

September 22, 2021

SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Re: *Kootzabaa'a* (Mono Lake) & Tributaries – Tribal Beneficial Uses

Daniel Sussman
Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board
2501 Lake Tahoe Blvd.
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150
Email: Lahontan@waterboards.ca.gov

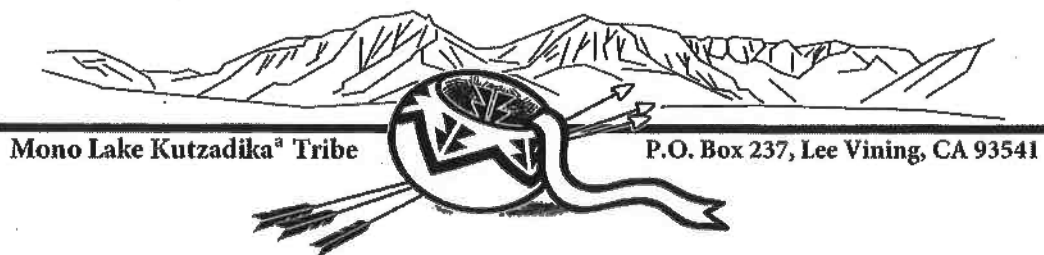
Dear Mr. Sussman,

Kootzabaa'a, also known more recently as Mono Lake, is the physical, cultural and spiritual center of the Kootzaduka'a people. This water body is so central to our lives and heritage that we must do all that we can to ensure our lake has the utmost protections so that our lake and the ecosystem it supports is healthy and strong. We, the Kootzaduka'a people seek to establish Tribal Beneficial Uses for Mono Lake and the tributaries that feed it, and are providing the information below to share the connections between our people and these waters.

KOOTZABAA'A (MONO LAKE)

1. Origins: We, as the Kootzaduka'a (also spelled Kutzadika'a or Kutzaduka'a) people, originated from the islands of Mono Lake. Mono Lake and its environs are the birthright of the Kootzaduka'a people and remains the heartland of our Kootzaduka'a homeland. The Kootzaduka'a, translated as the Brine Fly Pupae Eaters, take our name from the brine fly pupae that served as an important and highly nutritious staple for our people.

2. Food: In addition to the unique brine fly larvae, which was considered a delicacy, other sources of food are found at Mono Lake. The aquatic invertebrates within Mono Lake's saline waters are not commonly found elsewhere. The unique and balanced chemistry of Mono Lake allowed aquatic invertebrates to thrive, reaching populations year-round numbering in the trillions. The aquatic invertebrates were also a nutritious food source for migratory birds and waterfowl who, by the millions, visited Mono Lake seasonally each year. The waterfowl were hunted for food. Nothing was wasted; the feathers and down were used in making insulating blankets. Bones were used to make whistles and beads. Even the sharp bills of some water birds were fashioned into awls for basket weaving. Waterfowl eggs were harvested along the shoreline and, during breeding season, the Kootzaduka'a rafted out to the islands on tule boats or on bundled log rafts to harvest gull eggs for food.



Numerous freshwater springs surface along the shoreline of Mono Lake. These springs and the saline groundwater supported diverse vegetation communities that were tolerant of saline groundwater. The vegetation was an abundant food supply for our people, with grass seed that was ground into flour, bulbs and roots which were roasted and eaten. Berries and seeds from shrubs and shrubby trees were harvested seasonally.

The waters of Mono Lake were a source of minerals that when taken in the appropriate quantity ensured the Kootzaduka'a an abundant supply of nutrients to which, over deep time, the Kootzaduka'a became adapted to such that our optimal health is dependent on the balanced chemistry of the water.

3. Climate Buffer: The shoreline of Mono Lake is markedly different from the surrounding terrain. The numerous springs and lake water provided soil moisture during drought so that adjacent vegetation communities could still grow and bear fruit during drought periods. This benefitted the entire ecosystem within the Mono Basin as fauna could utilize the shorelines as a place of refuge when the surrounding area was less productive due to drought.

Mono Lake moderated ambient temperatures, where areas near the shoreline were cooler during hot periods and warmer during cold periods. Our Kootzaduka'a people often wintered along the shoreline where hot springs and the temperature-modifying effects of the lake made the shoreline a warmer place to be during the harsh winters the region experiences.

