



Robb Hirsch

Geoff McQuilkin, Executive Director
Mono Lake Committee, *monolake.org*

Southern California Water Dialogue

October 25, 2023



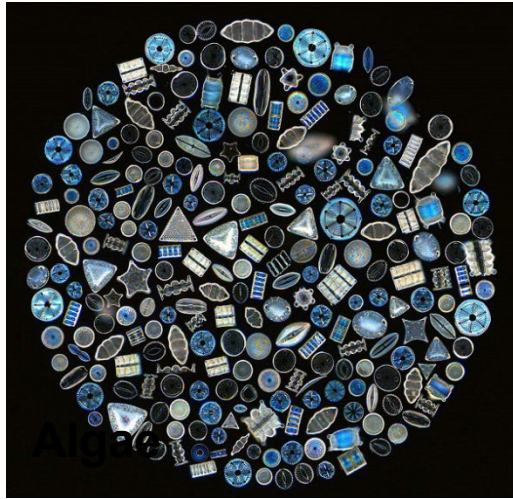


Peter Essick





Marie Reed



Brine Shrimp



Alkali Flies



Critical Habitat



Rick Kattelman



Marie Read







TITANIC PROJECT TO GIVE CITY A RIVER.

*Thirty Thousand Inches of Water to be
Brought to Los Angeles.*

*Options Secured on Forty Miles of River Frontage in
Inyo County—Magnificent Stream to be Conveyed
Down to the Southland in Conduit Two Hundred and
Forty Miles Long—Stupendous Deal Closed.*

INDEPENDENCE (Cal.) July 28. [Exclusive Dispatch.] Agents representing Los Angeles city have secured options on about forty miles of frontage on the Owens River north of Owens Lake. Fred Eaton, ex-Mayor of Los Angeles, and the superintendent of the Los Angeles water works were in the valley in an automobile the early part of this week. Two days ago they closed the last outstanding options. The price paid for many of the ranches is three or four times what the owners ever expected to sell them for. Everybody in the valley has money, and everyone is happy.

Three months ago Eaton bought the holdings of the Rickey Cattle Company, comprising about 50,000 acres of water-bearing land. It was then thought that Eaton was going into the stock-raising business here, but it has since been learned that he was securing options for Los Angeles city. Eaton has made every option solid and secured all the land the city wanted. The deal is riveted.

THE estate that has held the San Fernando Valley for ten centuries to the arid desert is about to be secured by the magic scholar of modern engineering skill.

Back to the headwaters of the Los Angeles River will be turned the flow of a thousand mountain streams that ages ago were tributaries of the current that swept past the site of the ancient pueblo of Los Angeles to the ocean.

The desert has yielded up its wealth. The problem of Los Angeles' water supply has been solved for the next hundred years.

Thirty thousand inches of the purest snow water is to be taken from the bed of the Owens River in Inyo county, right in the heart of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and conveyed for a distance of 240 miles over arid plains and through the heart of mountain ranges to be emptied into mighty reservoirs at the headwaters of the Los Angeles River.

THE Times announces this morning the most important movement for the development of Los Angeles in all the city's history—the closing of the preliminary negotiations securing 30,000 inches of water, or about ten times our present total supply, enough for a city of 2,000,000 people. In brief, the project is to bring this water to Los Angeles from Owens River in Inyo county, a distance of 240 miles, at a cost of about \$23,000,000. Options on the water-bearing lands have been closed by the city's representatives and a series of bond issues will be asked of the voters. This new water supply, immense and unending, will make Los Angeles forge ahead by leaps and bounds and remove every specter of drought or enormous stream of the purest mountain water pouring in here, Los Angeles best supplies in the land; she will have water to sell to the San Fernando San Diego; she will have assured her future for a century. There is no will be forthcoming.

served during a number of trips to his son's ranch near Independence, the peculiar formation of the land along the route of the wagon road from Mojave to the Owens River Valley.

The engineers now all agree on what he first surmised: that waters of the Owens River, centuries ago, flowed down through the arid valley from what is now Owens Lake, passing near the present site of Mojave and finally emptying into the Los Angeles River in the San Fernando Valley.

A series of mighty upheavals distorted the rise of a number of the lesser Sierras, throwing mountains across the path of the stream and for less centuries at least the river has emptied into Owens Lake.

