



MONO LAKE

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2022

DWP Lowering Mono Lake

Mono Lake Hearing Imminent

Free Drawing

Fall Catalog

Do you remember setting up dominoes to knock over when you were a kid? It seemed to take forever, requiring concentration to line them up, to not bump the table, to watch for an errant sibling who could cause disaster. It didn't feel safe to leave the fragile project, not even for a second, until all the pieces were set.

And then, when everything was ready, the delicious anticipation of knocking over that first domino...

We've been setting up the dominoes at Mono Lake for years. Documenting air quality violations, monitoring alkali fly health, ferrying scientists out to study the birds. Working with community groups in Los Angeles, attending City Council meetings, and touring reporters around the Mono Basin. We've been running scenarios through the Mono Lake models to understand the effects of different water diversion scenarios. We have kept Mono Lake in front of Sacramento decision makers and strategized with our lawyers.

Thousands of Mono Lake Committee members have been setting up dominoes too. Every donation, every visit to the lake, every comment letter, every purchase in the bookstore is setting pieces to fall the right way when the time comes.

Even DWP has set up some dominoes, believe it or not. With its push to expand the Tillman Plant (see page 8) and focus on increasing recycled water capacity, stormwater capture, and better local water supplies—yielding far more than what it takes from the Mono Basin—DWP has added a line of very convincing dominoes.

The State Water Board must be the one to tip over that first domino. When they announce a date for the long-awaited hearing (see page 4), everything will move rapidly. But *they* have to do it.

I know this moment feels frustrating. We've been working for so long, not leaving the table for even a second lest the project tumble into chaos, waiting for the State Water Board to lift their finger and carefully push...

But I hope you can also feel the anticipation. The first domino is starting to tip, and the thrilling clatter of each carefully placed piece knocking the next toward a better future for Mono Lake will be just incredible.

—Elin Ljung, Communications Coordinator



COVER PHOTO COURTESY OF FORREST GALT

BRENDAN PERALZ

A few lucky visitors to South Tufa in mid-August had a rare sighting of a long-tailed weasel scampering up and down a tufa tower.

Mono Lake Committee Mission

The Mono Lake Committee is a non-profit citizens' group dedicated to protecting and restoring the Mono Basin ecosystem, educating the public about Mono Lake and the impacts on the environment of excessive water use, and promoting cooperative solutions that protect Mono Lake and meet real water needs without transferring environmental problems to other areas.



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

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Fall 2026
Volume XLVIII, Number 2

The *Mono Lake Newsletter* is a publication of the
Mono Lake Committee. ISSN #0275-6633.
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Without diversions, Mono would be rising

Volume of DWP diversions equivalent to Mono Lake's drop over the last 12 months

by Greg Reis

Los Angeles has multiple sources of water, with some local sources funded specifically to offset Mono Basin diversions. Mono Lake, on the other hand, has no additional sources of water other than runoff and precipitation. When the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) takes Mono Basin water instead of using the local sources to which it has access, it slows down Mono Lake's rise, degrading and threatening the Mono Basin ecosystem.

When Mono Lake's level is steady, it means that inflows are balanced with evaporation. But to reach its required management level of 6,392 feet above sea level—ten feet higher than it is now—Mono Lake needs an additional 450,000 acre-feet of water. In other words, inflows must exceed evaporation by that much water to raise the lake. If spread across 20 years, that would be an additional 23,000 acre-feet per year with an average rise of about half a foot each year.

Coincidentally, that amount of filling—23,000 acre-feet—is about the same volume of exported water that DWP chose to divert from Mono Lake's tributary streams over the past 12 months. Although technically allowed, these water diversions show that the health of Mono Lake is not a factor in DWP's aqueduct operations decisions.

Imagine you stood with your toes touching the water at the Mono Lake shoreline on August 1, 2025 and then returned to the exact same spot on August 1, 2026. This year you would have been standing with dry feet a little farther away from the water, since Mono Lake has dropped almost two inches over those 12 months. During that time, DWP exported 23,455 acre-feet of stream diversions to Los Angeles, equivalent to about six inches of lake level rise if left undiverted. Had those 12 months of stream diversions flowed to Mono Lake instead of LA, you would be standing in ankle-deep water. Unfortunately, DWP's diversions have

prevented that rise.

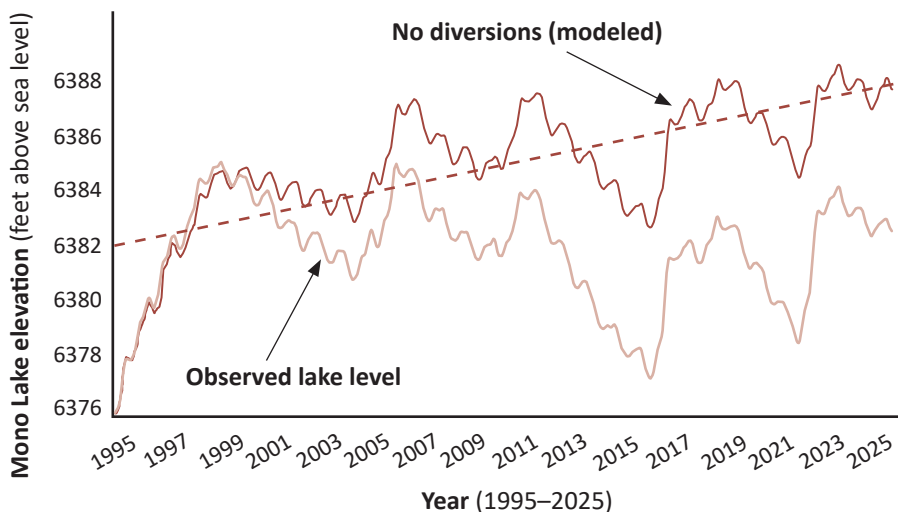
The reason this is happening: DWP always takes the maximum amount of water allowed, because it can. The diversion rules set in 1994 aren't working, and DWP, when planning its annual exports, is ignoring its own remarkable successes in growing its local water supply in LA—well beyond the amount needed to allow a pause in Mono Basin diversions (see page 8).

The diversion rules allow DWP to make environmentally responsible choices for Mono Lake, but DWP has made it very clear that unless the rules are changed, it is taking every drop. That's why that water will continue to flow toward LA instead of Mono Lake until the California State Water Resources Control Board holds the hearing (see page 4) and votes to pause diversions.

If we imagine that the State Water Board had paused surface water exports during those same 12 months, and you were standing ankle-deep in a rising Mono Lake, it does not mean that LA would have been completely cut off from its Mono Basin water supply. DWP would still have exported approximately 5,000 acre-feet of groundwater from the Mono Basin during those twelve months.

The future climate is unknown, but modeling shows there is an opportunity right now to deliver the water needed to raise Mono Lake, before climate change impacts make it more difficult. The best available climate and lake modeling show that Mono Lake *will* rise if DWP pauses stream diversions, but DWP won't do that on its own. DWP needs to be told what to do, which the State Water Board can do by upholding its promise to revisit diversion rules and pause stream diversions now to allow Mono Lake to rise to its overdue Public Trust level. ❖

Mono Lake elevation, actual vs. without diversions



This graph shows Mono Lake's level since the State Water Board hearing and a modeled projection of the lake level without DWP stream diversions. The modeling analysis shows the lake would be 5 feet higher and better protected from the negative impact of droughts without diversions. Modeled by the Mono Lake Committee.

State Water Board hearing launch at hand

All eyes turn to regulator action to fix low lake problem

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

As the end of the year approaches, so does the formal launch of the long-anticipated California State Water Resources Control Board Mono Lake hearing process. Expected to take nine or more months, the hearing is the necessary quasi-judicial procedure the Board must undertake to modify the rules governing how much water the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) can divert from tributary streams, export from the Mono Basin, and permanently take away from Mono Lake.

In March, the Board discussed Mono Lake extensively, receiving a report from the UCLA Center for Climate Science affirming that water diversions have had a significant impact delaying Mono Lake's recovery to the Board-mandated management level of 6,392 feet above sea level. The Mono Lake Committee and a wide range of interested parties called for action to pause diversions since the lake is only halfway to 6,392 feet and a decade overdue. The discussion concluded with Board members unanimously directing staff to do the legwork needed to initiate the hearing process before the end of the year.

Summer showed preparations were underway. Board staff held two science workshops covering the status of Mono Lake's limnology, brine shrimp, alkali flies, California Gulls, phalaropes, Eared Grebes, and waterfowl (see page 5).

DWP attorneys and staff sent multiple letters to the Board complaining about the process to date, calling for the cancellation of the science workshops, claiming that diversions have little relevance to lake level, criticizing the Committee, and questioning scientific data. In contrast to the widespread public, Tribal, and agency concerns about the low lake level, DWP's letters asserted that "actions taken by LADWP since issuance of [the State Water Board's 1994 decision] have been overwhelmingly successful."

Despite DWP, the State Water Board has expressed a focused purpose for the hearing. In the summer, Board documents described the plan for the hearing to "determine whether Mono Basin water diversions should be modified to reach Mono Lake's legally mandated water management level."

This makes sense as the management level was established after years of proceedings and is founded on solid science. The maximum amount of water DWP could divert was set to



Holding a hearing is the way the State Water Board, the governing body that can modify DWP's water diversions, can protect the Public Trust resources at Mono Lake.

adequately restore the lake level in the hydrological models of the time, with the clear recognition that if the numbers didn't work out, a future hearing could fix them. Of course that's exactly the situation we're in today, with the lake only halfway to the mandated level and a decade late in getting there. The hearing the Board required as a safeguard in 1994 is the one that soon will be underway.

The official start of the process will come when the Board issues a hearing notice. The notice will describe the steps of the process, ask interested parties to declare their intent to participate, and set key dates, including an initial conference of the parties.

A hearing process is intensive, and the Committee has been preparing diligently to present a principled legal, scientific, and water supply case for Board action to put the lake back on the rise to health by pausing diversions until the 6,392-foot management level is achieved.

With a record-setting El Niño poised to deliver ample water to California this winter the Committee looks forward to the hearing getting underway so that, finally, delivery of the water Mono Lake needs will be required. ❖

We expect that a date for the State Water Board hearing will be announced before the end of 2026. For the latest news about the hearing schedule and process, go to monolake.org/swbhearing.

Board workshops reveal ecological stress

by Bartshé Miller

Over the summer the California State Water Resources Control Board held two public workshops about the condition of ecological resources in the Mono Basin. The workshops followed a spring meeting about the Mono Lake report from the UCLA Center for Climate Science where the Board directed staff to prepare for a hearing and to begin gathering information on the condition of Mono Lake and its Public Trust resources (see Summer 2026 *Mono Lake Newsletter*).

