. The California State Water Resources Control Board mandated a healthy lake elevation of 6,392 feet—midway between pre-diversion highs and post-diversion lows. California Gulls nesting on Negit Island would be safe from predators. Salinity would stay within the range

Continued on page 19



PHOTO COURTESY OF LLOYD BAGGS

needed for alkali flies and brine shrimp to reproduce by the gazillion. The ecosystem would thrive.

Los Angeles backed off on diversions. The lake began to rise. But the hydrologists projected wetter years than we've seen.

In 2023, nearly 30 years after the 1994 decision, the lake remained 12 feet shy of the desired "management level." It's a discouraging story but one we now understand: decreased precipitation, lower runoff from the Sierra, increased evaporation, continued diversions—all require adaptation. To live up to its mandate, the State Water Board must pause or limit diversions to bring Mono Lake—finally—to a baseline healthy level that can buffer the effects of climate change.

Crises bring awareness, and awareness can create change. We are paying more attention to our dynamic desert lakes. Congress enacted a 2022 law to "assess, monitor, and conserve" the imperiled saline lake ecosystems in the Great Basin, a welcome first for coordinated regional planning.

Each of the dozens of basins in the greater basin faces the same facts: water comes in, evaporates, concentrates salts, and has no drainage to the sea. They also face the same challenges. Divert inflow and a lake declines. Warm the climate and a lake declines.

Twin symbols of Great Basin wetlands, Mono Lake and Great Salt Lake share these trials. They also benefit from notoriety, from massive volume, from passionate activism.

Great Salt Lake has been falling since those boom-water years forty years ago. This shallow saucer of brine has a maximum depth of just 33 feet, so every one-foot drop in lake level creates vast expanses of exposed lakebed, poised to blow away in clouds of toxic dust. The lake hit its historic low in 2022, and not even a record spring snowfall in 2023 can save it.

Five hundred miles away, Mono Lake's protectors plea for the State Water Board to honor its commitment, to bring the lake to the healthy level mandated by law. The Native Northern Paiute people of Mono Lake, the

Kootzaduka'a, appeal to Congress for federal Tribal recognition. The Los Angeles Department of Water & Power longs to keep the spigot open, pouring forth Sierra Nevada water from Mono Lake tributaries for their customers.

While humans debate the lake's future, the California Gulls keep returning. Clouds shape-shift, mirroring the line-dance of tufa towers parading along the shore. Storms blanket the Sierra, summer scorches the Great Basin, climate scientists watch annual temperatures creep up.

Somewhere in this Anthropocene tangle of life and change lies the new balance we seek as we find our way in the 21st century Great Basin. ❖

Award-winning Utah writer and photographer Stephen Trimble last wrote the essay for the Mono Lake calendar in 1996. He's revising and updating his classic book, The Sagebrush Ocean: A Natural History of the Great Basin, for a 35th anniversary edition, to be published in 2024.

2023 Free Drawing prize winners

by Leslie Redman

Amidst the rush of last-minute holiday shoppers, Mono Lake Committee staff gathered to select the winners of the 2023 Free Drawing. This annual fundraiser is one of our most popular and successful fundraisers year after year, thanks to the generosity of our donors and members who participate.

Megan McGahey of El Portal won the early bird prize, an iPad Mini. Mammoth & June Mountain ski pass: Denece Dodson of Walnut Creek. Tamarack Cross-Country Ski Center season pass: Sara Ackerman of Santa Rosa. Mammoth Mountain Bike Park season pass: Dan Estabrook of Oxnard. June Lake retreat: Joanne

Woodard of Torrance. National Park grand adventure: Alexander Brennen of Berkeley. Yosemite Conservancy experience: Gary Wuchner of Wawona. Lee Vining getaway: Stephanie Macho of Sonora. Mono Lake trip for two: Bill Moffat of Keene. Mono Basin fun in the field: Kristian Leide-Lynch of Orangevale. A day on the Bay: John Miller of San Jose. Experience the Channel Islands: Chriss Kilburn of Arvada, CO. Bird the Mono Basin: Beth Deaton of Bishop and Lisa Pichitino of Bellingham, WA.

