Join an exploration of the diverse plant communities from the shores of Mono Lake to the forests and meadows in high elevations of Lee Vining Canyon. We will explore elevations from 6,000–10,000 feet, and seek out forest, meadow, and streamside blooms, and dozens of shrub and tree species.

We will begin by identifying common wildflowers, starting with common traits used to recognize plant families. You’ll learn the basics of flower and plant anatomy and how to use a plant key. We’ll discuss soils and geology, and examine the adaptations that enable plants to tolerate the extremes of mountain environments. We’ll talk about forest health and causes and recent progression of forest mortality across the Sierra Nevada.

Land managers use a broad variety of mapping and inventory methods to monitor both rare and common plants and their communities. You’ll participate in an overview of these methods and learn about opportunities to contribute your own observations or join ongoing studies to help inform science and the conservation of public lands.

Michèle Slaton is an Ecologist with the US Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region Remote Sensing Lab. She earned her Ph.D. in Botany from the University of Wyoming, and taught Botany, Plant Ecology, and Plant Physiology in Colorado before arriving in the Eastern Sierra in 2001. She worked as a botanist for Death Valley National Park and the Inyo National Forest before joining the Remote Sensing Lab, where she focuses on vegetation mapping by combining ground techniques with novel technologies.
ITINERARY

Friday, July 17, 6:45pm: Meet at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore (51365 Highway 395) in Lee Vining. We’ll introduce ourselves, distribute course materials, and then enjoy a short slideshow to preview our weekend seminar. The precise locations we’ll visit on Saturday and Sunday will depend upon the year’s snowpack and the current weather.

Saturday, July 18, 8:00am: Meet at a location we will discuss on Friday night. Bring everything you need for a full day in the field, including water, lunch, and sun and rain protection. All instructional materials will be provided, but bring a hand lens or magnifying glass, and plant guide/key if you have one. Optional: Bring a cell phone and/or GPS unit if you’d like to learn about and use technological applications like iNaturalist. We’ll hike 2–3 miles each day in easy to moderate terrain. We’ll return to Lee Vining around 5:00pm and may opt to dine together at a local restaurant.

Sunday, July 19, 8:00am: Same procedure as Saturday. We usually end the day around 3:00pm so that folks have time to drive home.

High Altitude Cautions: Remember to bring (and drink!) lots of water because your body loses more water at high altitudes. Begin drinking extra water as you drive to higher elevation in order to prevent dehydration and headaches. Also, the sun is fierce at high elevations, capable of burning even on cool days, so be sure to protect yourself thoroughly, using sunscreen, sunglasses, hat, and a bandanna to protect the back of your neck. If you have a history of heart or respiratory related problems, please consult with a doctor before joining this field seminar. Our walks will be at a leisurely pace, over level to moderately steep terrain, and 2–3 miles per day. We will spend most of our time at 9,000–10,000 feet in elevation; at least 24 hours of prior acclimation in Lee Vining is advised.

TO BRING

___ lunch, both days  
___ plenty of water  
___ notebook or clipboard & paper  
___ hat, bandanna  
___ camera and binoculars (optional)  
___ 10X hand lens  
___ field guide  
___ sunscreen  
___ insect repellent  
___ pens & pencils  
___ sunglasses

RECOMMENDED BOOKS


   Some like this book for its broad habitat coverage and information on how plants get their names. Species arranged by habitat. Photos are of varying quality.

An introduction to climate change and its impacts, written in a style that is informative, accessible, and insightful. Although written more than ten years ago, the facts it presents are still current. Also includes suggestions for things we can all do to slow the rate of change.

Laws, John Muir. The Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada. California Academy of Sciences, 2007. This beautifully illustrated guide has it all: trees, shrubs, wildflowers, ferns, fungi, lichens, fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, mammals, insects, weather, and constellations. Includes many of the plants, birds and butterflies we will see, with lots of ecology tidbits and “fun facts.”

Smith, Genny. Sierra East. UC Press, 2000. A well-illustrated, thorough introduction to the geology, weather and climate, plants, insects, fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, and places to see them, of the Eastern Sierra. Now available in paperback.

Weeden, Norman F. A Sierra Nevada Flora. Wilderness Press, 1996. No photos but useful for those who have keying experience. Includes almost all plants we will see in the high country. Recently reprinted, so date may differ. Plant names are out-of-date.

Wenk, Elizabeth. Wildflowers of the High Sierra and John Muir Trail. 2015. Interesting ecological stories about plants; 340 species are covered, arranged by flower color. Photos are of varying quality in focus and composition; color representation is good.