

# Ashes to Avalanches: The Mono Basin in Recovery



**July 18–20, 2025 • Todd Wanner**

\$280 per person/ \$265 for Mono Lake Committee members  
enrollment limited to 12 participants

The Mono Basin is a fascinating place to observe the ongoing impacts—both beneficial and damaging—of natural disturbances. A warming climate is precipitating periodic intense wildfires in a variety of plant communities: upper montane coniferous forest, Eastside pinyon/juniper forests, the bitterbrush/sagebrush dominated steppe community, and montane meadows. Additionally, in the winter of 2022–2023, the Mono Basin experienced 100-year snowfalls with highly damaging avalanches in sub-alpine plant communities, upper montane forests, and in some places these avalanches slid almost to Mono Lake.

The focus of this course will be to visit these various disturbance sites and observe/evaluate the current health of these communities. What are the consequences for these plant communities? Are there some species which benefitted from the disturbance? Which plants/animals were most adversely impacted? Where are these communities in the process of recovery? How does length of time since the disturbance affect the recovery of the site?

As we look for answers to these questions we will enjoy birding, botanizing, nature journaling, and reflecting. Are there any lessons for humans as stewards of the Mono Basin ecosystem? Are there perhaps any life lessons that nature in recovery might be able to teach us? Come with an open mind: The natural world has much to teach us!

Todd Wanner has been a lover of nature since he was a boy, hunting and hiking in the Adirondacks of New York state. He is a recently retired Lee Vining High School and Lee Vining Elementary teacher: Environmental Science, Spanish, Physical Education. Todd has a master's degree in environmental studies/environmental education from Prescott College. His master's thesis looked at motivations for earth-care among Christian college students. Todd is an avid gardener and has lived and played in the Mono Basin for the past 17 years.

## **ITINERARY**

**July 18, 2025 at 7:00pm:** Meet in the gallery at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining (51365 Highway 395). After introductions, we will have some fun getting to know one another. Then, we will have an overview of the variety of disturbances impacting plant communities in the Basin and focus on avalanche and fire as disturbances both positive and negative for the plant communities.

**July 19, 2025 at 8:00am:** Meet at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining. We will spend the day traveling to the Virginia Lakes and Lundy Canyon drainages, focusing on the impacts of avalanche on plant communities. The day will end around 4:00pm.

**July 20, 2025 at 8:00am:** Meet at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining. We will spend the day traveling to various burn areas in and around the Mono Basin. Focus will be on Lee Vining Canyon and Mono Lake drainages to the south.

## **ACTIVITY LEVEL:**

This seminar's activity level: *difficult*. We will be walking up to three miles a day, some of which will be over uneven terrain, off trail, and will include stepping up and over obstacles. This type of walking requires good balance, some agility, and stamina. Be prepared for short, steep sections of trail with little shade.

## **WEATHER & ALTITUDE**

Temperatures in summer will be hot during the day and drop to chilly at night, with possible windy conditions and afternoon thunderstorms. Average temperatures in July in Lee Vining are 85°F (max) and 54°F (min).

This seminar will take place at elevations ranging from about 6,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level. It is a good idea to acclimate at the elevation of Lee Vining for at least 24 hours prior to the start of the seminar. Those with a history of heart, ear, or respiratory problems should consult their doctors before attending. Anyone restricted to lower elevations should not enroll.

Remember to bring (and drink!) lots of water because your body loses more water at the higher altitudes of the Mono Basin. Begin drinking extra water as you drive to higher elevation in order to prevent dehydration and headaches. Also, the sun is intense at high elevations, capable of burning even on cool and cloudy days, so be sure to protect yourself thoroughly using sunscreen, sunglasses, and hat.

## **FEES**

The cost of the seminar covers tuition only. Participants are responsible for all other fees:

- **lodging accommodations:** visit *leevining.com* to make reservations
- **all meals:** breakfasts range in price from \$3–\$8, lunches \$4–\$10, dinners \$10–\$25
- **South Tufa fee:** the \$3-per-person entrance fee to South Tufa is good for a week; 80% of it stays at Mono Lake for improvements to interpretive/educational activities
- **Old Marina fee:** the \$3-per-car-per-day fee enables Mono Lake’s state park to stay open

## MEALS

Please bring a lunch already packed in the morning plus water and snacks to eat during both days.

## TO BRING

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| ___ warm clothing (warm enough for snow!) | ___ daypack                            |
| ___ long pants (due to brush)             | ___ plenty of water (2 quarts per day) |
| ___ raincoat, just in case                | ___ boots or supportive shoes          |
| ___ hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses        | ___ binoculars/guidebooks/journal      |

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Blackwell, L. R. (2002). *Wildflowers of the Eastern Sierra and adjoining Mojave Desert and Great Basin*. Lone Pine Publishing.
- Carle, D. (2021). *Introduction to fire in California*. University of California Press.
- Rixen, C., Haag, S., Kulakowski, D., & Bebi, P. (2007). Natural avalanche disturbance shapes plant diversity and species composition in subalpine forest belt. *Journal of Vegetation Science*, 18(5), 735-742.
- Stuart, J. D., & Sawyer, J. O. (2001). *Trees and shrubs of California* (Vol. 62). University of California Press.



## Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars

P.O. Box 29 • Lee Vining, CA 93541 • (760) 647-6595 • [monolake.org/seminars](http://monolake.org/seminars)