

# MONO COUNTY



## COUNTY INFORMATION

**Size:** Total - 8,111 km<sup>2</sup> (3,044 mi<sup>2</sup>)

**Population:** 12,853 (as of 2000 Census)

**Location:** Central-Eastern Sierra

**Official Website:** [www.monocounty.ca.gov](http://www.monocounty.ca.gov)

## **CONSERVATION STORY**

### **The Mono Basin Volunteer Program at Mono Lake**

Since 1978, the Mono Lake Committee has led the protection and restoration of Mono Lake. This ongoing effort has included public awareness campaigns, legal battles, years of hearings, education of urban youth, and now, a strong local volunteer program.

Today, volunteers are beginning a new chapter in the long history of citizen advocacy at Mono Lake. The Mono Basin Volunteer Program is a robust, interagency-sponsored program established by the Mono Lake Committee that connects local and statewide volunteers to Mono Lake.

The story of water diversions from Mono Lake and the Owens Valley are a well-



documented part of California's history. Newspaper articles, books, and scientific reports have all covered the issue, including the Planning and Conservation League Foundation report "Everyday Heroes" (2000).

In 1941 the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (DWP) began diverting water from tributary streams that flowed into Mono Lake. After 40 years of unrestricted diversions, the lake had lost half its volume, doubled in salinity, and dropped 45 feet. As a result, waterfowl habitat disappeared, riparian vegetation withered along the dry stream channels, and brine shrimp, alkali flies, and trout populations declined.

A historic turning point in Mono Lake's health and in water laws across the country came in 1983 when a Supreme Court decision found DWP's diversions from the Mono Basin unlawful under the Public Trust Doctrine.

Later, the 1994 California State Water Resources Control Board's (State Water Board) Decision 1631 (D1631) marked an even greater victory for Mono Lake. Under D1631, DWP must allow Mono Lake to rise to a level of 6,392 feet above sea level, a level at which the lake's ecosystem can thrive. DWP must also deliver minimum base flows and annual peak flows to the creeks they diverted, and restore critical waterfowl habitat

primarily in lakeshore areas. To achieve these mandates, the agency has reduced their water exports from the creeks and allowed water to flow below the dams all the way to Mono Lake.

To ensure that restoration proceeds on schedule and in the best possible ecological way, the Mono Lake Committee and independent consulting scientists work closely with DWP. All parties routinely review and analyze stream data to ensure that diversions occur at appropriate times and creeks receive the required flow of water.

Thirteen years after the State Water Board's decision, DWP and the Mono Lake Committee work as partners in the restoration process. The lake has risen nearly nine feet since 1994, and its tributary streams flow once again through lush riparian corridors full of wildlife. There will always be more work to be done to ensure a healthy Mono Basin, but there is much to celebrate.



With less of an emphasis on litigation the Mono Lake Committee continues to focus on hands-on education programs, science, and new protection efforts. After all, undergraduate college students were the founders of the Mono Lake Committee in 1978. In addition to conducting interpretive walking tours and canoe tours, hosting groups of inner-city youth from Los Angeles, and giving talks to school and university groups, the Committee helps to oversee the Mono Basin Volunteer Program.



Mono Lake.

The Mono Basin Volunteer Program is sponsored by the US Forest Service, the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve, the Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, and the Mono Lake Committee. Volunteers come from all over the Eastern Sierra (with some from Nevada!), and donate eight hours of their time to Mono Lake each month. Retired State Reserve ranger Janet Carle conducts the training each May with enthusiasm and expertise.

Volunteers are a crucial part of keeping the Mono Basin healthy. They help plant Jeffrey pine seedlings, remove invasive plant species along the creeks, help interpret the area for visitors, and monitor water quality. In 2006, volunteers contributed over 800 hours of their time to

Lisa Cutting, the Mono Lake Committee's Eastern Sierra Policy Director, says the volunteer program does more than protect the lake: "It connects people to this place in an important way. [Mono Lake] has been damaged, and this helps people see the land healing."

She says that volunteers not only connect with the lake, but with other volunteers as well since, "We have a number of people who come back to volunteer year after year."

In addition to volunteering, there are many other opportunities to get involved at Mono



Lake for families, young adults, couples, seniors, or anyone. Check the Mono Lake website ([www.monolake.org](http://www.monolake.org)) for a calendar of events that includes the locally-renowned Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua. This festival is a celebration of birds, science, and art with field programs and presentations from scientists and experts from around the country, culminating in an outdoor music concert and bird calling contest. Other annual events include the Christmas Bird Count, Halloween South Tufa Walk for those not afraid of the dark, and canoe

tours, among many others.

State Water Board required restoration actions at Mono Lake will eventually end, but Cutting states that the plan "as envisioned by the Water Board and scientists may not be 'done' in our lifetimes." In 1994 it was estimated that it would take at least 20 years for Mono Lake to rise to its target level. Some of the riparian vegetation, including cottonwood seedlings, will take at least 50 years to mature. Overall, Cutting says "restoring channel morphology to pre-diversion conditions will take decades."

The Mono Lake Committee will continue to oversee the health of the Mono Lake watershed for decades into the future. Together with the Mono Basin Volunteer Program, the Committee ensures that Mono Lake will have friends and advocates forever.

