

Statewide Water Policy Updates

by Frances Spivy-Weber

Sierra Conservancy Inching Toward Reality

In late May, Assembly Bills 2600 (Laird) and 1788 (Leslie) were sent to the Senate, recommending the formation of a Sierra Conservancy. While this might sound normal, it is actually a historic occurrence. First, it is rare that two bills—one from a Democrat and one from a Republican—addressing the same issue are approved in one House and sent to the other. In this case, however, the two legislators, Assemblyman Laird from Santa Cruz and Assemblyman Leslie from Roseville, are not trying to kill each other's bill. They are working together as their bills leap the various hurdles to try to craft a Conservancy that both parties can support. Secondly, there is broad-based support for a Conservancy from the Sierra. In April more than 60 citizen lobbyists formed one of the largest Sierra gatherings in Sacramento in many years to meet with the Conservancy bill sponsors and other key legislators. Third, the Laird bill is gaining support from throughout California. Urban and rural cities and towns, businesses, labor unions, inner city community groups, and environmental groups are all letting their legislators know that the Sierra is important to the whole state.



GEOFF MCQUILKIN

The Natural Resources Committee of the State Assembly considered two Sierra Conservancy bills in April and approved both. More than 60 citizens attended in support of AB2600.

The Mono Lake Committee has made a Sierra Conservancy its highest legislative priority. Committee staff are working with the Sierra Fund to have someone working full time on the Laird bill and where appropriate, the Leslie bill. The Committee is also gathering political support for a Conservancy in Southern California and Mono County. Staff members Geoff McQuilkin, Lisa Cutting, and Jen Nissenbaum left Lee Vining in the wee hours of April 18 to drive to Sacramento for the Sierra Lobby Day, which the

Committee co-sponsored, and for the Committee hearing. The dedicated staffers returned to Lee Vining that evening, because the policy crises at home (see policy articles in this *Newsletter*) needed attention the next day.

There are four milestones coming up. By June 18, one or both Sierra Conservancy bills must get out of the Senate Natural Resources and Wildlife Committee. Then in August, the Senate must take action on just one bill, and if the final bill is different from the Assembly bill, there will be a Conference Committee between the two Houses. Finally, the Governor has until September 30 to embrace his campaign promise to establish a Sierra Conservancy.

If there is trouble, Mono Lake Committee members will be the first to know. We have an email list of members who are willing to write letters. If you would like to be on that list, please send your email address to frances@monolake.org. The progress of the Conservancy is also posted at www.monolake.org. Stay tuned!

Water Policy Legislation

The Mono Lake Committee is also supporting the following:

AB2528 (Lowenthal), the "Drinking Water Quality: Emerging Contaminants" bill, which will make it clearer what action water agencies, cities, and counties should take when there are unregulated contaminants in surface and/or groundwater.

AB2572 (Kehoe), the "Urban Water Meter" bill, which requires all remaining unmetered cities to meter water.

State Water Plan (Bulletin 160-03)

Every five years the state is required to update its long-range (20-30 years) plans for meeting the water supply needs of the state. The update is called the State Water Plan. To make a very long story short, the plan, which was to be completed by the end of 2003 got caught in the change of administrations. Now, in mid-2004, it is unclear what the new Schwarzenegger water team will do with the report. The Mono Lake Committee is well represented on the State Water Plan Advisory Committee, and is working to ensure the strong role of urban and agricultural conservation in the plan is not weakened. Once the draft Plan is approved, possibly in August, it will be open for public comment. Your voice at this time will be very important! Keep your eye on the website, www.monolake.org for updates. ❖

Fran is the Committee's Co-Executive Director. She just returned from a birthday trip to Italy and has renewed energy for carrying the lessons of Mono Lake to Sacramento.