This lake is a great stretch of water ten miles wide and thirty miles long. Its waters are so permeated with soda that they contain no living thing.

The engineers contemplate cutting through the mountains that block the path of the river and bringing a canal from Charles's Butte, a foothill midway between Independence and Lone Pine, by way of Mojave to Los Angeles.

All the plans have been approved by the government engineers.

By expending about \$100,000 in cash for options and by guaranteeing the payment of over \$100,000 more, the Water Commissioners have pledged the city to build this conduit.

Ex-Mayor Eaton has acted as the city's agent in all the negotiations. The farmer folk in the Owens River Valley think that he has gone daffy on stock raising. To them he is a millionaire with a fall.

INDEPENDENCE SACRIFICED.

It is the village of Independence that will probably be hardest hit. The town is kept alive partly by the trade of the ranchers in the valley, and partly by the travel to and from the gold fields of Western Nevada. The trail to Goldfield passed through Independence. It is one of the star stations on the route.

A number of the unsuspecting ranchers have regarded the appearance of

canal from Lone Pine to Mojave. A great deal of the territory lies in a gold-bearing district. The soda in the bed of the Owens River is, in many places, rich with silver gold. Some of the towns will be run through buttes in which are promising ledges of gold and copper.

Already the engineers are recalling



SUPT. MULHOLLAND,
OF WATERWORKS.

the tales of the time when the Southern Pacific built its first line into Los Angeles—the time when the Chinamen on the work quit because they could make more money washing gold in their shovels.

U. S. GOVERNMENT CONCESSIONS
United States Engineer J. B. Lipph-

heretofore other part.

Thirty thousand inches of water means more to Los Angeles than all the gold hidden away in the California mountains.

LAST SPIKE IN. DEAL CLOSED.

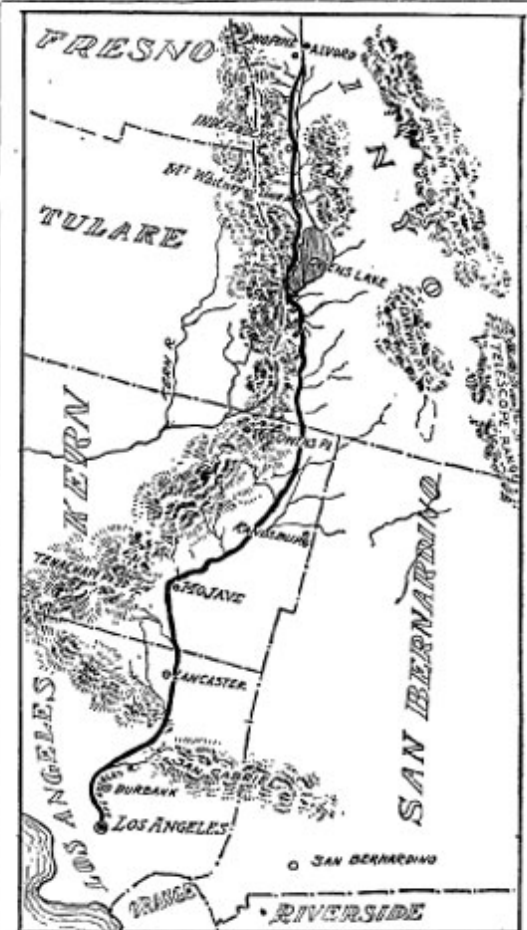
SUPT. MULHOLLAND BRINGS THE
GLAD TIDINGS.

Says Options are Fixed and Los Angeles Business Owes of Thirty Thousand Inches of Purest Snow Water—Would Give All the Credit to Others.

Stretched and browned by the almost intolerable desert wind and sun Superintendent Mulholland returned yesterday afternoon from a daring nine days' automobile trip into the heart of the Owens River country, bearing the glad tidings that "The last spike has been driven; the options are all secured; the deal by which Los Angeles city becomes the owner of thirty thousand inches of the purest snow water has been made."

In the excited gratification born of a knowledge that the vexed water question has at last been solved, Mulholland inspired like a schoolboy.