The workshops featured researchers and scientists discussing data on the lake's algae, brine shrimp, alkali flies, overall productivity, salinity, and physical-chemical lake processes, as well as avian resources. The workshops were thorough and detailed, covering years of monitoring and research-based analysis on how the Mono Lake ecosystem is doing 32 years after the 1994 State Water Board decision to protect it. Broadly, they demonstrated that chronically low lake level conditions driven by 85 years of water diversions are inflicting ecological stress and instability and causing decline among key species.

Workshop 1: Water quality, salinity, brine shrimp, alkali flies

The first workshop focused on water quality, salinity, brine shrimp, and alkali flies. Dr. John Melack and Dr. Dave Herbst, two scientists who have both worked continually on Mono Lake for more than 35 years, presented. Melack discussed the limnology and the complex annual physical and chemical processes in the lake that support algae and brine shrimp. Herbst addressed alkali fly life cycle and productivity. The takeaway of the detailed, nearly two-hour workshop is that under the range of lake levels since 1994, both shrimp and flies are measurably smaller and generally less productive.



Alkali flies, which feed and breed underwater, and are a critical food resource for migratory birds, are negatively affected by the increased salinity of low lake levels.



Mono Lake's alkali flies and brine shrimp are critical for global populations of migratory birds, including Wilson's Phalaropes.

Herbst explained, "With water diversions, you get a lower lake level and increased salinity. The lower lake level results in a reduction in the benthic area and substrate availability... That, along with the constraints of increasing salinity, results in reduced rates of larval survival and development, smaller size of pupae in adults, and reduced reproductive success."

For Mono Lake's endemic brine shrimp, *Artemia monica*, higher salinities and cascading ecosystem dynamics are negatively affecting productivity. Repeated cycles of lake stratification called meromixis (a function of higher salinities and lower lake levels) are altering the timing and abundance of brine shrimp in the lake. "At current lake level ranges we expect episodes of persistent stratification to occur... We would expect, and have observed, lower algal abundance, decreased *Artemia* fecundity, lack of oxygen in deep water, reduced *Artemia* cyst hatching, and altered changes in the distribution through time of the *Artemia*, which has consequences for the birds," Melack said. The long record of limnology data also indicates a 40% decrease in annual production of overwintering cysts (eggs), a 42% decline in abundance-weighted fecundity (a metric used to describe the reproductive potential), and an 11% decrease in adult female length. A decrease in the body length of an adult brine shrimp has even greater consequences for the overall biomass of individuals as well as the population. For birds like Eared Grebes and California Gulls, which heavily depend on brine shrimp at Mono Lake, this suggests fewer nutrients and calories per shrimp foraged.

Workshop 2: Migratory and nesting birds

The second workshop featured six experts looking at the conditions of birds at Mono Lake since 1994. Mono Lake provides critical habitat for several species of birds, notably Wilson's and Red-necked phalaropes, California Gulls, and

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Will DWP choose to protect its ratepayers?

The fiscally responsible choice for Los Angeles: Raise Mono Lake to the 6,392-foot Public Trust level quickly

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

Questions about the cost of the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power's (DWP) actions at Mono Lake for its ratepayers are essential to the discussion of Mono Lake's future. Analysis shows that DWP's focus on maximizing diversions is short-term thinking that will burden LA ratepayers with tremendous costs in the long-term.

For more than 85 years, DWP has been diverting water out of Mono Lake's tributary streams and into the network of conduits, tunnels, and reservoirs that are the Los Angeles Aqueduct.

The privilege of taking the public's water comes with certain requirements, such as obtaining water rights and holding a water license issued by the California State Water Resources Control Board. But remarkably, DWP's water diversions do not require any meaningful monetary payment to the state and people of California.

The free ride on the water resource itself means DWP has paid next to nothing to divert and export more than 3.5 million acre-feet of water from the Mono Basin since 1941. That's enough water to cover the entire city with over ten feet of water. It is more than the entire present-day volume of Mono Lake. And that 3.5 million number doesn't even include the additional half-million acre-feet of free groundwater captured by the Mono Craters Tunnel.

There is no free water

But the water DWP gets for free is not free for Los Angeles ratepayers, who are billed for all the costs associated with the water system. Of course, running an aqueduct

and urban water delivery system costs money. But more significantly, DWP leadership has a fiscal obligation to anticipate—and mitigate—costly future liabilities. At Mono Lake, DWP has many compliance obligations. There is no zero-cost option, and as we head into the State Water Board hearing (see page 4) the big question is: will DWP will choose the affordable path to legal compliance—or wage an expensive fight against compliance?

Even with free water diversions, pausing diversions to rapidly achieve the mandated Public Trust level for Mono Lake of 6,392 feet is the single most fiscally responsible action Los Angeles can take.

To date, DWP has always argued against compliance—be it the Public Trust, the Clean Air Act, state law, or the 6,392-foot lake level requirement. It is a classic example of maximizing the harvest of a common resource for private benefit and outsourcing the costs of the damage done to the public.

If you live in the impacts-don't-matter mindset of the early 1900s when the Los Angeles Aqueduct was being built, it is not surprising that you'd ignore the vast and perpetually mounting impacts of excessive water diversions, such as toxic dust storms and threatening the lake ecosystem with collapse. That would lead you to argue that Mono Lake and Owens Valley water are the best deal around. Indeed, former DWP CEO Janisse Quiñones wrote earlier this year, "Los Angeles Aqueduct supplies ... are the most affordable ... water source available to Angelenos." The point of her letter was to urge the State Water Board to ignore the impacts and let the free water keep flowing, calling any potential change to diversions "unwarranted" and "imprudent." In short, pay no mind to the very real and ecological and air quality impacts and public costs of DWP's vast diversions.

Modern thinking

In contrast, the half-century fight to protect Mono Lake is built on the foundational idea that we Californians can think much better about the full package of costs and benefits associated with water extraction, plan sustainably, and actually protect the environmental marvels of the state like Mono Lake while crafting solutions that ensure people, too, get the water they need.

The Public Trust decision by the California Supreme Court, won by the Committee and Audubon in 1983 placed the power to achieve such balance in the hands of the State Water Board. "The Public Trust," the court wrote, "is an affirmation of the duty of the state to protect the people's common heritage of streams, lakes, marshlands and tidelands."

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PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBB HIRSCH

Pausing diversions to rapidly achieve the 6,392-foot level for Mono Lake is the single most fiscally responsible action Los Angeles can take.

When the State Water Board issued its landmark 1994 decision it used that power to place new requirements on DWP to ensure protection of the lake's Public Trust resources. Chief among these was the 6,392-foot management lake level, chosen to ensure the lake survives into the future, as a condition of DWP holding the ongoing privilege of taking Mono Lake's water for free.

And yet, even as DWP achieves major engineering triumphs in developing sustainable local water supplies in Los Angeles, far exceeding the volume of Mono diversions, aqueduct staff and attorneys continue to promote the tired perspective of a century ago.

DWP will have to formally present its opposition to Mono Lake protection and pursue its fight for every drop of water possible when the State Water Board hearing begins—unless Los Angeles leaders set a different course.

Will DWP continue to claim its free water privileges are its only financial priority? Or will it recognize that the aqueduct causes damage for which Los Angeles is legally responsible and finally agree to meet the State Water Board's mandate by pausing diversions—as the Committee advocates?

Fiscal realities, local solutions

While we can predict what path attorneys and aqueduct staff will take, the question is: what will true Los Angeles leaders do? The mayor, city council members, and other city leaders live in the present day, not the 1900s. They understand impacts, liability, and the necessity of operating in compliance with legal requirements. The City is investing in sustainable local water supplies not just because it is environmentally responsible but also because it is fiscally prudent to look out for the long-term interests of the city.

When the vast costs of fixing DWP's impacts are considered, pausing diversions to rapidly achieve 6,392 feet is the single most fiscally responsible action Los Angeles can take at Mono Lake.

City leaders have already begun to highlight this big picture, for example earlier this year, former DWP Commission President Richard Katz called on the State Water Board to implement “an elegant, cost-efficient, and timely” solution by pausing diversions with the confidence that the fully funded Tillman Water Reclamation Plant expansion could provide the replacement water (see page 8).

To confirm the fiscally responsible path forward, City leaders need only to look at the lesson of Owens Lake, where DWP opposed regulation, lost, and has now had to invest more than \$2.5 billion (!) to control the toxic dust storms created by its own water diversions. DWP charges customers



ROSE NELSON

The way to end air quality violations at Mono Lake: raise the lake to the mandated 6,392-foot surface elevation to inundate emissive dust flats and put them underwater.

for those costs. And they keep growing because 48 square miles of constructed dust controls require an expensive annual operation and maintenance program, in perpetuity.

DWP water diversions have caused the same hazardous dust storm problem at Mono Lake. And DWP has the same legal obligation to restore clean air in the Mono Basin.

Mono Lake is the air pollution solution

At Mono Lake there's already a studied and approved way to end air quality violations: raise the lake to the 6,392-foot surface elevation to inundate emissive dust flats and put them underwater.

When DWP argues against reducing diversions to raise the lake, it is also, quietly, arguing that it has no responsibility for fixing the air quality hazard it created. It tried that at Owens Lake too, without success. The cost of fixing DWP's destruction of clean air in the Mono Basin must be considered as part of the fiscal calculation.

A higher Mono Lake is a healthy lake that comes with the very large benefit of ending toxic dust storms. DWP's opposition inspired the Committee to look into the alternative, asking the question: what would it cost the ratepayers if DWP had to construct massively engineered Owens Lake-style dust control measures at Mono Lake?

The answer is: many hundreds of millions of dollars. A hypothetical gravel “blanket” placed over acre after acre of dusty exposed lakebed would be incredibly expensive, even more than at Owens Lake due to the inaccessible remote location of emissive lands at Mono Lake. Such a project would require excavating new gravel mines, building lengthy road networks across fragile habitats, parading unending lines of carbon-spewing haul trucks, and deploying a fleet of

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The Tillman Plant promise

DWP's Tillman Plant staff in Van Nuys extol the benefits of reduced imported water dependence

by Arya Degenhardt

This summer the Mono Lake Committee had the opportunity to tour the Donald C. Tillman Water Reclamation Plant expansion project under construction and learn more about the increased water recycling capacity it will afford the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) when it comes online in 2027.

In October 2025, with widespread support, the LA Board of Water & Power Commissioners voted to fund a significant increase in the recycled water output of the LA Groundwater Replenishment Project at the Tillman Plant to 50,000 acre-feet per year (see Fall 2025 *Mono Lake Newsletter*).

The *Los Angeles Times* made an astute observation about the vote: “In a plan that will reverberate more than 300 miles north at Mono Lake, Los Angeles city leaders have decided to nearly double the wastewater that will be transformed into drinking water at the Tillman Plant in Van Nuys.”

Years in the making

In the 1980s DWP argued that any reduction in its Mono Lake exports would force LA to take water from other places, transferring the problem to Southern California or the San Francisco Bay Delta. The Mono Lake Committee took DWP's argument as a challenge. From the Committee's perspective, LA and Mono Lake share the same need—reliable, adequate water supply—so there had to be a solution that would both help LA develop water reclamation and recycling capacity and also save Mono Lake without transferring the problem elsewhere.