Theresa Carson of Bishop and Dennis Frisch of Santa Monica won canoe adventures on Mono Lake. Mono Lake Committee gift pack: Richard Clack

of Cambria and Stefan Merli of Gardena. Eastern Sierra experience: Sheri Freemuth of Boise, ID. Camp comfort gift pack: Tom Berndt of Carson City, NV and David Cataldo of Redondo Beach. Patagonia apparel: Rich Maurer of Castro Valley and Sam Singer of San Francisco. Patagonia Black Hole duffel: Jun Stutz of Arroyo Grande. Patagonia Black Hole backpack: Tom Scyphers of Gardnerville, NV. Pentax Papilio II 8.5x21 binoculars: Mark Imbriaco of Menifee. Photographer's favorites book bag: Kim Kronenberger of Yucca Valley. Bodie exploration: Mara Richards of Los Angeles.

Naturalist notes

by Nora Livingston

“...it never failed that during the dry years the people forgot about the rich years, and during the wet years they lost all memory of the dry years. It was always that way.” —John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*

Last year's white winter seems like a dream fading quickly in the first moments of waking, hard to tell if it was real or not. Without clues like fresh water freezing in thin sheets along the shallows of Mono Lake from all the runoff, or avalanche scars along the hillside, we could almost forget that we were blanketed in deep snow for months last year. This December and January, the landscape was saturated with russet, pine green, and ochre. Whipping wind threw branches, stirred up cinders, and moved wet leaves dropped months ago from aspen and cottonwood into piles. Moth and butterfly larvae and cocoons nestled into the piles to hibernate.

The lake mirrored the sky when the weather was calm and mimicked the ocean when it was not. There was hardly any snow on the ground below the 7,500-foot elevation line, except in the shade. Luckily, February brought a strong storm that dropped 2.5 feet of snow, and the Mono Basin remembered winter once again. This snow will hopefully stay awhile high in the Sierra, but we expect it to melt away from the lower reaches of the basin due to the intermittent warmer days *El Niño* is bringing us.

A warm, dry, late winter gave us the chance to really look

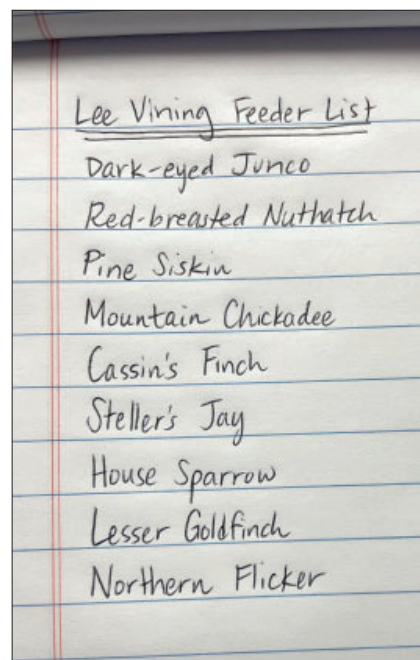
at the minute details in nature around us and to notice more, wonder more. I watched two Red-breasted Nuthatches interact on a bare cottonwood branch. They hopped around each other in a dance of “who goes to the feeder first,” smooth movements to match their smooth rusty chests, feathers overlapping so well it's hard to tell one from another. A white chin below their upturned bill is in stark contrast

with the thick black stripe through the eye that leads to their steely blue-gray back. They took turns picking out millet and returning to the spindly branches or vertical trunk, quietly *pip-pip*-ing to each other the whole time.

Pinyon Jay flocks have been gracing town more than usual, their harsh *waah* calls chorusing together as they fly from pinyon to pinyon, a group of many individuals that together seem like one organism, seeking food caches that may have been inaccessible last winter. Another corvid specialty is spending the winter with us, a lone California Scrub jay, deeper blue and a lot less shy than the resident Woodhouse Scrub jays. A European Starling in my yard keeps pulling my leg with a perfect rendition of an Evening Grosbeak call that sends my mind back to point count surveys along Sherwin Creek 14 years ago when I first heard them. It is amazing how a single call note can bring a memory alive again.

Last year, winter went on for weeks past the spring equinox. This year, it may feel like spring long before the birds return from afar or the buds burst open. We must not forget the wet winter that poured snowmelt into Mono Lake all summer, raising the lake nearly five feet. We must also not forget that dry years and water diversions are sure to steal that gain back if we don't keep fighting for our beloved lake. It is, after all, for the birds. ❖

Nora Livingston is the Committee's Lead Naturalist Guide. She is playing *Tetris* with the Chautauqua program to build a polished schedule that will delight seasoned festival goers and newbies alike. Join us June 21–23, 2024!