"Fred Eaton did it. He has been working on it for thirteen years. It is the greatest natural engineer that the West has ever known. He has made it possible for us to accomplish the greatest scheme of water development ever attempted in this country." Supt. Mulholland did not say was that it was himself that made it possible for Eaton to finance his scheme; that he has made five times as fast



Showing route of 240-mile conduit from Owens River to Los Angeles.

FINANCIAL DARING IN GETTING OPTIONS.

IT WAS the very daring of the proposal to buy an entire valley, the most valuable in Inyo county, and turn it over to the city for the water rights involved that has made the negotiations a success.

Water rumors have been so frequent and so false in the Sierra country that members of the possibility that Los Angeles would go so far for its water supply was regarded by the ranchers as

No impressed were they with the seemingly impracticable supply of water that Mr. Eaton started to getting options without further ado. This, of course, was without official authority, but the members of the party decided that it was time to get and act quickly; they felt that they could not take any chances on letting anyone else, no not even the United States government, get ahead of them.

This action later received the official



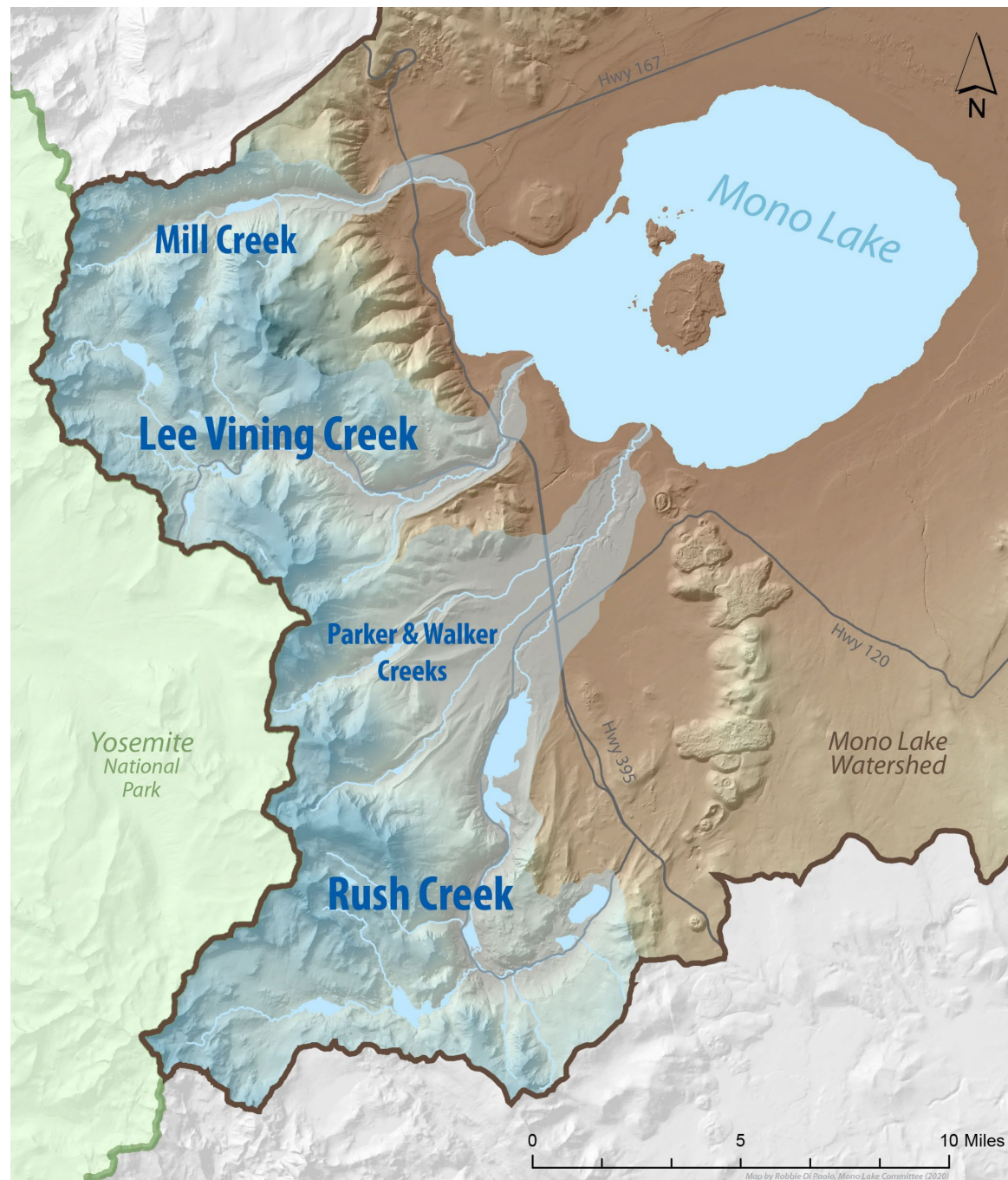
MONO LAKE
COMMITTEE



Water Diversions - Streams

Rush, Lee Vining, Parker, and Walker creeks





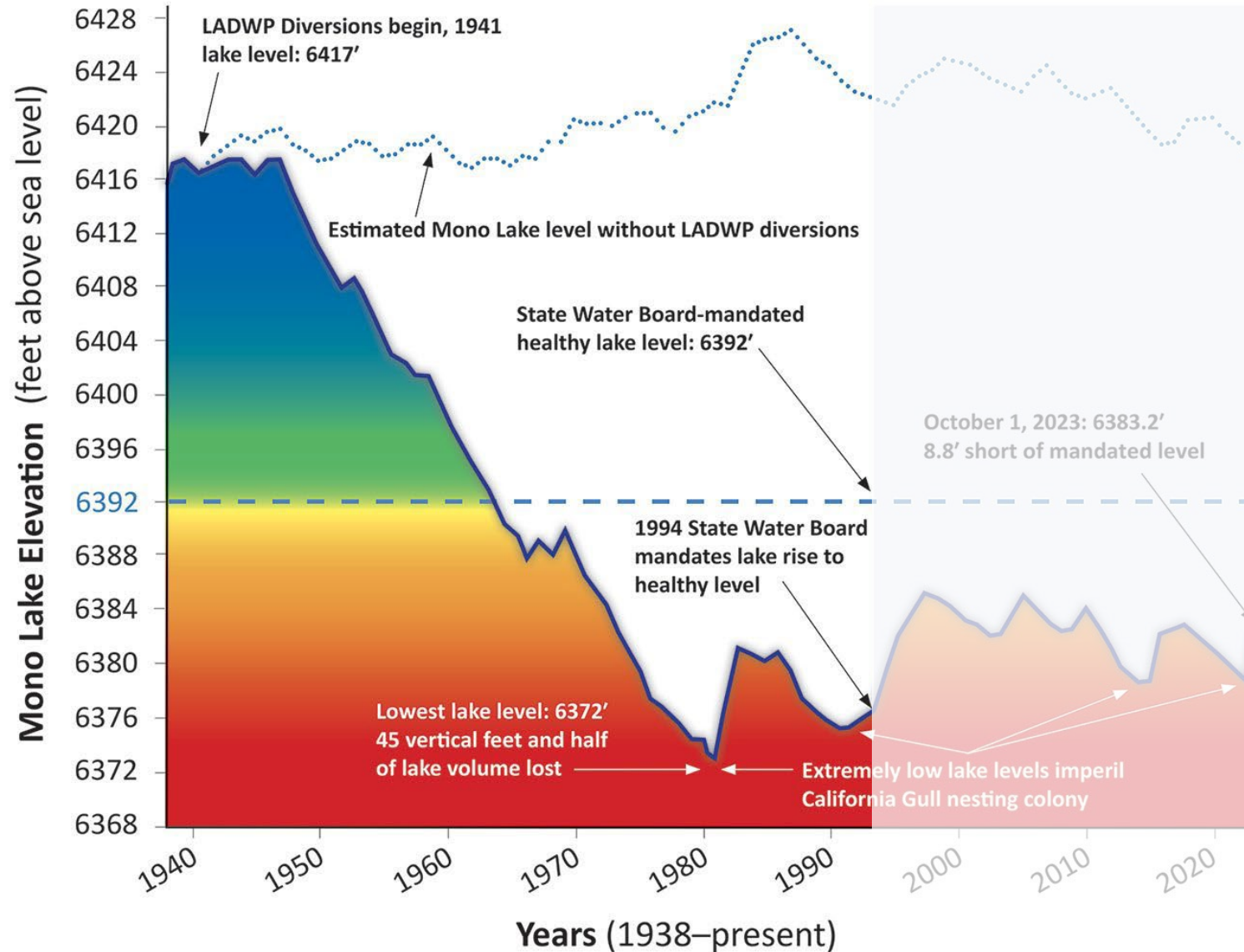
Water Export - Groundwater

inflow capture in the Mono Craters Tunnel



Mono Lake Surface Elevation

8.8 vertical feet below the Public Trust lake level



Water Diversion Impacts

Lake level



- LADWP water diversions caused Mono Lake to decline 45 vertical feet by 1982, lose half its volume, and double in salinity.
- High salinity pushed the lake food web and ecosystem toward collapse