In the 1990s the Committee secured more than \$100 million in state and federal funds specifically to support DWP water conservation and recycled water projects. Long story short, the money did eventually support building new recycled water infrastructure at Tillman, but the full realization of the water replacement was derailed by inaccurate publicity about recycled water safety. The Tillman Plant was completed, but only about 8,000 acre-feet annually ended up replacing existing potable water use. DWP has never acknowledged that those 8,000 annual acre-feet were part of LA's historic agreement to protect Mono Lake.

The goal is in sight

The Tillman expansion project will eventually deliver far more than double the amount of water DWP takes from Mono Lake this year, every year.

It is exciting to see such a large and long-awaited construction project in full swing with DWP engineers talking about developing new technologies and facilities to rapidly implement water recycling. In fact, DWP's own engineers are all in on pursuing and achieving Los Angeles' goal of reaching 70% local water supply by 2035, and thus reducing dependence on imported water.

As new water reclamation and stormwater capture projects come online it gets harder for DWP to say it must have Mono Basin water. As the former President of the LA Water & Power Commission wrote to the State Water Board in January 2026, “The [State Water Board] hearing process ... could be efficiently and cost-effectively focused on the implementation of the established lake level requirement by using the recycled water produced by the Tillman facility.”

And yet, DWP's stream diversions continue to lower Mono Lake.

While so many people are working together to achieve these essential milestones in the effort to reduce dependence on imported water, DWP isn't actually following through. Los Angeles City leaders, community groups, and every resident who conserves water in LA, are all actively working toward a future that reduces dependence on imported water. DWP remains stubbornly unwilling to commit local water supply gains in Los Angeles to any meaningful changes to its imported water diversions from the Mono Basin. ❖



Construction of the LA Groundwater Replenishment Project at the Tillman Plant is set to launch production of 50,000 acre-feet of water annually starting in 2027, more than three times what DWP currently diverts from Mono Basin streams.

Tribal Beneficial Uses designation advances

Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a Tribe continues leadership role in developing guidance for designating TBU

by Teri Tracy

In response to Tribal requests for greater clarity and consistency in the statewide development of Tribal Beneficial Uses designation, the California State Water Resources Control Board released a new guidance document and held a day-long workshop in July. Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a Tribal Elder Dean Tonenna gave a special presentation about progress and challenges with the Mono Basin Tribal Beneficial Uses (TBU) Designation Project.

California Tribes have long called for water quality protection for Tribal uses not adequately protected by existing regulations. TBU designations started in 2003 in the North Coast Region, but it was 2017 before TBU definitions were adopted statewide. The Mono Basin TBU project, an effort to formally recognize and protect Tribal cultural and subsistence uses of Mono Basin waters under state water quality standards, was initiated in 2018 by the Kootzaduka'a Tribe. In recent years, the Tribe has helped Lahontan Regional Water Board work through an issue of unrealistic fish harvest standards with the Tribal Subsistence Fishing TBU for Mono Basin streams.

Tribes across the state were frustrated by slow progress and inconsistent approaches being taken by regional water boards, according to Adriana Renteria, Tribal Liaison for the State Water Board, who spoke at the workshop. In response, the Tribal Strategic Caucus formed, led by Tribal representatives, including Tonenna. Tribal representatives, staff from state and regional water boards, and other partners collaborated to develop the draft guidance document released in June.

At the workshop, Tonenna described Mono Lake as the spiritual center of the Kootzaduka'a Tribe's traditional area. He said neighboring Tribes, when discussing the capacity of local Tribes to work on TBUs, supported the Mono Basin TBU project as a "test case," and that they did not want Mono Lake to become "another Owens Lake," devastated by water diversions. Tonenna described harms caused by low Mono Lake levels that included reduced alkali fly habitat, reduced *kootzabe* (alkali fly pupae) abundance, exposed lakebed creating hazardous air quality from dust storms, and a changed lake chemistry that has negatively impacted Tribal members' cultural and subsistence uses.

Tonenna painted a picture of Tribal subsistence that involves consuming many different species. He described his Tribe's objections to rigid consumption requirements that do



BRENNAN PERALTEZ

The Mono Basin Tribal Beneficial Uses project is progressing after California Tribes, including the Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a Tribe, provided guidance to the State Water Board about subsistence fishing and consumption uses.

not reflect diverse Tribal practices; these rigid requirements delayed the Tribal subsistence fishing designation on Mono Basin streams. Tribal input about this issue is included in the new guidance, and the Lahontan Board has a new planned amendment to designate Tribal Subsistence Fishing as a "probable future use" for Mono Lake tributary streams and lakes. Per the guidance document, probable future use indicates the use is not current in the water body but is expected to take place in the future—such as through cultural revitalization efforts and planned restoration. Tonenna stated his Tribe has created a "Care for the Water and Fisheries Plan" to support this planned amendment.

Workshop speakers included State Water Board attorneys who highlighted the obligation for the regional water boards to protect tribal beneficial uses, and they pointed to the Public Trust and reasonable use authorities of the State Water Board that allow it to make changes to existing water rights when necessary. Board members noted the importance of shifting evidentiary burden away from Tribes and the importance of providing technical support. Tribes from other regions also presented on TBU projects.

Written comments about the State Water Board's draft guidance document were accepted through August. The Mono Lake Committee commented in support of the Kootzaduka'a Tribe and in favor of addressing remaining Tribal concerns about the guidance document. Though a specific timeline is uncertain, the Mono Basin TBU project is once again underway, and a finalized guidance document should be released soon. ❖

Policy notes

by Bartshé Miller

Kootzaduka'a Tribe and State Parks sign MOU

In August, the Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a Tribe and California State Parks signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at Mono Lake "to formalize a relationship to promote successful consultation, collaboration, and co-stewardship for the mutual benefit of the Kootzaduka'a and State Parks," according to State Parks. The MOU encompasses both the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve and Bodie State Historic Park, the two State Park units within the traditional homelands of the Kootzaduka'a Tribe.

Tribal Chair Charlotte Lange remarked at the signing, "My grandfather told me to always take care of the land and take care of the water. We are grateful we are partnering with State Parks to protect our Tribal lands." Scott Green, Sierra District Coordinating Tribal Liaison, said, "[The MOU] reflects our shared commitment to stewardship of the land."

The California Natural Resources Agency, the parent agency to State Parks, has worked to expand Tribal collaboration, stewardship, and access around the state through State Parks, and the MOU with the Kootzaduka'a is the culmination of those efforts locally.

State Reserve boardwalk replacement planned for spring 2027

Construction on the State Reserve boardwalk below Mono Lake County Park began in August with a State Parks crew installing "diamond piers" that provide the foundation for the new, replacement boardwalk. The piers are small structures secured by metal posts, which eliminate the need for pouring a concrete footing in the sensitive wetland habitat.

Delivery of the boardwalk materials is unfortunately delayed and State Parks is now planning to construct and install the boardwalk sections in spring 2027 with the grand reopening tentatively planned

for the summer. Prior to the installation of the piers, Mono County Recreation Stewards worked to clear the boardwalk trail of invasive weeds and new willow growth since last year's fire. This work helped to expedite State Parks' launch of the boardwalk installation.

The Inn Fire destroyed the State Reserve boardwalk in May 2025 (see Fall 2025 *Mono Lake Newsletter*), and the replacement of the boardwalk has been a collaborative effort between State Parks, Mono County, the Mono Lake Committee, and a large number of volunteers that helped remove the burned boardwalk in July 2025.

Wild horse gather completed

During three days in July, the Inyo National Forest completed a gather of wild horses that had expanded their range, population, and impacts west beyond the Montgomery Pass Wild Horse Territory to Mono Lake. No horses were injured or killed in the gather operations, but according to the Inyo National Forest, "three horses were humanely euthanized due to pre-existing chronic ailments, including physical defect, poor body condition, and severe lameness." The gather was conducted after years of planning, public comment, and Tribal consultation.

A total of 458 horses were transported to the Double Devil Wild Horse Corrals, operated by the Modoc National Forest Wild Horse & Burro Program in Alturas, California. The corrals have a reputation for providing good care as well as a successful and ethical adoption program (98% adoption rate), which includes wellness checks, proper maintenance, and care under humane conditions for at least one year after adoption before an owner can receive legal title to a horse.



Construction of the State Reserve boardwalk below Mono Lake County Park is underway, with plans to reopen in 2027.

The formal adoption program for the horses began in late September.

New Mono Basin Waterfowl Director

Late last spring the State Water Board appointed Dr. Matt Reiter as the new Waterfowl Director to administer the Board's Mono Basin Waterfowl Habitat Monitoring Program. The appointment came after a Request for Proposal process and the unanimous nomination and recommendation by the Mono Basin Monitoring and Administration Team (MAT). The MAT is made up of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Trout, Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, and Mono Lake Committee, and is the State Water Board-ordered structure for overseeing restoration research and monitoring activities in the Mono Basin.

Dr. Reiter is a Research Director with Point Blue Conservation Science and has extensive experience with a broad range of research and monitoring projects evaluating waterbirds and their habitat in California and the Western Hemisphere. His extensive field and research experience provide the needed high-level background to evaluate decades of data gathered at Mono Lake under the Waterfowl Program to propose future recommendations that will guide the program for the State Water Board and the MAT. ❖

Motus operandi: Migration monitoring

by Robbie Di Paolo

2026 was the Mono Lake Committee's fourth year managing Motus wildlife tracking stations at Mono Lake. The Committee's three stations have helped detect and track the movements of 15 Red-necked Phalaropes and five Wilson's Phalaropes tagged at Mono Lake. Additionally, Mono Lake stations have contributed migration data for two American White Pelicans tagged at Great Salt Lake, a Swainson's Thrush and a White-crowned Sparrow each tagged in British Columbia, a Common Poorwill tagged in Montana, and a Purple Martin tagged in Oregon.

Motus stations work independently to detect lightweight radio tags attached to small birds, bats, and even flying insects. All detections are transmitted to an international research collaboration called the Motus Network, which is designed to detect and share the locations and movements of wildlife over any distance, whether that's across the state or across hemispheres.

Oikonus Ecosystem Knowledge, a conservation non-profit which has been conducting phalarope research at Mono Lake since 2019, worked with the Committee to help design the Mono Lake Motus system. While implementing and maintaining Motus at Mono has not been an easy task due to the Mono Basin's harsh conditions, the data has already contributed meaningfully to our understanding of phalaropes at Mono Lake. A surprising example includes a Red-necked Phalarope tagged at Mono Lake in 2025 that flew straight over the Sierra crest and was detected a little more than two hours later and 136 miles away in the Panoche Hills between Monterey and Fresno. This year, we've been able to track a Wilson's Phalarope to the Colorado River south of Las

Vegas, then to a coastal lagoon near the middle of the Gulf of California, and later to a reserve at the Colorado River Delta in the northern Gulf of California.