SANTIAGO M. ESCRUERIA

Cassin's Finch, one of the birds on a Lee Vining winter feeder list.

2024 Field Seminars



Spring Photography at Mono Lake

May 3–5 • Joe Decker

\$350 per person / \$330 for members
enrollment limited to 12 participants

Spring in the Mono Basin offers brand new leaves emerging along the creeks and washes of color as wildflowers bloom in the sagebrush. Bright warm sunshine, late-season snowstorms, and gentle spring rainstorms are all possible, combined with a still snow-covered Sierra Nevada as the backdrop. Along with a moonless night and opportunities to photograph the stars, the photographic possibilities are endless. We will discuss composition and methods of proper exposure under the diverse variety of lighting conditions encountered in the Eastern Sierra.

Birding Mono Basin Hotspots

May 25–26 • Nora Livingston

\$195 per person / \$180 for members
enrollment limited to 8 participants

Mono Basin creeks and canyons are hidden jewels for breeding and migrating songbirds in a region where high desert habitat

dominates. This birding seminar will explore lush riparian areas that are hotspots for bird activity. Expect to see warblers, sapsuckers, pewees, buntings, sparrows, towhees, vireos, and if we're lucky, an American Dipper or Townsend's Solitaire.

Mono Basin Landscape & Night Photography

May 31–June 2 • Jeff Sullivan & Lori Hibbett

\$350 per person / \$330 for members
enrollment limited to 10 participants

Early summer is a special time in the Mono Basin with Sierra Nevada peaks catching morning alpenglow and afternoon cloud formations lighting up at sunset, often yielding to clear skies for Milky Way night photography. This seminar will cover best practices for composing and capturing stunning landscape and night sky photographs. We'll also spend time learning how to anticipate and plan for great sunrise and sunset shots and how to use composition and light for greater impact in every photograph. When we're not out photographing in the field, we will have discussions and demonstrations on post-processing indoors to refine our skills.

To sign up for a Mono Lake Committee Field Seminar
please visit monolake.org/seminars or call (760) 647-6595.

Breeding Birds of the Mono Basin

June 1 • Nora Livingston

\$145 per person / \$130 for members
enrollment limited to 8 participants

Late spring and early summer are the best times to find breeding birds in the Mono Basin—they are singing from the tops of trees and shrubs to declare their territory to rivals and to protect their mates. This one-day seminar will visit birding hotspots in the Mono Basin to learn about the many breeding birds that raise their families here. We will learn to identify these birds and observe their behavior as they gather food for their young or gather material to build nests. We will also delve into their migration patterns and conservation status.

Mono Basin Natural History: Aquatic & Terrestrial Habitats

July 5–7 • David Wimpfheimer

\$285 per person / \$270 for members
enrollment limited to 12 participants

The Mono Basin is one of the most diverse ecosystems on the continent; this seminar will be an overview of the varied habitats found here. One of the best ways to get an appreciation for Mono Lake's drama and productivity is to explore its shores and then proceed higher in elevation to other habitats. We will enjoy the rich diversity of mammals, butterflies, wildflowers, and trees, and a major focus will be the identification and ecology of birds that breed here. In sagebrush meadows and riparian and conifer forests, the class will explore a number of sites intensively, mixing short leisurely walks with periods of observation and natural history discussion. A guided canoe tour of Mono's south shore is included.

Capturing the Mono Basin in Pastel

July 12–14 • Ane Carla Rovetta

\$310 per person / \$295 for members
enrollment limited to 12 participants

The rich light and deep colors of the Mono Basin are a perfect subject for the brilliance of pastel chalks. During this seminar, we will work outside, on location, to make landscape studies in pastel. We will be challenged by wind, weather, and our copious gear, however, the exuberant brilliance of "plein air" paintings make them worth the effort. We will concentrate on vista paintings in the mornings, move indoors for midday lectures, and late afternoons will consist of painting a smaller scene in a sheltered place. Each participant will go home with at least one small finished painting and several sketches, color studies, and value experiments to fuel future artistic endeavors.