Water Diversion Impacts

Exposed landbridge puts nesting islands at risk



- At low lake levels a landbridge is exposed that allows predators to access nesting islands, imperiling one of the world's largest California Gull colonies.

Water Diversion Impacts

Dust storms



- Dust storms from exposed lakebed violate Clean Air Act health standards
- PM10 events with concentrations up to 470x the federal standard

Water Diversion Impacts

Mono Basin streams



- Lost 20 miles of fisheries, streams, streamside forests, and broad bottomlands habitats
- Lost premier Sierra trout fishery

Water Diversion Impacts

Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe

“Mono Lake is the physical, cultural, and spiritual center of the Kutzadika'a people.”



“This water body is so central to our lives and heritage that we must do all that we can to ensure our lake, and the ecosystem it supports, is healthy and strong.”

*Charlotte Lange, Chairwoman
Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe*





Lee Vining Creek, 1970s

“The owner of any dam shall allow sufficient water at all times to pass over, around, or through the dam, to keep in good condition any fish that may be planted or exist below the dam.” —California Fish and Game Code § 5937



“The public trust ... is an affirmation of the duty of the state to protect the people’s common heritage of streams, lakes, marshlands and tidelands....” —The Mono Lake Decision, Supreme Court of California, 1983





**State Water Resources Control Board, 1994
Decision 1631**

“This decision ... amends Los Angeles’s water right licenses to include specified water diversion criteria which are intended to gradually restore the average water elevation of Mono Lake to approximately 6,392 feet above mean sea level in order to protect public trust resources at Mono Lake.”

—State Water Resources Control Board
Decision 1631
emphasis added

Los Angeles – Mono Lake Agreement

1994 State Water Board modified Los Angeles water rights

- Heal damage done:
Restore damaged streams and fisheries
- Protect Public Trust:
Raise lake to healthy, sustainable 6,392-foot level

1994 Los Angeles – Mono Lake Agreement

- City Council, Mayor, LADWP, Mono Lake Committee, state and federal agencies, and other organizations
- At Mono Lake, implement the State Water Board's Mono Lake decision.
- In Los Angeles, state and federal funding for local water supply

A nature-based solution fulfilling many requirements

- Public Trust protection
- Fish and Game code compliance
- Clean Air Act compliance
- Clean Water Act compliance
- National Forest Scenic Area
- Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve
- Cultural resources protection
- Recreation opportunities and local Mono County economic health