These two birds alone were tracked thanks to 23 different Motus stations spread across California, Arizona, and Mexico, including three at Mono Lake. But despite different station managers and research interests, the Motus network helps us help one another. A Motus station designed to track monarch butterfly migration near Santa Barbara can also detect a Mono Lake Red-necked Phalarope. And in doing so, the organisms we track show us how faraway ecosystems, and the need for habitat conservation, are connected.

See the path of these birds, the three stations the Mono Lake Committee maintains, and more at monolake.org/motus. ❖



Mono Lake Committee staff manage and maintain three Motus wildlife tracking stations in the Mono Basin.

New Mono Lake webcams!

by Andrew Youssef

The Mono Lake webcams have long been a favorite feature of the Mono Lake website—on average, they're viewed more than 50,000 times annually. Whether it's to see how much snow fell in Lee Vining after a big storm, to watch a gorgeous summer sunset over Mono Lake, or to enjoy the changing aspens along Mill Creek in the fall, the webcams have helped people stay connected to Mono Lake from wherever they are all year long.

This summer, we upgraded both the Lee Vining and Mill Creek webcams with high-definition livestreaming cameras. The new cameras provide much clearer views of the Mono Basin more reliably. Both views can also be enjoyed full screen on a phone, tablet, or computer, so you'll feel closer than ever to Mono Lake. We also plan to upgrade our Mono

Lake camera at the Scenic Area Visitor Center.

You can now also enjoy daily timelapse videos from each location to watch the beautiful and ever-changing weather and light moving across the Mono Basin. You can even adjust the speed of the timelapse video by using the controls at the bottom of the video player. Each camera also has an image history below the live video feed where you can get a glimpse of the previous three hours at each location. Click on any image to open a gallery view to flip through the most recent photos.

If you've been inspired by the webcams, we hope you'll consider chipping in to help fund these new cameras and their ongoing maintenance and you'll also further our work to protect and restore Mono Lake: monolake.org/webcams.

Full reservoirs, a rainy summer, and fast-melting low snowpack

by Greg Reis

Lee Vining precipitation was 135% of average during the 2026 water year (October 1, 2025–September 30, 2026), the eighth-highest in the 38-year record, and precipitation at Gem Lake was sixth-highest for that period. Lee Vining, where the Mono Lake Committee operates the official NOAA weather station, also experienced its wettest August, and second-wettest summer season on record at 175% of average. The patchy nature of summer thunderstorms meant not all areas of the Mono Basin experienced this extraordinary precipitation, but even the 124% and 129% of average winter precipitation exceeded what fell in all but eight of the last 38 years at these two weather stations.

Six of the years with more precipitation than this year were, as would be expected, also the wettest years for runoff during this period. The seventh, 1997, was a lot like this year in that it wasn't among the wettest runoff years, but there was a lot of wintertime runoff. Reflecting the record-warm winter, only 70% of the 2026 water year runoff occurred in the April–September season, the lowest proportion on record.

The combination of the fast-melting snowpack and the rainy summer translated into better-than-forecasted conditions for three of the Mono Basin's five creeks. Parker Creek's April–July runoff was above average: 110%, compared to a forecast of 81%. Walker Creek and Mill Creek also outperformed

their April–July runoff forecasts by over 20 percentage points. Rush Creek and Lee Vining Creek had slightly less runoff than the forecast, resulting in the total April–July runoff coming close to the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power's (DWP) 75% of average forecast.

There was no peak flow requirement for Rush Creek this year due to DWP's forecast of a Dry-Normal I year. While Rush Creek and Mono Lake got a bonus because Grant Lake Reservoir spilled, unfortunately, DWP exported water from the reservoir while it was spilling. This reduced the peak flow in the Rush Creek bottomlands to 264 cubic feet per second (cfs) when it would have been 325 cfs had DWP waited until the end of the summer to export, as is the typical operation. ❖

Lakewatch

What does a super El Niño mean for Mono Lake?

by Greg Reis

The strongest El Niño on record is expected to peak this winter, bringing California very strong odds of above-average rainfall. The record of strong El Niños is small so it is difficult to use observational data to make predictions.

The table at right shows the seven strongest El Niños and how Mono Basin precipitation and Mono Lake levels were affected.

Despite the current record warmth in the tropical ocean, El Niño does not necessarily mean a warmer and less-snowy winter in California. Of these seven strongest El Niños, five of them had a lower percent of average snowfall than their percent of average

winter precipitation at Mono Lake. But the other two, 1958 and 1973, had 129% and 135% of average snowfall, respectively.

The bottom line: A super El Niño strongly tilts the odds toward a wet winter in California. Mono Lake rises

during wet winters. So, the odds are good we will see a rising lake next year. ❖

Greg Reis is the Committee's Information & Restoration Specialist. He unexpectedly saw a bear in Cottonwood Canyon in August.

Water year	Peak El Niño RONI*	Cain Ranch precipitation	Observed Mono Lake rise/fall (feet)	Calculated Mono Lake rise/fall with no stream diversions (feet)
1958	Strong: 1.89	145%	+0.4	+1.6
1966	Strong: 1.99	102%	-1.7	-1.0
1973	Strong: 1.97	113%	-1.5	+1.4
1983	Very strong: 2.4	158%	+5.8	+6.6
1992	Very strong: 2.12	68%	-0.6	-0.5
1998	Very strong: 2.28	121%	+2.3	+2.7
2016	Very strong: 2.25	76%	-0.9	-0.6

A very strong El Niño provides good odds for a wetter-than-average year and a rising lake, but these seven strongest El Niños show there is still a chance of a drier year. This year's RONI is predicted to peak in December higher than 2.7. *Relative Oceanic Niño Index*

6,417'

Prediversion lake level, 1941

6,392'

Management lake level

6,382.0'

Current lake level

6,372'

Historic low, 1982

Mono Basin Journal

A roundup of quiet happenings at Mono Lake

by Geoffrey McQuilkin



The blue waters of Mono Lake are now turning green for the winter as the brine shrimp fade away until next year. The color contrast is sharp against the bright white shores of Paoha Island where dynamic, but essentially invisible, change is underway.

Recent scientific analysis has found that the inner portion of the north end of the island has been sinking slowly, steadily, at the rate of one centimeter a year—for decades.

The decline of the island surface is of such a small scale that specialized remote sensing equipment and technical analysis is

needed to detect the imperceptible change.

The decline of the water's surface of Mono Lake this year, by contrast, is easily observed at the shore of the lake. Long lines of sand and alkali fly pupae mark where the waves lapped in the spring. Now the lake is lower.

The great geologic forces pulling at Paoha Island lie beyond our control, but soon, friends of the lake will have the chance to question, and change, the rules that let aqueduct operators choose to maximize water diversions at a time of plenty to push the lake lower, again, this year. ❖

Benchmarks



In September, members of the original Mono Basin Research Group gathered at Mono Lake for a 50th reunion. Their work to study and document Mono Lake's ecological condition in the summer of 1976 showed just how close to collapse the ecosystem had been pushed by DWP's water diversions, and became the driving force to found the Mono Lake Committee.



In their own words

Here at the Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center (OEC) we have an open journal that serves as a free space for group members to express their thoughts on their experiences during their visits. A register at the top of a mountain, it is a place for reflections, and a marker of people and time in a special place. We started the book in 2024 and it is full of inspiration. As we close out the 2026 OEC season we wanted to share some of the participants' reflections on what the program means to them.

"This program was honestly nothing like what I was expecting at all. I thought this was going to simply be a hiking trip but I'm so grateful it wasn't. I learned so much through my experiences here, thanks to the program." —California State University Northridge, Chicano & Chicana Studies Department

"I believe that this program makes dreams and wonders come true. For many students this was their first time to Mono Lake." —California State University Northridge, EOP Program

"This was the best experience I ever had and it reminds me to take life slow." —Pacoima Beautiful

"This was a wonderful time. The alignment I felt in my spirit, my understanding, and body with my world brought peace. I think a lot about what a world of sustainability, care, love and curiosity looks like." —East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice

"Honestamente mis hijos son 'city kids' y estoy preocupada y no nos va a gustar. Pero Mono Lake era magical y todas las beautiful things melted away the smog y dirt from their tiny souls. This trip was a core memoria for sure." —East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice

Top: Communities for a Better Environment shows how far Mono Lake needs to rise to achieve the mandated healthy 6,392-foot elevation level.



Recognizing longtime partnerships

Thanks to a grant from a thoughtful family foundation we were able to recognize five of our Los Angeles community group partners with funds to support their good work. At the end of the summer, I met with each group to give them checks for their organizations to use as they see fit. It was special for us to be able to support these groups that are working so hard to make the world a better place—both in LA and at Mono Lake.



The mission of the Mono Lake Committee's Mono Basin Outdoor Education Center is to build understanding and appreciation for the Mono Basin/Los Angeles watershed through education programs and muscle-powered recreational activity; to demonstrate that balanced solutions are possible for meeting the water needs of people and the environment; and to kindle stewardship through service projects that restore and improve the quality of the Mono Basin watershed.

monolake.org/oec facebook.com/mono.oec

2026 Experience Ambientalia exchange

by Ryan Garrett

Eastern Sierra students in the Experience Ambientalia program met in person with their international peers on the shores of Laguna Mar Chiquita in Argentina in July. Experience Ambientalia connects students at Mono Lake and Laguna Mar Chiquita, sister saline lakes that are linked by small migrating shorebirds called Wilson's Phalaropes.

Laguna de Pozuelos

This year's exchange also welcomed students and teachers from Laguna de Pozuelos, a saline lake at roughly 14,000 feet in Argentina's Andean highlands that hosts tens of thousands of Wilson's Phalaropes each migration season. The community members from Pozuelos taught us about their unique ecosystem where, despite sitting within an arid mountain climate, the water in the region supports a plethora of unique bird species like Andean Avocets, Andean Gulls, and James' Flamingos, plus vicuñas. Laguna de Pozuelos is located in the Puna, an ecologically sensitive region that is also rich in lithium. Lithium extraction is environmentally intensive, diverting massive amounts of water, and has negatively affected the region's Indigenous communities, who have been excluded from decisions over land use in their ancestral territories and displaced by mining operations.

For the Ambientalia students, learning about threats to Laguna de Pozuelos added a new dimension to a familiar story. They had already learned how agriculture, pollution, and municipal diversions are degrading Laguna Mar Chiquita, and they know that Mono Lake is threatened by Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) water diversions.

Despite these threats, all three communities share a deep commitment to protecting their lakes. In Argentina, students learned about conservation efforts through presentations on ecological restoration and ecotourism in Ansenuza National Park; shorebird evolution, morphology, and migrations; wildlife camera monitoring of pumas and maned wolves; leave-no-trace principles and survival skills, and more.

A once-in-a-lifetime experience

Our visit to Argentina serendipitously coincided with the FIFA Men's World Cup. Together with the Mar Chiquita locals we watched Argentina beat England in a thrilling semifinal match. Following the win the town took to the streets and celebrated for hours—yet another once-in-a-lifetime experience for the students.