Los Angeles Aqueduct Tour

July 20 • Robbie Di Paolo & Maureen McGlinchy

\$145 per person / \$130 for members
enrollment limited to 15 participants

The Mono Basin extension of the Los Angeles Aqueduct began exporting water 350 miles south to the City of LA in 1941. Today, the aqueduct must balance competing needs for this water instead of exclusively serving one. During this seminar, we will visit all the major aqueduct facilities in the Mono Basin and learn about their modern relationship with Los Angeles, Mono Lake, and the lake's tributary streams. We will discuss past and present diversions, and see how 20th century infrastructure is serving 21st century water needs. This seminar will provide a great overview of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, and a few of the historical, engineering, and ecological anecdotes that make up this fascinating water infrastructure.



SANTIAGO M. ESCOBAR

Join the Mono Basin Natural History Field Seminar, July 5–7, for an in-depth look at the area's rich biodiversity on land and in the water.

monolake.org/seminars or (760) 647-6595 to register

Wildflower Wander

July 21 • Nora Livingston

\$140 per person / \$130 for members
enrollment limited to 8 participants

Working on your wildflower identification? July is the perfect month to practice as the flowers will be out in abundance taking advantage of plentiful sunlight and warm temperatures. We will scour meadows and canyons for the plethora of blooms that grace the trails, focusing on the identification and natural history of the flowers we see.

Mono Basin Ecology for Families

July 27 • Nora Livingston

\$10–40 per person, sliding scale
enrollment limited to 12 participants

This hands-on, immersive seminar for families is designed to foster an understanding and appreciation of the habitats in the Mono Basin. Open to families with kids ages 6 and up, there will be something for everyone no matter their age, including scavenger hunts, science experiments, nature art, and more. This seminar encourages bonding, environmental stewardship, and a deeper connection with nature. At least one adult per family is required to attend.

Butterflies & Moths of the Eastern Sierra

August 2–4 • Paul Johnson

\$250 per person / \$235 for members
enrollment limited to 10 participants

More than 100 species of butterflies and perhaps 20 times as many species of moths live in the Eastern Sierra. With this



Field Seminars have a range of activity levels, from slow, leisurely walking to strenuous hiking. Learn more at monolake.org/seminars.

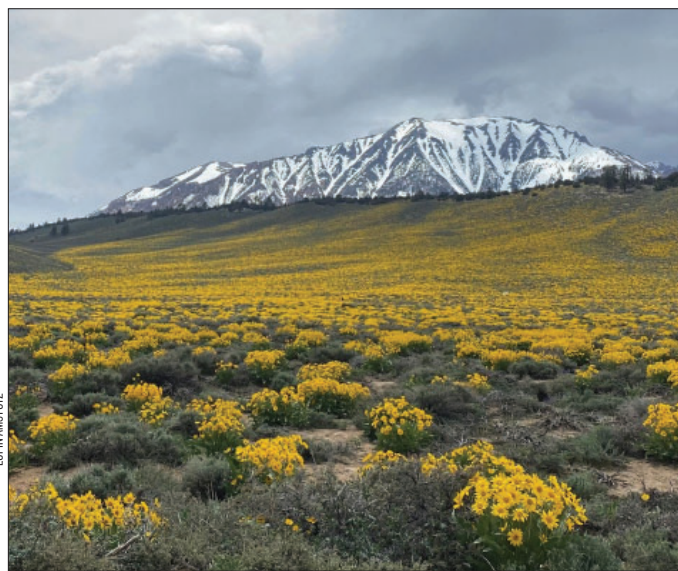
incredible diversity of species, there is always something new to be found by the careful observer. Most butterflies and moths have close relationships with the few plant species their caterpillars can eat, and various biological needs drive them to visit flowers, mud puddles, hilltops, and more. This seminar will explore these habitat preferences and then use this knowledge to guide our searches at various butterfly-rich locations. We will likely see some day-flying moths along the way and we'll also reconvene at night and use black lights to attract nocturnal moths that might otherwise go unnoticed as they go about their lives in the darkness.

