

Tuesday March 23 – Conference Day II

Topic: Economic and Social Dimensions of Lake Management

14:30-16:30: Round Table 10: Managing Health Issues (sanitation, drinking water)

Title: Dust in the wind? What air quality standards have to do with protecting Mono Lake.

Briefing: In 1994 an historic environmental victory happened: the California State Water Resources Control Board issued Decision 1631—setting a target lake level for Mono Lake, establishing flow regimes for restoration of the tributary streams, and ordering a restoration plan for waterfowl habitat. Years of careful examination of the many factors that contribute to and are affected by choosing a lake level and management plan for Mono Lake came together in this management plan. One of the elements studied for the report was the issue of airborne particulate matter from the nine square miles (23 km²) of exposed lakebed due to the excessive water diversions. Called PM₁₀, this classification of dust particles is known to lodge in human lungs, causing severe short- and long-term health issues. The United States' Clean Air Act defines the responsibilities of the Environmental Protection Agency for protecting and improving the nation's air quality. The current PM₁₀ standard is 150 µg/m³ and dust concentrations at Mono Lake have been recorded at 1,000 times this standard. In 2006, under the Bush administration, the EPA proposed new regulations that would have pulled this cornerstone from the protections that are critical to the ongoing health of Mono Lake. We will talk about the importance of such protections, the need for ongoing vigilance in lake protection, how 16,000 Mono Lake Committee members flexed their muscle and changed the course of this ill-conceived agenda, and how this model can be replicated in other areas.

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