Our students came home inspired by their peers and the advocates working tirelessly to safeguard the waters and wildlife of Laguna Mar Chiquita and Laguna de Pozuelos.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FUNDACIÓN LÍDERES DE ANSENUZA

Experience Ambientalia students from the Eastern Sierra with fellow Argentinian students during this year's visit to Laguna Mar Chiquita.

Reflecting on the exchange, one student wrote, "This experience was an incredible opportunity to open my mind, understand the importance of protecting salt lakes, and exchange perspectives on the realities of Mono Lake and Mar Chiquita. It made a lasting impact on my life by inspiring me to take a more active role in caring for nature and to view environmental issues with a more critical and committed mindset."

Another wrote, "Through this program I developed several new skills and perspectives that have deepened my understanding of environmental conservation. I gained a deeper understanding of environmental policy, especially how the Mono Lake Committee fought to restore water levels against DWP. I also developed naturalist skills like identifying local species and understanding how water levels affect the ecosystem. Most importantly, I learned how community action, education, and fundraising can make a real difference in protecting the environment."

Fourth year of the program

We kicked off the fourth year of Experience Ambientalia this fall. New this year, students and teachers from Lake Abert in Oregon and Great Salt Lake in Utah have started their own chapters of the program, creating cousin programs within the Great Basin. We hope to host these students at the Committee's Outdoor Education Center in the near future.

We look forward to an exciting year ahead and greatly appreciate all the community support that makes this program possible. Thank you to Mammoth Lakes Rotary, Bishop Rotary Foundation, DeChambeau Creek Foundation, June Lake Women's Club, Eastern Sierra Bird Alliance, Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP, and Mono Lake Committee members. Equally essential is the leadership of Marina Castellino, co-director of Experience Ambientalia, the dedicated team at Fundación Líderes de Ansenuza, and Manomet Conservation Sciences. ❖



MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

INFORMATION CENTER & BOOKSTORE

Fall Catalog



CALIFORNIA GULL HOODIE

Show your love for Mono Lake's iconic California Gulls! Brendan and Roni are wearing our poconip-blue hooded sweatshirt with the Mono Lake Committee logo on the front and a gull on the back.

Mono Lake Committee exclusive.

California Gull hoodie, 50% cotton and 50% polyester, unisex sizes S-XXXL: \$60.00

MONO LAKE COMMITTEE LOGO CAP

Spread the word about Mono Lake with our logo cap! The light blue cap, on Annakate, brings to mind summer wildflowers, waters, and skies. The green color of the cap, on Brendan, below, is a near-perfect sagebrush color match.

Mono Lake Committee exclusive.

Mono Lake Committee logo cap, 100% cotton unisex, one size, adjustable, specify light blue or sagebrush: \$26.00



NEW!



SUN-PRINT TUFA HAT

Local artist Kali McKeown designed this hat with a blue Mono Lake sun-print, shown on Roni. Choose from a washed cotton hat in goldenrod or spruce, or, a corduroy hat in copper, rabbitbrush yellow, lavender, or juniper. *Mono Lake Committee exclusive.*

Sun-print tufa hat, 100% cotton, unisex, one size, adjustable, please specify style and color: \$35.00



SUN-PRINT DETAIL

MONO LAKE COMMITTEE LOGO TOTE

This 100% organic cotton, navy blue tote bag, carried by Brendan, is sturdy, roomy, and a great way to show your love for Mono Lake. *Mono Lake Committee exclusive.*

Mono Lake Committee logo tote, 100% organic cotton, 12½" x 14½" x 7", handle length 24¼": \$20.00



NEW!

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



MONO LAKE STAINED-GLASS ORNAMENT

Local artist Sapphire Stoner has captured the blue essence of Mono Lake's waters with these handmade stained-glass ornaments. Each one is in the shape of Mono Lake and features Mono Lake's two islands—Paoha and Negit—in a different shade of blue. These *Mono Lake Committee exclusive* ornaments vary slightly.
Mono Lake stained-glass ornament, approx. 4½" x 3¼", natural variations in color: \$70.00

CHICKADEE HOLIDAY CARD SET

This letterpress design of a chubby chickadee perched above a cluster of pinecones is simply heartwarming. The deckle-edged cards have the message "May the joys of the season be yours" inside in red ink.
Chickadee holiday card set, 8 cards with envelopes, 5"x 7": \$35.00



MONO LAKE HOLIDAY CARD SET

Snowfall and wintry trappings adorn Wendy Morgan's cards that feature beloved Mono Basin wildlife. "May you have a Happy Holiday and joyous New Year" is printed inside in red ink. *Mono Lake Committee exclusive.*
Mono Lake holiday card set, 10 unique cards with envelopes, 6½" x 5": \$18.00



BEARS



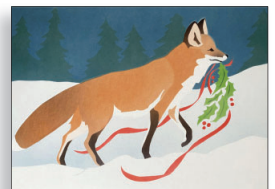
HOUSE WRENS



HAIRY WOODPECKERS



GREAT HORNED OWLS



RED FOX



PIKA



DARK-EYED JUNCOS



GREAT BLUE HERON

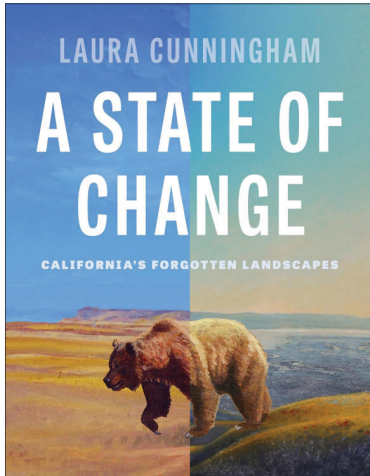


WHITE-BREADED
NUTHATCHES



CLARK'S NUTCRACKERS

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



A STATE OF CHANGE: CALIFORNIA'S FORGOTTEN LANDSCAPES

BY LAURA CUNNINGHAM

This much-anticipated update of a conservation classic braids together art, biology, and paleontology to paint a picture of pre-colonial California. The aim of this book is to inspire a brighter future through a blend of science, prose, art, and Indigenous stewardship practices.

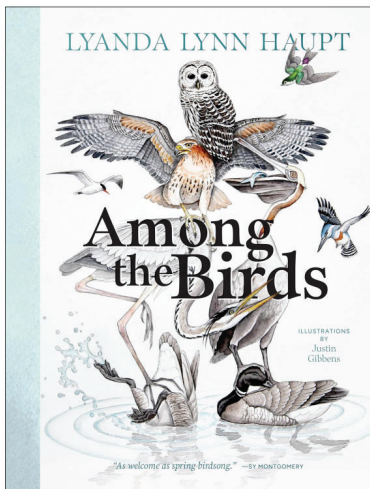
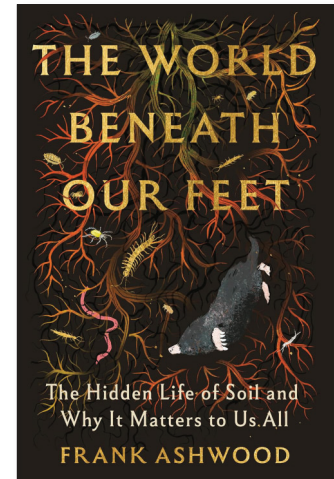
A State of Change, hardcover, 440 pages,
Heyday Books, 9"x 7": \$55.00

THE WORLD BENEATH OUR FEET: THE HIDDEN LIFE OF SOIL AND WHY IT MATTERS TO US ALL

BY FRANK ASHWOOD

Our lives are intricately tied to soil. Ashwood, a soil ecologist, explores the little-known underground world and helps us find awe and appreciation for the microorganisms, critters, fungi, and processes that sustain life above ground.

The World Beneath Our Feet, hardcover, 240 pages,
Random House, 9½"x 6¼": \$30.00



AMONG THE BIRDS

WRITTEN BY LYANDA LYNN HAUPT

ILLUSTRATED BY JUSTIN GIBBENS

This lovely book contains short essays on Cascadian birds, many species of which are also found in the Eastern Sierra. Vignettes include natural history and personal observations on American Dipper, Western Meadowlark, Clark's Nutcracker, Osprey, and more.

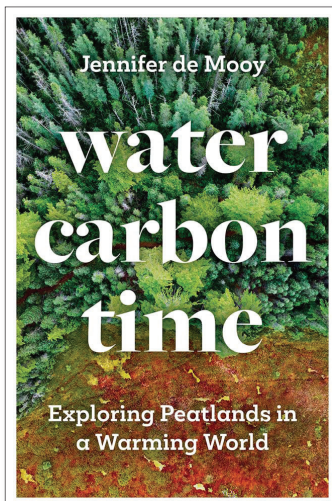
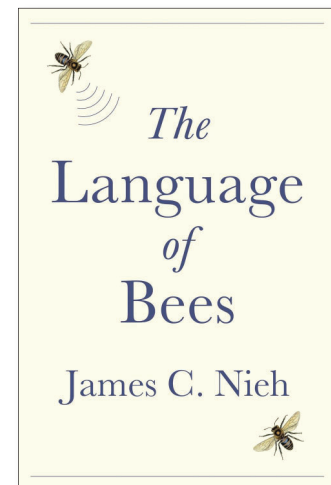
Among the Birds, hardcover, 232 pages, Skipstone Press,
7½"x 5¾": \$28.00

THE LANGUAGE OF BEES

BY JAMES C. NIEH

The findings about bee communication in this book will make your mind buzz! This book explores social bees, which live in multigenerational groups that collectively care for their young and have specialized labor roles. This is a rich and engaging book that is perfect for curious minds.

The Language of Bees, hardcover, 288 pages,
Princeton University Press, 9¼"x 6": \$29.95



WATER, CARBON, TIME:

EXPLORING PEATLANDS IN A WARMING WORLD

BY JENNIFER DE MOOY

This exploration of peatlands will amaze you! Understanding peatlands requires a kaleidoscopic view that incorporates geography, ecology, and botany. Learn how peatlands can aid in slowing climate change, alleviate wildfire danger, and hold back floods.