Cuentos y Cantos al Desierto

August 9–11 • Stacey Villalobos

\$40–80 per person, sliding scale
enrollment limited

La tierra es testigo de nuestras ofrendas, ¿cómo podemos honrar nuestra relación con la naturaleza a través de nuestras voces? Over the course of this bilingual seminar, participants will be guided on a series of outings that will explore reciprocity as an offering through stories and song. Exchanges with plants, critters, and the elements will inform our relationship with the lands, people, and communities we call home. Activities may include hiking, birdwatching, botany, meditation, journaling, storytelling, singing, and embodied voice practices. This bilingual seminar is specifically designed to create a space for native and heritage Spanish-speaking participants and field instructors to connect with the Eastern Sierra.



Field Seminars span a variety of interesting topics ranging from wildflowers and birds to painting and photography.

Falling for the Migration: Bridgeport, Crowley, Mono

August 16–18 • Dave Shuford

\$250 per person / \$235 for members
enrollment limited to 14 participants

The east slope of the Sierra Nevada is a major migration route for birds traveling from northern nesting areas to warm southern habitats. As a result, August is the time of year to see late summer migrants and early arriving wintering birds in the Mono Basin, Bridgeport Valley, and Long Valley. Beginners as well as experts will enjoy this introduction to the area's birdlife found in a wide variety of habitats, from the shimmering shores of Mono Lake to lofty Sierra peaks. We will identify about 100 species by plumage and calls and also discuss migration strategies, behavior, and ecology to complement our field observations.

Communing with(in) Nature

August 23–25 • Bree Salazar

\$40–80 per person, sliding scale
enrollment limited

This seminar will visit the varying ecosystems of Kootzagwae (the Mono Basin) and Payahuunadü (Owens Valley) to learn about local natural history, regional environmental/Indigenous-led movements, and ways to feel more connected to and grounded on the land. Activities may include hiking, birding, nature journaling, forest bathing, meditation, and community building. Whether it's your first

time or your hundredth in the area, by the end of this seminar we will feel more confident and empowered to step beyond just recreation and into responsibility, while honoring each other's identities. This seminar is specifically designed for participants who self-identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color).

Geology of the Mono Basin: Land of Fire & Ice

September 6–8 • Greg Stock

\$250 per person / \$235 for members
enrollment limited to 14 participants

From volcanic craters to glacial moraines, earthquake faults to tufa towers, the Mono Basin displays some of the most unique, spectacular, and accessible geology anywhere in the world. This seminar, consisting of field visits to the premier sites, will present in understandable fashion the geologic stories of the Mono Basin.

Natural History at the Edge of the Sierra

September 14 • Nora Livingston

\$145 per person / \$130 for members
enrollment limited to 8 participants

Natural history pays attention to all aspects of nature and widens our view when out in the forest or high desert. In this seminar, we will make our way up the east slope from Mono Lake to Tioga Pass, stopping at several locations to observe



NORA LIVINGSTON

The brilliant hues of golden aspen leaves in fall make the perfect backdrop for a Field Seminar.

monolake.org/seminars or (760) 647-6595 to register

all that we find, which may include wildly colorful butterflies like the lustrous copper, hidden Sierra rein orchids in pristine meadows, and plenty of birds, from warblers to rosy-finches. This is the quintessential day in the field with a naturalist, where we will ponder the grandeur and the minutiae that envelops us in this amazing place.

Foraging in the Eastern Sierra

September 20–22 • Mia Andler

\$270 per person / \$255 for members

enrollment limited to 15 participants

Learn about the edible and useful plants of the Eastern Sierra in an active, multisensory, and fun way. This seminar is a hands-on course in plant identification and their uses. We will search for plants, cook some of what we find, make plant-based products, get creative with field journaling, and get closer to plants by practicing nature awareness techniques. While the seminar will focus on foraging in the Eastern Sierra, much of the knowledge participants will learn will help them forage in other areas too.

Geology of the Mono Basin:

Land of Fire & Ice

October 4–6 • Greg Stock

\$250 per person / \$235 for members

enrollment limited to 14 participants

From volcanic craters to glacial moraines, earthquake faults to tufa towers, the Mono Basin displays some of the most unique, spectacular, and accessible geology anywhere in the world. This seminar, consisting of field visits to the premier sites, will present in understandable fashion the geologic stories of the Mono Basin.

Mono Basin Fall Photography

October 11–13 • Robb Hirsch

\$350 per person / \$330 for members

enrollment limited to 10 participants

In autumn spectacular foliage and skies combine with exceptional light, presenting ample subject matter to photograph. Seminar participants will learn how to refine their own vision and best interpret it through the camera. Explore shoreline locations at sunrise and sunset, fall color in nearby canyons, and grand overviews of the Mono Basin in this seminar.