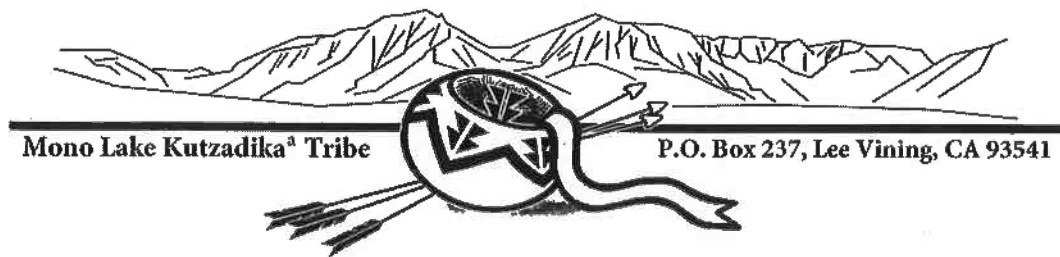
4. Medicine: The balanced chemistry of Mono Lake had great healing properties. External injuries such as cuts, punctures, bites, rashes and infections from fungi or bacteria were washed and treated with the lake's water to ensure fast and scar-free healing. Hot mud applications from nearby hot springs along the shoreline were used to soothe muscle and joint pain. Internally, sips of Mono Lake water were used to treat stomach and intestinal ailments. Even wounds on domesticated animals were treated with Mono Lake waters.

5. Cleansing: The alkaline waters of Mono Lake were excellent for cleaning the body, hair and clothing. Care was taken after washing to rinse the alkaline waters off using fresh water from the numerous springs along the shoreline.

6. Purification: Mono Lake provided a source of purification for both physical and spiritual needs during aspects of everyday and religious observances. The starting point for purification was to clear the mind by listening to the rhythmic sound of crashing waves and breathing in the scented air.

7. Spiritual Life: Mono Lake was a place to conduct observances which kept the body, mind and spirit at balance with the Creator and all of Creation. Prayer, blessings, anointings, and spiritual power, along with steadfastness and reciprocity were inseparable from the physical world, and ensured a well-balanced life with the environment and within the community.

8. Recreation: After a long hot day of work, a swim in the waters of Mono Lake rinsed the sweat and cares of the day away allowing for a time to relax along the cooling shoreline with family and friends. The



Kootzaduka'a also ran barefoot along the moist lakeshore for health and exercise. One did not have to worry about sharp rocks or thorns and so running could be carefree and enjoyable. Numerous freshwater springs kept runners hydrated as they ran around the lake.

9. Economic Resources for Trade: The brine fly pupae was a highly sought after delicacy that was traded with neighboring tribes. Quantities of this insect food was taken over the Sierra to share with friends and family in the valley now known as Yosemite. The Mariposa Battalion, the first group of Euromericans to enter Yosemite, found baskets full of insect food from Mono Lake in the hastily deserted villages. Rounded pumice stones found along the Mono Lake shoreline were used for sanding wood. These pumice stones were also used as items of trade. In return our Kootzaduka'a people were able to secure items from the western slope of the Sierras, as well as shells from the Pacific Ocean.

10. Landmark Feature: Mono Lake is a prominent landscape feature in the Eastern Sierra. Numerous indigenous trails crisscrossed this area in all directions. Mono Lake was recognized from far distances and helped with navigation, for those travelers not familiar with local mountain peaks.

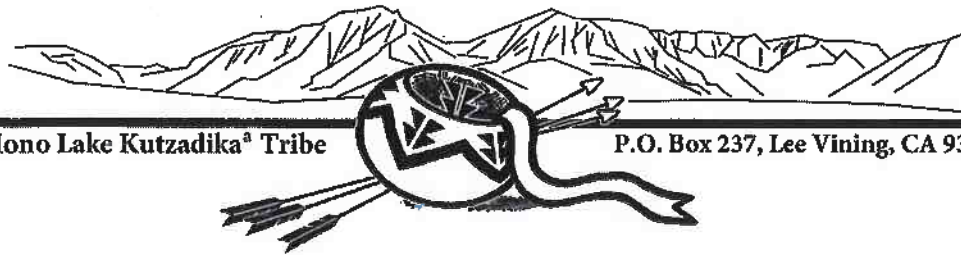
11. Communication: Just like symbols written on a page are assigned meaning, Mono Lake and its features were embedded with meaning in the form of stories, history, songs and memories. The lake was like a book whose features were to be read. This ensured a continuity of traditional memory within a culture that had no writing system in place.