Water, Carbon, Time, paperback, 200 pages, University of Minnesota Press, 8¼"x 5½": \$19.95

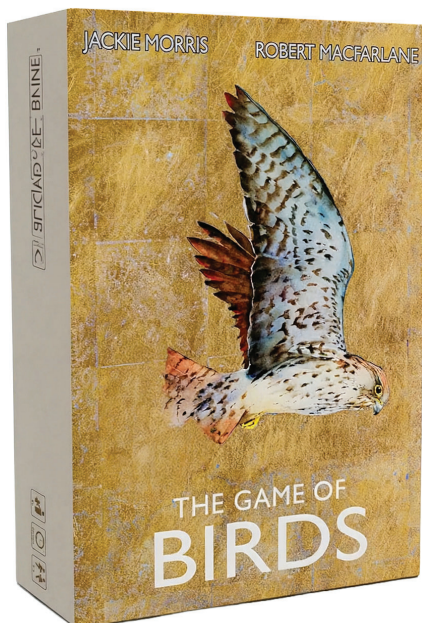
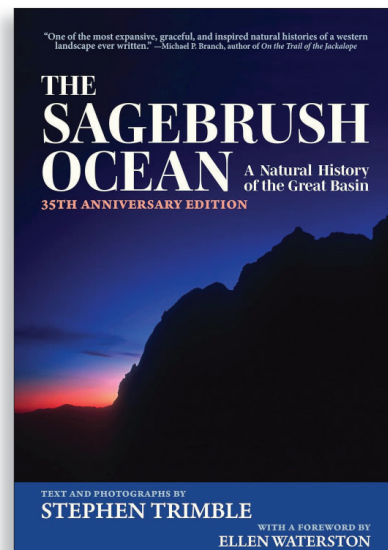
order at monolake.org/shop or (760) 647-6595

THE SAGEBRUSH OCEAN: A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE GREAT BASIN

BY STEPHEN TRIMBLE

Having immersed himself in the Great Basin for decades now, Trimble has updated this essential introduction to the natural history and ecology of the Great Basin. This unique landscape of desert, mountains, lakes, flora, and fauna has experienced new challenges since the original publication, and Trimble's writing continues to capture the essence of this wild and remote country.

The Sagebrush Ocean, paperback, 440 pages, University of Nevada Press, 7"x 10": \$39.95



THE GAME OF BIRDS

BOARD GAME

In this family card game based on *The Book of Birds* by Jackie Morris and Robert Macfarlane, the aim is to rescue as many bird species as possible. Made for 2–4 players ages 8+, players compete to become the most successful bird conservationist in this fun, beautifully illustrated, and educational game.

The Game of Birds board game,
7"x 10¼"x 2": \$35.00

MONO LAKE HAND-PAINTED TILE

This hand-painted tile designed by artist Elany Prusa reflects the picturesque Mono Lake shoreline. Hang this tile as art or use it as a trivet to spark a conversation about Mono Lake.

Mono Lake Committee exclusive.

Mono Lake hand-painted tile, 6"x 6": \$50.00



ARTISANAL CHOCOLATE BARS

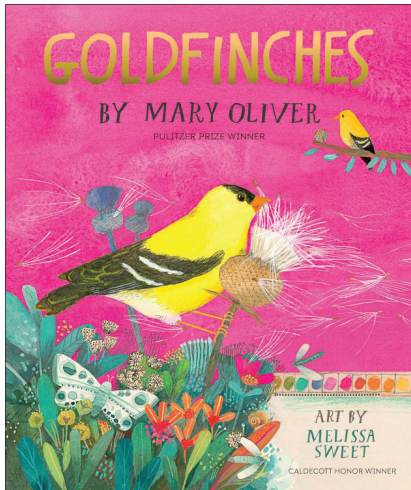
These 75% cacao chocolate bars from Twenty-four Blackbirds are made from meticulously sourced, stone-ground cacao beans. The Uganda Semuliki Forest bar has luscious and creamy notes of cherry, hazelnut, and toast. The Honduras Wampusirpi bar is smooth and buttery with notes of citrus, roasted almonds, and walnuts. The Tanzania Kokoa Kamili bar has flavors of red fruit, red velvet cake, and blackberry tart.

Artisanal chocolate bars, please specify variety:

\$13.00



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



GOLDFINCHES

WRITTEN BY MARY OLIVER

ILLUSTRATED BY MELISSA SWEET

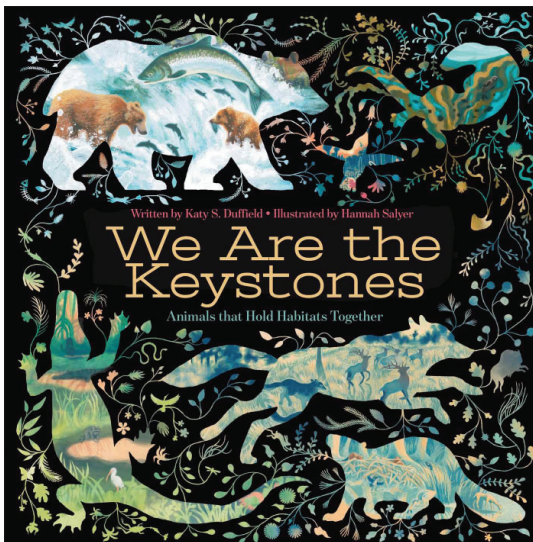
This stunning book features Mary Oliver's beloved poem brought to life with vibrant mixed-media artwork. Perfect for kids ages 4–8, it is a joyful and accessible introduction to Oliver's words and sense of wonder.

Goldfinches, hardcover, 40 pages, Viking Books for Young Readers, 9¼"x 8": \$18.99

LITTLE BROWN BAT PLUSH

In the Mono Basin, this nocturnal mammal can be seen in the evenings catching insects. Little brown bats prefer to be near water and are therefore susceptible to the impacts of water diversions. With its pointy ears and soft wings, this plushie is cute and cuddly.

Little brown bat plush, 7" long: \$20.00



WE ARE THE KEYSTONES: ANIMALS THAT HOLD HABITATS TOGETHER

WRITTEN BY KATY S. DUFFIELD

ILLUSTRATED BY HANNAH SALYER

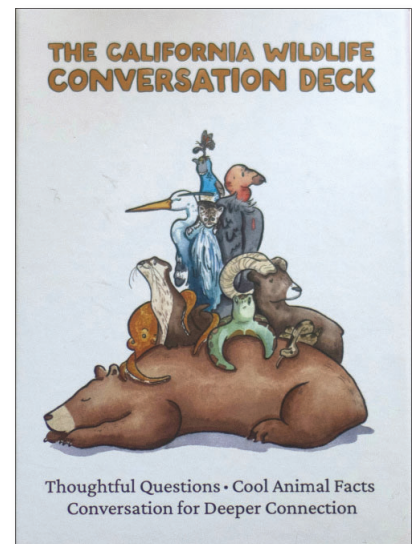
Meet keystone species—from beavers to elephants and alligators to hummingbirds in this beautifully illustrated book for children ages 4–8. A blend of poetry, natural history, and artwork brings ecological connections to life in enchanting and engaging ways.

We Are the Keystones, hardcover, 40 pages, Beach Lane Books, 11"x 11": \$19.99

THE CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE CONVERSATION DECK

Skip the small talk and start meaningful conversations! This conversation card set can be used with others or serve as a prompt for personal reflection. Each card has a beautifully illustrated animal, neat facts about the animal, and three interesting questions to consider.

The California Wildlife Conversation Deck, 60 cards, 4½"x 6½"x 1½": \$28.00



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

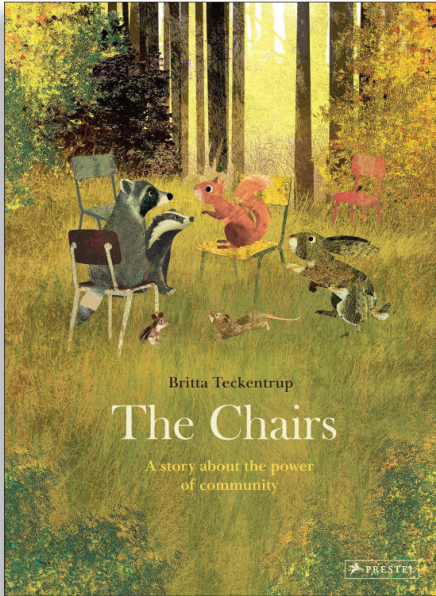
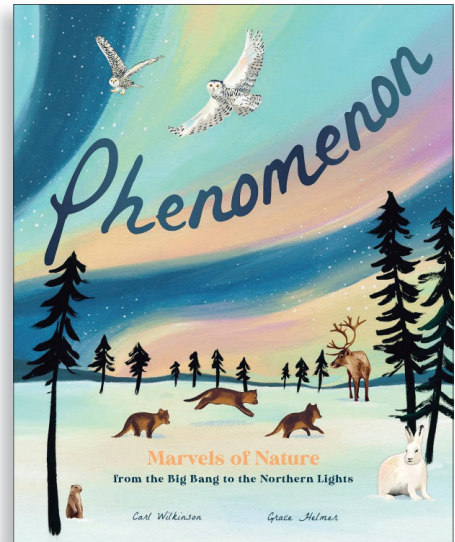
**PHENOMENON:
MARVELS OF NATURE FROM THE
BIG BANG TO THE NORTHERN LIGHTS**

WRITTEN BY CARL WILKINSON

ILLUSTRATED BY GRACE HELMER

Learn about 40 wonders of nature through captivating illustrations and beautifully delivered facts in this inspiring book for children ages 7–10. Some of the phenomena include auroras, fairy rings, retreating glaciers, black holes, and bioluminescence in an approachable way to pique children's interest for further discovery.

Phenomenon, hardcover, 96 pages,
Magic Cat, 11½"x 9¼": \$24.99



THE CHAIRS: A STORY ABOUT THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

BY BRITTA TECKENTRUP

In this funny, touching, and wise story, an inviting set of chairs appears in a forest clearing, and critters of all shapes and sizes use them to create a joyful home. When their sanctuary is threatened, the animals find the strength in their community. This timely story for children ages 5–9 speaks directly to experiences children know from their own lives, and to the power of a community that welcomes all.

The Chairs, hardcover, 96 pages, Prestel Junior, 10¼"x 7¾": \$24.99

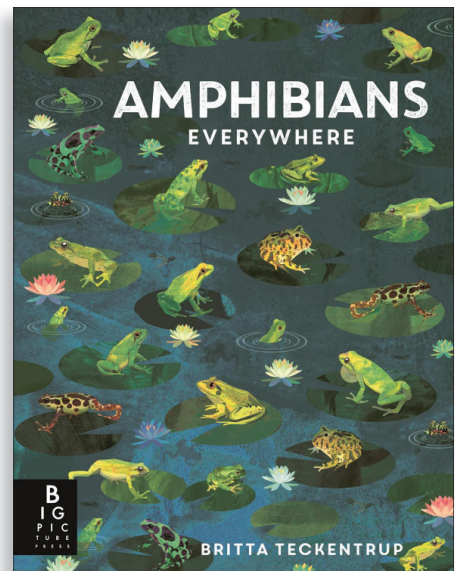
AMPHIBIANS EVERYWHERE

WRITTEN BY CAMILLA DE LA BEDOYERE

ILLUSTRATED BY BRITTA TECKENTRUP

This book shows readers where in the world different, and often elusive, amphibians can be found and what makes each species unique. The sixth book in this beloved series of gorgeously illustrated non-fiction books is perfect for children ages 6–9, and their grown-ups too.