Discover many of the unique and fascinating geological features of the region on Geology of the Mono Basin.

Field Seminar Information

Please visit monolake.org/seminars to register for a Field Seminar, see complete itineraries, and cancellation and refund policies.

No pets are allowed on any Field Seminars. Please consider this in advance and find boarding accommodations for your pets or leave them at home; do not leave pets in your car during seminars. Service animals assisting people with disabilities are allowed on seminars and must be leashed.

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

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

Questions? Email fieldseminars@monolake.org or call us at (760) 647-6595.

Staff migrations

by Leslie Redman

Though we are deep into the quietest part of the year, when most of our feathered friends have migrated to their wintering grounds, and the locals and lands of the Mono Basin have a chance to rest after the bustle of summer and whirlwind of fall, there's always something happening at the Mono Lake Committee. In keeping with that trend, we have welcomed new staff members to Lee Vining and wished others well as they depart for their next adventure.

Working at the Committee, you get used to the seasonal ebbs and flows of staffing changes, but permanent staff come and go far less often. In December we celebrated longtime staff member **Ellen King** as she set forth into well-earned retirement. After many years as a dedicated Committee member who would “bound up the steps into the bookstore,” Ellen fulfilled her dream of working for the Committee in 2007 when she landed the Membership Coordinator job and moved from Silicon Valley with her husband Duncan. Ellen's attention to detail combined with her enthusiasm for the Committee's work made her a perfect person to steward our 16,000 members.

Over the years Ellen managed hundreds of thousands of pieces of mail—walking her little red wagon to the post office through wind and snow. She never took a donation for granted—knowing that members are the engine that makes the Committee's work possible. She treated every gift with the utmost care—reading aloud handwritten letters from members at staff meetings so we could all feel the love.

Recently she got back to her librarian roots as Policy Library Coordinator—using her knowledge of the political history at Mono Lake to organize our extensive library and policy archives. Thank goodness Ellen is staying local so we will get to see her out and about in the Mono Basin, and she will forever be an ace up the Committee's sleeve when it comes to keeping the record of the fight for Mono Lake straight, should anyone (ahem) need reminding.

This winter, we were delighted to welcome our new Office Coordinator, **Anna Kristina Moseidjord**. A recent graduate of UC Davis with dual Bachelor of Arts degrees in English and History, Anna Kristina has previously worked as a backpacking, climbing, and rafting guide and as a local journalist in her hometown of Oakland. Anna Kristina is thrilled to join the Lee Vining community and looks forward to winters skiing in the Mono Basin and summers climbing in Tuolumne Meadows.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JANET CARLE

Ellen King, center, after speeches, toasts, and a phalarope photo as a farewell gift upon her retirement from the Committee.

We also welcomed Facilities Assistant **Freeman George**, Anna Kristina's partner. Freeman grew up in South Lake Tahoe, where he learned to ski, climb, and enjoy the outdoors. As a raft guide and archeologist, he's looking forward to all-season and all-terrain exploration of the Eastern Sierra.

As winter arrived to the Mono Basin, we said farewell to Project Specialists **Bree Salazar** and **Fiona Travers**. Bree provided educational support for the Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center and led the Committee's first BIPOC-focused Field Seminar, *Communing With(in) Nature*. She returned to Los Angeles, where she continues to work in the field of environmental justice. Fiona spent last summer as a Mono Lake Intern before staying on through the fall as a Project Specialist. She graduated from Pennsylvania State University in December 2023 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Energy and Sustainability Policy, which she is celebrating by traveling the world.

After a successful summer inspiring folks with the story of Mono Lake, Information Center & Bookstore Assistant **Teri Tracy** headed back home to Fort Collins, CO to complete her Master's degree in Environmental, Natural Resources, and Energy Law. Next, she plans to find a job in environmental policy closer to home. ❖

Leslie Redman is the Committee's Membership Coordinator. She's looking forward to shoveling a lot more snow before the next edition of the Newsletter hits mailboxes.