Stream Restoration: Progress underway



Lee Vining Creek, 1970s



Lee Vining Creek, 2010s



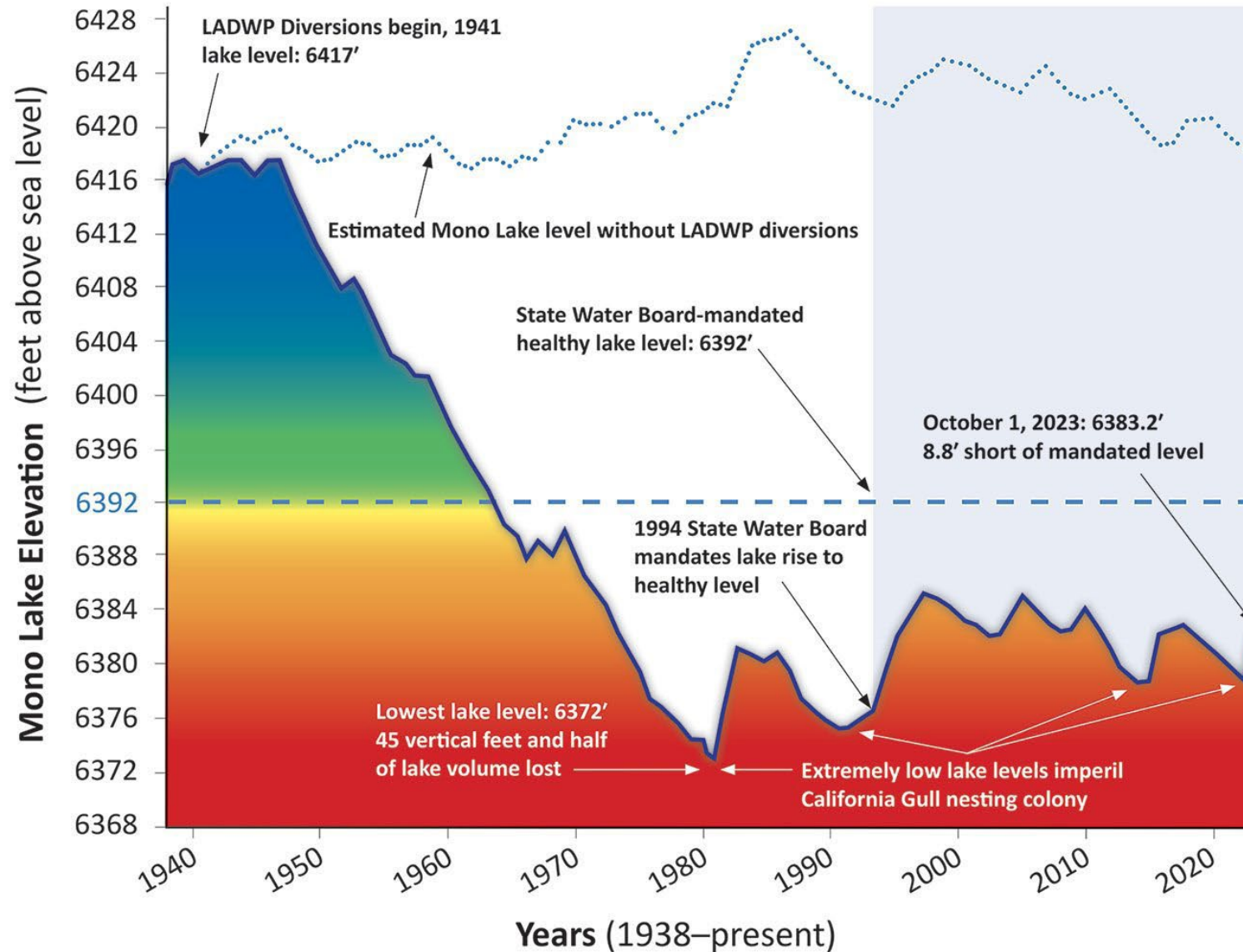
Grant Lake Reservoir



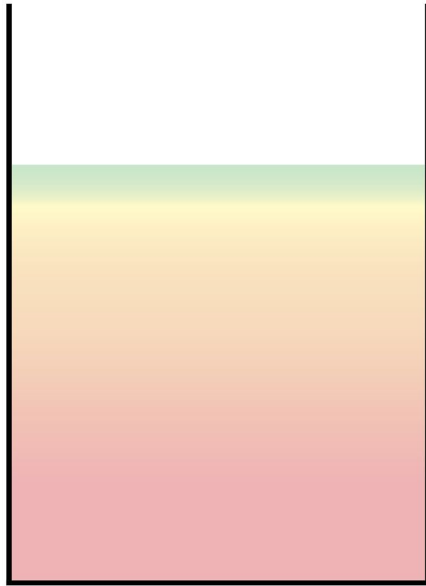
Spillway
modification will
deliver Rush Creek
Stream Ecosystem
Flows

Mono Lake Surface Elevation

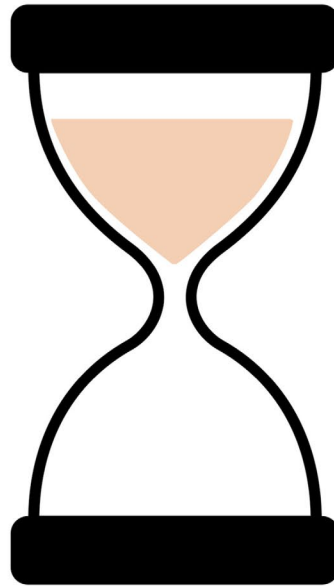
8.8 vertical feet below the Public Trust lake level



