

State Parks Director Visits Mono Lake

No Possibility of Eliminating State Reserve

by Geoffrey McQuilkin

In September, California Department of Parks and Recreation Director Rusty Areias paid a visit to Mono Lake at the urging of the owners of Tioga Lodge and another property adjacent to the Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve. Areias reviewed State Reserve facilities—including the new County Park boardwalk—and held a meeting to discuss Reserve management with property owners, elected officials, and Committee representatives.

The theme of the visit centered on the concept of a State Reserve management plan. While the Reserve was specifically exempted by the legislature from creating such a plan (due to the lack of any permanent structures on its land), everyone generally agreed that a plan could help avoid miscommunication and contention about use of Reserve land.

It is the details of such a plan that are the likely ground of future debates over commercial use or other development on Reserve land.

Any plan would need statewide public review and would need to be consistent with the guiding purpose of State Reserves within the State Park system: “The purpose of a state reserve is to preserve its native ecological associations, unique faunal or floral characteristics, geological features, and scenic qualities in a condition of undisturbed integrity.”

Director Offers No Support For Eliminating State Reserve

Areias was asked several pointed questions about the future existence of the Reserve. Might the Reserve be abandoned as part of State budget cutting? No, answered Areias, pointing

out past fiascos of parkland abandonment. Might routine interagency lease procedures scheduled for 2002 eliminate the Reserve? No, Areias answered. The State legislature created the Reserve, and interagency activity won’t change that.

If Triggered, Water Quality Regulations Would Cap Motorized Recreation

Accompanying Areias were former State Water Board member Marc Del Piero and former Congressman Richard Lehman—both with extensive Mono Lake experience through, respectively, the Water Board decision and the creation of the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area.

Del Piero described the decision in 1994 to designate Mono Lake an Outstanding National Resource Water as “what saved” the brine shrimp harvesting operation at Mono Lake. The designation, which provides the highest level of water quality

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A Moment of Silence

The Mono Lake Committee and staff are saddened by the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., and we extend our deepest sympathy to all those affected by these events. You have no doubt already responded to the tragedy from your heart; here in Lee Vining, Committee staff have donated blood, supported organizations like the American Red Cross, and made contact with families that have been directly affected.

The Committee is also doing its part as an organization. We sit on an advisory panel for the State Department of Water Resources, and one of our tasks is to look at how water delivery would be affected by catastrophic events, including terrorism. Our advice: what will keep our cities hydrated in the wake of a catastrophe is *local self-sufficiency* through water conservation and water recycling—the same strategies we helped initiate in Los Angeles in order to prevent excessive water diversions from the Mono Basin.

In times of conflict as well as times of peace, Mono Lake, its millions of birds, and its unique landscape offer solace, solitude, and a chance to gain perspective on world events. Committee staff will continue to enrich the lives of all Americans in these difficult times by working to assure the good health of this ecological treasure.

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protection possible, avoided the Federal listing of *Artemia monica*, Mono's endemic brine shrimp, as an endangered species.

The upshot of the designation is this: right now, local residents and adventurous visitors are free to recreate on the lake as they wish because activity on the lake is at such a low level that the regulatory authorities have not been engaged. But pushing the boundaries of use would trigger immediate, strict water quality regulations.

"The designation does not preclude boats," Del Piero reminded the group, "but it clearly places limits on certain types of boats."

Lake Tahoe is the only other Outstanding National Resource Water in California, and it has strong, detailed water quality protections that protect the lake from hydrocarbon pollution originating with motorized activity.

Scenic Area Management Plan Seen As a Model

The Forest Service's Scenic Area Management Plan was frequently referred to in the meeting as the type of comprehensive, clear plan that could help resolve concerns involving the State Reserve. Developing such documents requires time, commitment from stakeholders, and funding. In the case of the Reserve, all three may come together next year to get a discussion process off the ground. ❖

Geoffrey McQuilkin is the Committee's Co-Executive Director. His new favorite thing is to have his daughter Caelen fall asleep on his chest.

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protect. A review of Caltrans' approach to this issue reveals a failure to develop a plan that is consistent with the protection requirements in place today at

Mono Lake. This behavior would not be acceptable from any of the parties in the Mono Lake case; it is not acceptable from Caltrans.

The Committee remains committed to working on developing a project that improves safety to the extent possible while maintaining Mono Lake's stunning views and lakeshore habitat. Safety improvements can be made without creating the severe visual and environmental impacts currently in the plans.

Public Comment Will Be Critical

Public comment will be critical when a suitable Draft Environmental Impact Report is released—which is currently planned for January 2003. News of the DEIR release will be on the Mono Lake Website www.monolake.org or join the direct alert list by contacting Lisa Cutting (lisa@monolake.org) at (760) 647-6595. ❖

North Basin Stream Stays Wet

As summers go these days, it was a good one for Mill Creek, Mono Lake's third largest tributary. Water flowed down the stream channel and reached the lake throughout the entire summer season. Mill Creek has run dry frequently in previous years, despite being the only year-round Mono Basin stream not diverted into the Los Angeles Aqueduct. The reason? Little attention has been paid to the creek while water has been diverted for hydropower, irrigation, fish rearing, and Wilson Creek flows. Ongoing discussions about the management of water in the North Mono Basin offer the potential for a well-planned, water-efficient solution to competing water demands that respects both Mill and Wilson creeks while providing for multiple uses associated with water rights.



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