From the mailbag

News from members and friends

by Leslie Redman

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

Ban Al-Wardi of Rolling Hills Estates donated in honor of **Hanaa Al-Wardi**. **Jean Anderman** of Newton, MA gave a gift in honor of **Elijah Theodore Forrester**. **Susan Baldwin** of Lanesville, IN contributed in honor of **Tom & Jeannine Williams**. **Brian Barr** of Jacksonville, OR donated in honor of **Linda Robb**. **Marybel Batjer** of Reno, NV gave a gift in honor of the **Batjer & McVicar families**. **Christopher Benham** of San Francisco contributed in honor of **Phyllis Benham**. **Midge Binnewies** of Santa Rosa donated in honor of **Susan Buren**. **Bob & Liz Brown** of Thousand Oaks gave a gift in honor of **Dave & Janet Carle**. **Greg Fellers** of Seal Beach contributed in honor of **Paul & Vida Fellers**. **Jolene Fisher** of Van Nuys donated in honor of **Susan Baldwin** and the **Luna family**. **Mary Harrington** of Minneapolis, MN gave a gift in honor of **Joanne Meier**. **Suzanne Hellmuth & Jock Reynolds** of New Haven, CT contributed in honor of **Margaret Eissler & Lisa Cutting**. **Burr Heneman** of Point Reyes Station donated in honor of **Frances Spivy-Weber**. **Chrissy Howell** of Novato gave a gift in honor of **Connie Millar**. **Jess Morton** of San Pedro contributed in honor of **Nora Livingston**. **Carole Oglesby** of Duarte donated in honor of **Billie Oglesby & Len Robertson**. **Ronald Rutowski** of Tempe, AZ gave a gift in honor of the **Rutowski-Mitchell family**. **Nina Souders** of Flagstaff, AZ contributed in honor of **David Rose**.

In memory

Deborah & Robert Alberti of Atascadero donated in memory of

Dorothy P. Millerd. **Patricia Arfsten** of Petaluma gave a gift in memory of **Terrie Van Alen**. **Bob Battagin** of Woodacre contributed in memory of **Rich Stallcup**. **Russell Breslauer** of San Francisco donated in memory of **Ellen Breslauer**. **Barbara Brydon** of Shingle Springs, **Marilyn D'Amico** of New York, NY, and **Keith & Carol Wingfield** of Lake Jackson, TX gave gifts in memory of **John Marshall**.

Sue & Ken Dinwiddie and **Mark Shipley** of Palo Alto and **Mary Peterson** of Santa Clara contributed in memory of **Suzanne Shipley**. **Rhoda Holabird** of Los Angeles donated in memory of **Chris Holabird**. **Lisa Honig** of San Francisco gave a gift in memory of **Lorraine Honig**. **Sue Hughes** of Incline Village, NV contributed in memory of **Robert Christensen**. **Jack & Martha Hussey** of Napa and **Greg & Phyllis Netherton** of Fresno donated in memory of **James Wagner**. **Stephen Ingram & Karen Ferrell-Ingram** of Swall Meadows gave a gift in memory of **Jack Ferrell**. **Linda Jane**

of Richmond Heights, OH contributed in memory of **Rita de Quercus**. **Donald Johanneck** of Highland donated in memory of **Beth Johanneck**. **Alan Lawson** of Brea gave a gift in memory of **Jorge Zavaleta**. **Kathy Oakes** of Reno, NV contributed in memory of **Edward Oakes**. **Jim Oeland** of Medford, OR donated in memory of **Caroline Erickson**. **Gerald Olsen** of Camarillo gave a gift in memory of **Carole Olsen Bryan**. **Jerry Olson** of Roseville contributed in memory of **Linda Watts**. **Cynthia Ostrowski** of Hackettstown, NJ donated in memory of **Jock VanPatten**.

Ralph Rea of Laguna Woods gave a gift in memory of **Patti Rea**. **Brenna Scheier** of Sacramento contributed in memory of **Travis Silcox**. **Debbie Simpson** of Valley Center donated in memory of **Bill Simpson**. **Jim Van Beveren** of Los Osos gave a gift in memory of **Christine Van Beveren**. **George Yamaoka** of San Jose contributed in memory of **Richard Brown**. **Kristine Zeigler** of Walnut Creek donated in memory of **Maria D'Amato**. ❖



Mono Lake Committee staff pull the tickets of Free Drawing winners (see page 19).



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