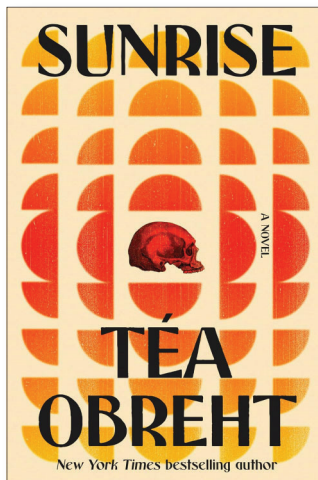
Amphibians Everywhere, hardcover, 32
pages, Big Picture Press,
12"x 9½": \$19.99



GREAT BLUE HERON PLUSH

This cute Great Blue Heron stuffed animal has soft lanky legs and a funny carrot-orange bill that are sure to make kids and bird lovers smile.

Great Blue Heron plush, 12" tall: \$20.00



SUNRISE

BY TÉA OBREHT

Three stories unfold and converge in this novel that spans lives, places, and years. With a plane crash in Wyoming, a ghost town, an old manuscript with a Western hero, and three strangers separated by time and circumstance, Obreht challenges myths, heroes, villains, and what we think we know of our own lives.

Sunrise, hardcover, 336 pages, Random House, 9½"x 6½": \$29.00

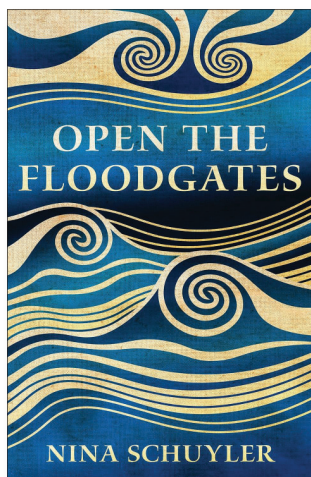
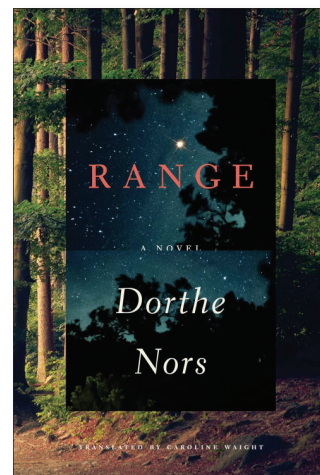
RANGE

WRITTEN BY DORTHE NORS

TRANSLATED BY CAROLINE WAIGHT

This Danish novel is set in an unnamed town in Scandinavia where an astrophysicist has chosen to take a sabbatical to study gamma-ray bursts. She expects to find solitude and to commit only to the study of the skies but is met with unexpected interactions that lead to self-study.

Range, paperback, 320 pages, Graywolf Press, 8¼"x 5½": \$18.00



OPEN THE FLOODGATES

BY NINA SCHUYLER

A living, breathing river is the main character in this novel. Having acquired the status of personhood, the river seeks protection from pollutants, toxins, waste, and siphoning. However, when the river floods, it must stand trial for its destruction in the case of *The River v. The Town of Mellen*. This book is philosophical and exploratory with a prose style like a river's flow.

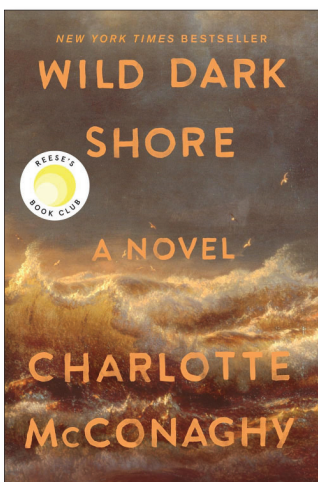
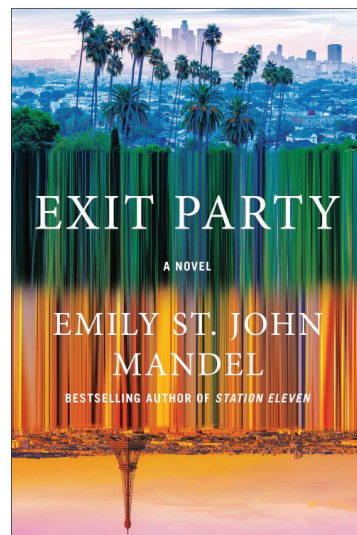
Open the Floodgates, hardcover, 224 pages, Reverberations Books, 8½"x 5½": \$24.95

EXIT PARTY

BY EMILY ST. JOHN MANDEL

This novel is set in 2031 Los Angeles during the first spring after the collapse of the United States. Complete with a wild plot, this novel is about the price of safety and the perils of the surveillance state. It is a requiem for a world not unlike our own, and a breathtaking story of resilience in the face of cataclysmic change.

Exit Party, hardcover, 320 pages, Knopf Publishing Group, 9½"x 6¼": \$32.00



WILD DARK SHORE

BY CHARLOTTE McCONAGHY

Off the coast of Antarctica lies an island where a community of scientists had once gathered to oversee a seed bank. Rising oceans cause the project to sunset and only the Salt family remains on the island. After a violent storm washes a woman ashore, secrets slowly come to light in this fantastic mystery novel.

Wild Dark Shore, paperback, 320 pages, Flatiron Books, 8¼"x 5½": \$18.99

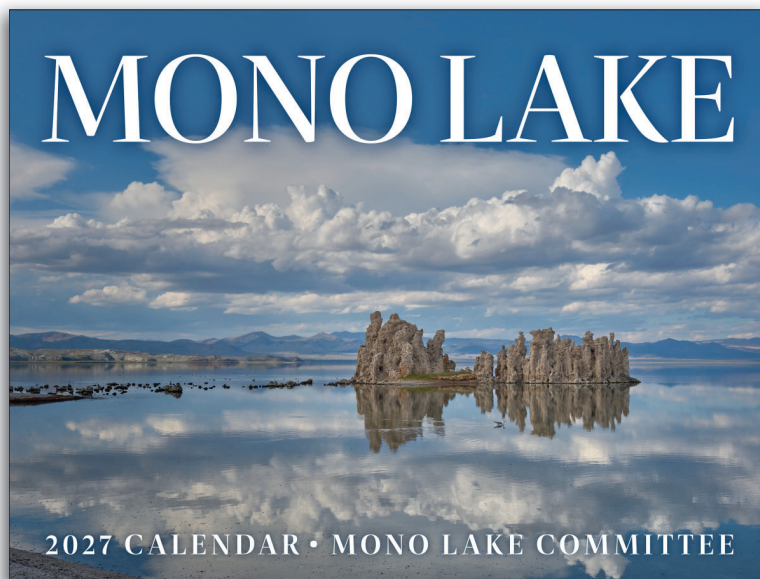
2027 MONO LAKE CALENDAR

Dustings of snow, glowing fall colors, blades of wetland grasses, wings in flight, and the blue skies of the Mono Basin are all captured in this edition of our favorite calendar. This year's essay is from law professor Erin Ryan. Discounts available for orders of two or more calendars.

Mono Lake Committee exclusive.

2027 Mono Lake Calendar,

13"x 9½": \$14.95



MONO LAKE WATER COLUMN & THREE BIRDS STICKERS

Pacific Coast artist Drew Madden has captured Mono Lake's waters in two uniquely illustrated, *Mono Lake Committee exclusive* stickers. The water column sticker captures an underwater view of brine shrimp and alkali flies with tufa and birds above. The three birds sticker shows an Eared Grebe, a California Gull, and a Wilson's Phalarope.

Mono Lake water column & three birds stickers, 4½" x 1¾" and 2½" x 4", please specify sticker: \$3.00



SAVE MONO LAKE LICENSE

PLATE FRAME

Remind everyone who sees your vehicle that it is time to save Mono Lake with this *Mono Lake Committee exclusive* license plate frame.

License plate frame, 12¼" x 6¼":

\$20.00



2026 Free Drawing to save Mono Lake

Tickets due by December 9

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

You could win one of these great prizes:

- Mammoth Mountain & June Mountain ski pass
- two-night stay at the Empeiria High Sierra Hotel, breakfast at Stellar Brew, a movie at Minaret Cinemas, and dinner at Giovanni's Restaurant in Mammoth Lakes
- Mono Basin Field Seminar for two and a Stio hip pack
- two-night stay at the historic Yosemite Valley Lodge
- two-night stay at The Redwoods in Yosemite plus a Yosemite Conservancy custom outdoor adventure
- Tamarack Cross Country Ski Center season pass
- Mono Lake Committee canoe tour for four
- Patagonia Nano Puff jackets and gear
- registration for the 2027 Owens Valley Bird Festival, one-night stay at Outbound Mammoth, and a gift certificate for Looney Bean in Mammoth Lakes
- Mono Lake Committee bookstore shopping spree
- admission to the Nevada Museum of Art and the Fleischmann Planetarium in Reno
- tickets to the 2027 California River Awards Gala hosted by Friends of the River
- admission to The Huntington and VIP tickets to The Broad contemporary art museum
- one-night stay at June Lake Pines, coffee at Stellar Brew, a Mono Lake canoe tour, and a movie at Minaret Cinemas in Mammoth Lakes
- two-night stay at the Inn at Benton Hot Springs and a gift certificate for Eastside Sports in Bishop
- sailing trip on San Francisco Bay with Captain Kirk's Sailing Adventures
- one-night stay at the Limelight Mammoth and a Bodie Foundation custom tour for four
- Island Packers cruise to Channel Islands National Park
- Mammoth Mountain pint glass, tumbler, and coaster set from North Drinkware
- admission to the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach
- REI Flexlite camp chair and trail pack
- Juniper Ridge home and body care gift set
- credit for boat rental, campsite, or cabin at Lundy Lake Resort, coffee at Looney Bean, and a movie at Minaret Cinemas in Mammoth Lakes
- tickets to the World Forestry Center in Portland, OR
- admission to the Walt Disney Family Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art



Eared Grebes.

Wilson's Phalaropes, currently under federal agency review to determine whether they warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act, depend on Mono Lake for staging during migration. Ryan Carle of Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge, an expert on phalaropes, commented, "Would accelerating the progress toward reaching that 6,392-foot lake level benefit the status of phalaropes? My answer is yes, because other vitally important staging sites are in danger of collapse... And that leaves Mono Lake as the only reliable large staging site."

For California Gulls, chronically low lake levels are causing harm. Coyote predation, changes in lake productivity, and invasive weeds on the nesting grounds—all caused by a history of stream diversions and lake levels well below the mandated 6,392-foot elevation—are inescapable problems for the gulls. According to Ryan Burnett, the lead Point Blue Conservation Science researcher for California Gulls, "The nesting population at Mono Lake has been in pretty steep decline, in particular in recent years... When we have good productivity years they're not as good as they used to be and when we have bad productivity years, they're worse. In fact, in 2022 and 2024, we had the two worst productivity years at Mono Lake with 2024 representing almost a complete population breeding failure at Mono Lake."