12. Education: Mono Lake was a place-based learning area where parents and grandparents taught younger generations about ecology, history, harvesting, and religion. Self-taught lessons and observations were another way in which Nature itself taught those with an open inquisitive mind. These lessons were essential for subsistence within this environment and culture where everything needed for life had to be collected, processed and shared with family and the community.

13. Identity: Mono Lake and all of its attributes provides the anchor for Kootzaduka'a self and group identity. This awareness of our identity binds us together as a community and is also recognized in us by our neighboring tribes. As people of this region, we are the only ones with this unique and beautiful homeland. The Kootzaduka'a are so inextricably bound to Mono Lake, that when we see Mono Lake, we see ourselves. And as our Elders have cautioned, if Mono Lake dies our culture dies with it, and in a sense, so do we.

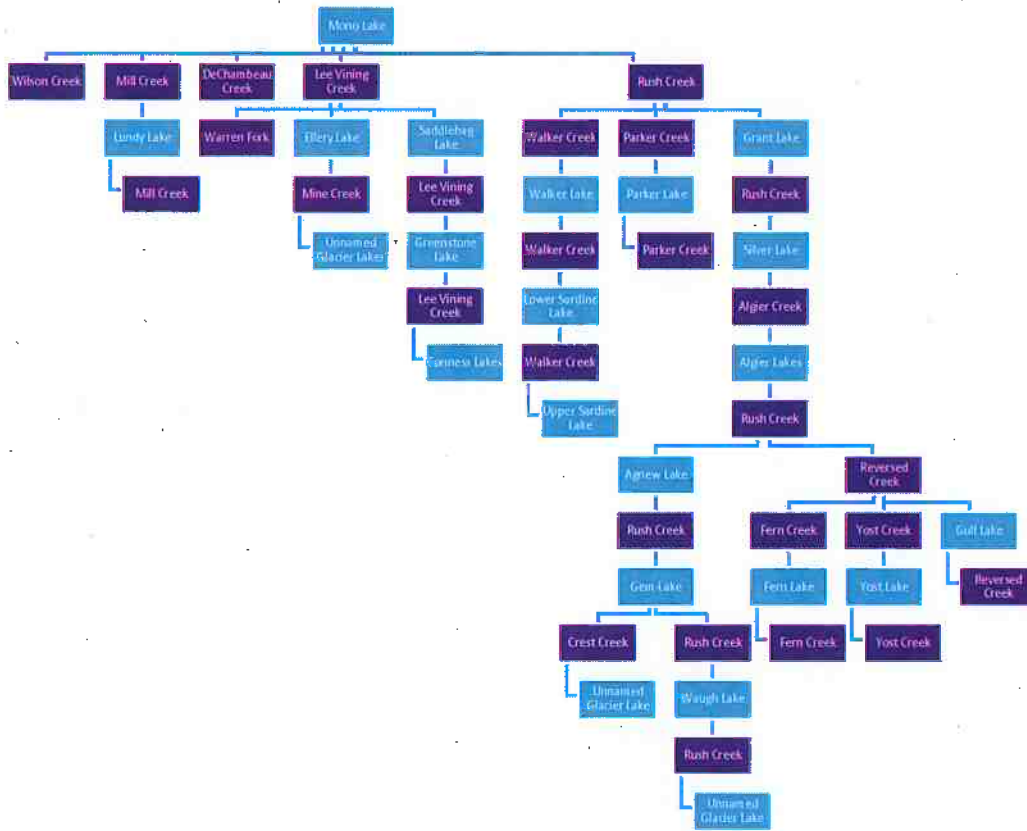
TRIBUTARY WATER BODIES OF MONO LAKE

Kootzabaa'a is fed by five tributary creeks which have their beginnings downslope from the Sierra Nevada Glaciers. These glaciers are permanent ice bodies at the uppermost elevations that are present year around, though with climate change they are more vulnerable to shrinkage than ever before. Melting glaciers and snow pack are responsible for the water that feed these tributary creeks. There are small to medium sized lakes which capture and retain this water. Eventually water accumulates and spills over the lake's natural rim elevation, allowing the water to make its way down the creek to the next lake, gaining volume and momentum with distance traveled. This clean and cold water makes it to Mono Lake where