To volunteer with, become a member of, donate to or find out more information regarding the Mono Lake Committee their contact information is listed in this section of the publication and their website is [www.monolake.org](http://www.monolake.org).

## **ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Advocates for Mammoth**

**Contact Name:** John Walter

**Address:** PO Box 2005 Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546  
**Phone:** 760.934.176  
**Email:** [walter@qnet.com](mailto:walter@qnet.com)  
**Website URL:** [www.advocatesformammoth.org](http://www.advocatesformammoth.org)

**County of Activity:** Mono  
**Issue Focus:** all  
**Group Type:** advocacy, coalition, educational outreach

**Volunteer Opportunities:** (contact Advocates for Mammoth)  
**Accepts Donations:** Yes

**Description:** Advocates for Mammoth has been formed to present an avenue for ensuring that community input received and recognized in planning and zoning decisions made by the Town of Mammoth Lakes.

### **Andrea Lawrence Institute for Mountains and Rivers (ALIMAR)**

**Contact:** Andrea Lawrence  
**Address:** Box 100 PMB 334, Mammoth Lakes CA 93546.0043  
**Phone:** 760.934.2877  
**Email:** [andrea@alimar.org](mailto:andrea@alimar.org)  
**Website:** [www.alimar.org](http://www.alimar.org)

**County of Activity:** Inyo, Mono, Alpine  
**Issue Focus:** all  
**Group Type:** coalition

**Volunteer Opportunities:** (contact ALIMAR)  
**Accepts Donations:** yes

**Description:** ALIMAR serves as a collaborative base for citizen conservation groups and decision-making bodies. It provides administrative support, convening meetings, moderating discussions, and synthesizing and disseminating information to achieve group consensus. ALIMAR is a catalyst for positive community change by developing, implementing and maintaining a cohesive regional vision integrating natural, cultural and spiritual values with economic and social needs.

At a very successful 'think tank' held on February 2004, attendees identified six core issues they felt presented significant regional challenges and volunteered to serve on working groups to explore solutions. The six 'working groups' are; Regional Identity, Sustainable Agriculture, Carrying Capacity, Community Involvement, Housing and Development Guidelines, and Science and Inventory. ALIMAR will also provide educational forums, serve as a 'Regional Planning Repository' and provide General Plan analyses for Inyo and Mono Counties and the Town of Mammoth Lakes. If the Town of

Mammoth Lakes general plan update becomes unduly contentious, which is likely, ALIMAR may seek a more active role to foster collaboration and consensus.

### **Mono County Watershed Group**

**Contact Name:** Greg Newbry  
**Address:** PO Box 347 Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546  
**Phone:** 760.924.1811  
**Email:** [gnewbry@msn.com](mailto:gnewbry@msn.com)

**County of Activity:** Mono  
**Issue Focus:** all

**Volunteer Opportunities:** (contact the Mono County Watershed Group)  
**Accepts Donations:** Yes

**Description:** Mono County worked with the county Collaborative Planning Team (CPT) successfully and received two Prop 13 grants enabling an effort towards the creation of watershed management plans. The CPT is an active body representing most of the state, federal and local agencies in Mono County. The purposes of the grants are to develop watershed management plans for three of the principal watersheds of Mono County: Upper Owens River Basin, Mono Basin and the West Walker basin. For each basin, the watershed management plans will be developed with input from a watershed council of landowners, agencies, and other local stakeholders, and will be based on an assessment of watershed conditions. The Group will also outline the role of a recently formed regional land trust, Eastern Sierra Land Trust, in watershed conservation and restoration (particularly as related to wetlands) within the basins and provide support for the land trust in this role.

### **Mono Lake Committee**

**Contact Name:** Geoff McQuilkin, Executive Director  
**Address:** PO Box 29 lee Vining, CA 6595  
**Phone:** 760.647.6377  
**Email:** [geoff@monolake.org](mailto:geoff@monolake.org)  
**Website URL:** [www.monolake.org/mic](http://www.monolake.org/mic)

**County of Activity:** Mono  
**Issue Focus:** air quality, botanical, water quality, water supply, wildlife and habitat  
**Group Type:** advocacy, stewardship, educational outreach

**Public Events:** Annual Bird Chautauqua, Tufa State Park tours  
**Volunteer Opportunities:** many – contact the Mono Lake Committee  
**Accepts Donations:** Yes

**Description:** The Mono Lake Committee is a non-profit citizen's 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.

## **PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND AGENCIES**

### **Mono County Board of Supervisors**

**Mailing Address:** P.O. Box 237 Bridgeport CA. 93517

**Phone:** (760) 932-5538

**Fax:** (760) 932-5531

**Website:** <http://www.monocounty.ca.gov/departments/supervisors/supervisors.html>

### **Senate Representative – 1<sup>st</sup> District:**

**Counties Represented:** Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Mono, Plumas and Sierra, as well as portions of Nevada, Placer and Sacramento Counties.

**Website:** <http://republican.sen.ca.gov/web/1/>

### **Assembly Representative – 25<sup>th</sup> District**

**Counties Represented:** Calaveras, Tuolumne, Mariposa, Madera, Mono

**Website:** <http://republican.assembly.ca.gov/members/a25/index.aspx>