Ninety percent of the Eared Grebe population in North America stages at Great Salt Lake and Mono Lake. The timing and abundance of Mono Lake's fall brine shrimp population is not consistently reliable for Eared Grebe migration. Simultaneously, Great Salt Lake's ecological health is in critical condition, verging on collapse due to a similar, enduring legacy of water diversions. Dr. Sean Boyd,

Researcher Emeritus of Environment & Climate Change Canada, has worked with Eared Grebes for decades, and he outlined the connection between varying brine shrimp densities in Mono Lake and Eared Grebe abundance patterns, indicating that "A higher lake elevation [at] the mandated level will lead to lower salinity levels and higher shrimp levels, which will ultimately lead to not just more grebes, but maybe more stable populations of grebes and grebe populations not crashing..."

Workshops provide detailed reasons to pause diversions

It has been more than three decades since this many researchers and scientists convened to present detailed science and results on the condition of Mono Lake's ecological health. Their findings showed clear and compelling reasons to pause diversions and raise Mono Lake as soon as possible.

As expected, DWP objected to the workshops and went so far as filing a request that they be canceled. Following the workshops DWP also submitted comments, questions, and assertions regarding biological resources, ecosystem health, and limnology. The letters from DWP and their outside counsel demonstrate its commitment to oppose, dispute, or delay any decision to change the current diversion criteria, even if only temporarily. If anything, science shows, from brine shrimp to birds, the need to raise the lake has only become more urgent in the last 32 years. ❖

To read more about the 2026 State Water Board workshops and see the full workshop videos, go to monolake.org/2026workshops.

heavy equipment within the state and federally protected lands around the lake. And then there is maintenance, year after year after year. All told, such a dust pollution abatement scheme at Mono Lake would likely cost more than \$1 billion.

Considering the ratepayers

So, what really is in the financial interest of Los Angeles citizens paying their monthly water bills? The cost of solving the air quality problem by pausing diversions, using the new Tillman facility water as an offset, turns out to be much cheaper than building engineered dust controls at the lake, even with conservative pricing assumptions. And, as Katz described, the local replacement supply from Tillman is already funded and coming online.

Interestingly, our neighbors in the conservative Utah state government are worried about similar air quality problems from the declining Great Salt Lake. They studied the dust

control work at Mono Lake and Owens Lake and came to the same conclusion. A recent Utah report cautioned about the enormous costs of engineered solutions and observed, "Among the most promising and potentially cost-effective solutions is a nature-based approach focused on restoring the lake's ecological health with dust mitigation as a co-benefit." Which is to say that the 1994 State Water Board solution already mandated for Mono Lake is what Utah aspires to achieve.

When the State Water Board hearing begins, the Mono Lake Committee and Los Angeles ratepayers will be watching closely to see what position DWP advances—and if it has backing from City leaders. Whether DWP chooses to admit it or not, the fiscally responsible position is clear: the lowest cost way to fulfill DWP's legal obligations to fix the toxic dust storm problem it created is to raise Mono Lake to the mandated 6,392-foot elevation as quickly as possible. ❖

Staff migrations

by Teri Tracy

The past several months saw an energetic crew of seasonal staff providing interesting educational programs and helping visitors in the Information Center & Bookstore, changes in job titles and duties, a chance to welcome a new staff member, and departures of interns who are off to their next adventures.

The Mono Lake Committee is excited to announce that **Eric Rios-Bretado** has joined us as Operations Manager. Eric is new on staff, but he is certainly not new to the Mono Basin. With a background in Wildlife and Conservation Science, he has previously worked for Mono County as Sustainable Recreation Coordinator, Lee Vining High School, and the Inyo National Forest in the Mono District.

Mono Lake Intern **Stephanie DeCavit** handled the challenging weekly staff schedule over the summer in addition to leading tours and working in the bookstore. We are pleased that she is staying on, applying her strong and diverse skills in logistics and event planning as the new Outreach & Operations Coordinator.

Roni Schacker, this summer's Birding Intern, inspired groups of visitors to appreciate the area's birds on her weekly tours. She is continuing to support the Committee's work over the winter as a Project Specialist. Likewise, **Victor Ulloa-Reyes**, Information Center & Bookstore Assistant, who steadfastly anchored the bookstore over the summer, is staying on as a Project Specialist for the winter.

We bid farewell to Business Coordinator **Lily Pastel**, who started a job with Mono County's Health & Human Services Department this fall after 12 years at the Committee. Lily connected with members since her first season as a Mono Lake Intern and garnered frequent compliments on the merchandise and welcoming atmosphere she cultivated as Information Center & Bookstore Manager. We are glad we'll still see her in the neighborhood in her new position.

As canoe paddles are exchanged for snow shovels, we say goodbye to our summer crew, flying off to new adventures. **Monica Potter**, Information Center & Bookstore Assistant, engaged with countless visitors, beautified the office propane tank with a whimsical mural, and displayed a knack for spotting and enjoying Mono Basin birds. Monica returned to the University of Central Missouri to complete her degree in Wildlife & Natural Resources Conservation Biology. Alkali Fly Research Technician **Jessilin Lee**, who fell in love with the flies, the lake, and the Eastern Sierra this summer while carrying on the fly population monitoring project, has returned home to much warmer Southern California for the winter.

After bringing her hometown knowledge and professional passion to the Mono Lake Intern position this summer, **Annakate Clemons** began a master's program in Coastal Science & Policy this fall at UC Santa Cruz, satisfied she inspired a few new birders this summer. Mono Lake Intern **Sophia Heffner**'s highlights from the summer were organizing and executing the Refreshing 'Ologists lecture series with local researchers and working with the membership team. She moved to the East Bay this fall to prepare to attend law school.

During her summer Mono Lake Intern experience, **Iris Mahony-Moyer** enjoyed working on interpretation projects such as making signs for the County Park boardwalk site, writing an Old Marina tour, and guiding canoe tours. She is now traveling abroad. Mono Lake Intern **Diego Murguia** completed the Spanish self-guided South Tufa tour to further spread the story of Mono Lake. He returned to UC Davis to continue his studies in History and Geology. **Jonah Rosen-Bloom**, Mono Lake Intern, created and delivered a new youth education tour and assisted with restoration monitoring fieldwork. He moved to Minneapolis this fall to provide youth programs with Minnesota State Parks. ❖

Teri Tracy is the Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Coordinator. She is excited for the squeak of snow underfoot.



The 2026 Mono Lake Committee staff.



From the mailbag

News from members and friends

by Leslie Redman

There is a chill in the air again and we are soaking up the last few crisp weeks of autumn. Aspen leaves have changed from spring green to the ephemeral gold of fall as Mono Lake Committee staff prepare for what is expected to be another unpredictable winter in the Mono Basin.

In honor

Nicole Bunnell of Santa Barbara gave a gift in honor of the **Hess** and **Blaver families**. **Carey Gregory** of Spring Valley donated in honor of **Eduardo Izquierdo**. **Ann Noble** of Davis contributed in honor of **Cathy Toft**. **Ronald Reafs** of Sacramento gave a gift in honor of **Darleen Birdman**. **David Rogers** of Santa Fe, NM donated in honor of **Shirley J. Dreiss**. **Martin & Joan Rosen** of Carmel contributed in honor of **Martha Davis**.

In memory

David Allen of Sacramento gave gifts in memory of **Alice Bea Allen** and **Jerry Lee Allen**. **Joanne Allen** of Sausalito, **Matthew La Rocque** of San Leandro, **JoAnn McGowan** of Santa Clara, **Greg Michaels & Ana Maria Linares** of Washington, DC, **George & Barb Nelson** of Kirkwood, MO, **Larry Norris** of Dallas, TX, **The Patchwork Fund**, and **Cristina Yoon** of San Francisco donated in memory of **Ruth Norris**. **Richard Ault** of San Francisco contributed in memory of **Julie Spector-Sprague**.

Roger & Sharon Bales of Shelter Island, NY, **Christine Helbling** of Tiburon, **Nancy & Jack Hom** of Moraga, **Maureen Huson** of Sausalito, **Lea Randall** of San Francisco, and **Barbara Welk** of Fennville, MI gave gifts in memory of **Chris Huson**. **Richard & Debra Beebe** of Tracy donated in memory of **Sean Beebe**. **John Blumer Bell** of Hana, HI contributed in memory of **Dr. James Irwin Buell**. **Mark Bollinger** of San Rafael gave a gift in memory of **Anita Bollinger**. **Peter & Gwen Cassidy** of Brentwood, TN, **Jerry Trainor** of Los Angeles, and **Bruce R. McCaw** donated in memory of **George Westfall**.

Marcia Correia of Elk Grove contributed in memory of **Richard & Gertrude Thompson**. **Tony Corsaro** of Crowley Lake gave a gift in memory of **Joe Corsaro**. **Robin Cox** of San Carlos and **Laura Smith & Rowland Morin** of Santa Cruz donated in memory of **Brett Cox**. **Teri & James Curtis** of Oakdale contributed in memory of **Richard Charles Anderson**. **Barry Goode** of Richmond gave a gift in memory of

Erica Goode. The family of **Paul & Helen Green** donated in their memory. **Lynn Hansen** of Modesto contributed in memory of **Richard Anderson**. **Sharon Hawley-Crum & Dana Crum** of Escalon gave a gift in memory of **George Hall**.

Thomas Jackson of Anacortes, WA donated in memory of **Rob & Liz Jackson**. **Sarina Lambert** of Sacramento contributed in memory of **Bob Fry**. **Alyson Lamprecht** of Reno, NV gave a gift in memory of **Lura & Charlie Caldwell**. **Steve Lautze & Teresa Eade** of Berkeley donated in memory of **Joe Herzog**. **Robin Leong** of Vallejo and **Lois Snedden** of Reno, NV contributed in memory of **Janet Barth**. **Carol Mathews** of La Quinta gave a gift in memory of **Robert Mathews**. **Sharon Mattern** of Palm Desert donated in memory of **Carol Mattern**. **Glenda McKibben** of Chula Vista contributed in memory of **Robert McKibben**. **David Myers** of Sedona, AZ gave a gift in memory of **Anne Marie Vaccaro**. **Charlene Roe** of Whittier donated in memory of **Marie Roe**.

Nancy Scott of Fairfax contributed in memory of **Terry Scott**. **Carol Silva** of Livermore gave a gift in memory of **Allen Olson**. **Nina Souders** of Flagstaff, AZ donated in memory of **David Rose**. The **Sylvester family** of Chico contributed in memory of **Frank S. Stephens**. **Caron Tayloe** of Reno, NV gave a gift in memory of **Ed & Marcelle Aweeka**. The **Tomales Bay Watershed Foundation** donated in memory of **Rich Stallcup**. **Jerry Vergara, Jr.** of Los Angeles contributed in memory of **Trini A. Vergara**. ❖



Family and friends of Paul and Helen Green gathered at the Mono Lake Committee to celebrate their family's long connection to Mono Lake.



MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

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