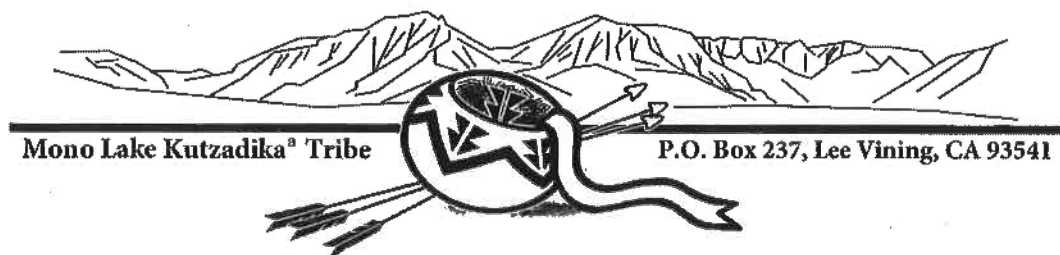


it mixes with the saline lake water. The Kootzaduka'a name for creeks and streams is *hoopaa*, which simply means flowing water.

As seen in the chart below, there are a number of water bodies channeling water from the upper elevations to their terminal point in Mono Lake. Blue symbolizes lakes, purple symbolizes creeks:



1. Food: Our Kootzaduka'a people utilized the streams and creeks in a similar fashion as the uses described for Mono Lake, but there were differences. The creeks are bounded on either side by a diverse assemblage of riparian plants such as aspens, various willows, buffalo berries, grasses and forbs, together forming a green ribbon of verdant growth which contrasted sharply with the mellow hues of the sagebrush hills and valleys through which these riparian areas traverse. Among the aspen trees abundant onions grow right after snow melt. The green stems were a delicious reminder of the spring thaw and longer, warmer days ahead. Various grass species found in adjacent meadows were harvested throughout the summer for their seeds which were toasted and ground to a fine flour. Roots, tubers and corns were dug



and cached for later use in underground stone-lined pits. Berries were enjoyed fresh and dried for winter use.

2. Basketry: Willows were used for baskets which were integral to a nomadic way of life as they were strong, and lightweight. Baskets were made for water jugs, cradleboards, and for utilitarian purposes such as winnowing and parching seeds and nuts. Finely woven baskets are an art form prized for their intricate patterns, fine stitching and symmetry of form.

2. Medicine: Plants were used by our people for medicines. Most parts of plants were prepared for the treatment of symptoms and for use in preventative health care. Even poisonous plants were used with care as pain relievers.

3. Travel Corridors: Streams were important transportation corridors. If topography allowed, trails were formed on both sides of a creek. These trails were important as they allowed for long distance travel due the abundance of water available whenever needed. Pack loads were devoted to trade items or personal belongings without the added weight of water-filled willow water jugs.

4. Hunting: Creeks and streams were filled with wildlife which made them important hunting areas. Tall willows were good to conceal hunters. Stone deadfalls were placed in seasonally wet meadows to trap small game. The upper elevation water bodies were important for bighorn sheep who inhabit rocky crags. These glacially-fed water bodies provided water and forage for the bighorn sheep. Hunters made trips to the high elevation to hunt the bighorn sheep. All parts of the animal were used including the bones, hooves and horns. Nothing was wasted or taken for granted.

5. Fishing: Before the introduction of non-native fish species, the Kootzaduka'a fished for native fish species. Our people used basketry traps hidden within undercut stream banks. They fashioned spears with specially made tips for spear fishing. They utilized dip nets made with nettle fiber string attached to wooden frames made from willow or current bushes. Trips were made following the riparian trails, up and over the Sierran crest to the upper San Joaquin watershed to harvest chinook salmon. The salmon were split open, smoke dried and packed up for the return journey. With the introduction of non-native fish to local streams, the Kootzaduka'a relied on these fish as well for subsistence.

6. Religion: There are stories that connect Kootzaduka'a religious beliefs to water bodies. Journeys were made to certain high elevation water bodies for religious purposes with offerings placed along the edge of the water. Many of these things have been looted, with looters unaware of the consequences their actions will bring upon them. In some areas our people passed by sacred water bodies in quiet procession taking care to remind children to be quiet and respectful. These children became our elders who shared with us those things that were impressed upon them.

In conclusion, we cannot overstate how central these waters are to our lives and heritage. We urge you and the Board to make the requested designations for tribal beneficial uses, so that we may protect and preserve Mono Lake, the tributaries that feed it, and the ecosystem they both support.



Mono Lake Kutzadika' Tribe

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Respectfully,



Charlotte Lange

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