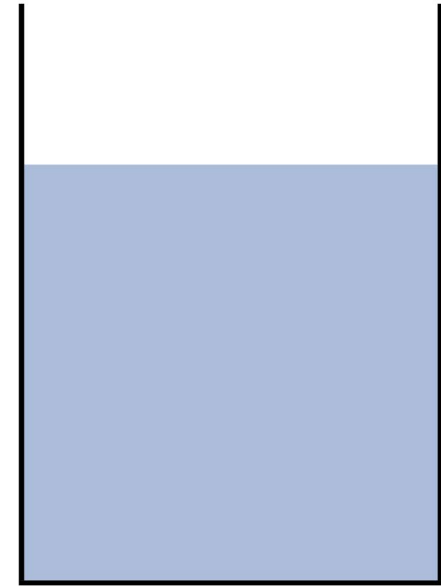
The State Water Board expected that Mono Lake would ...



rise to 6392 ...

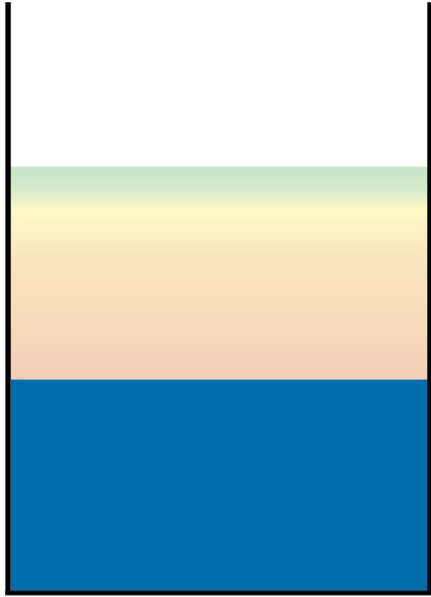


in about 20 years ...

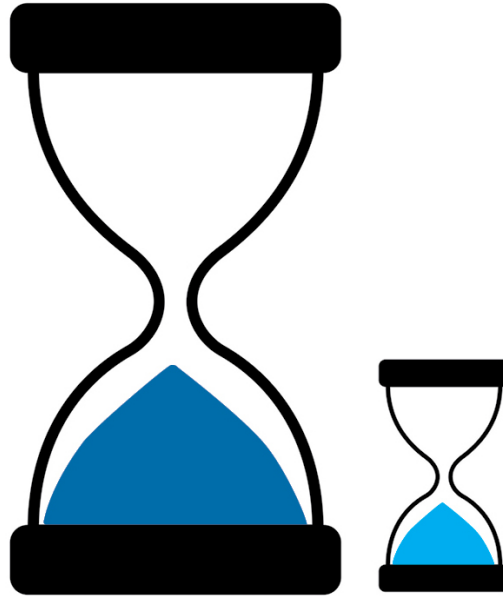


with specified LADWP diversions.

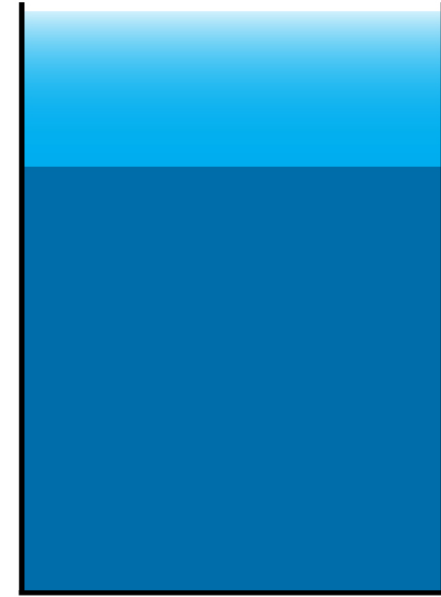
Instead, as of today, Mono Lake has ...



only risen 50% ...



after 29 years ...



**and LADWP has diverted all the
water the Board expected ...
and more.**



The Board is “keenly aware of the limitations of computer modeling hydrologic systems and the probability that future hydrologic conditions may differ significantly from historical conditions.”

State Water Board, 1994

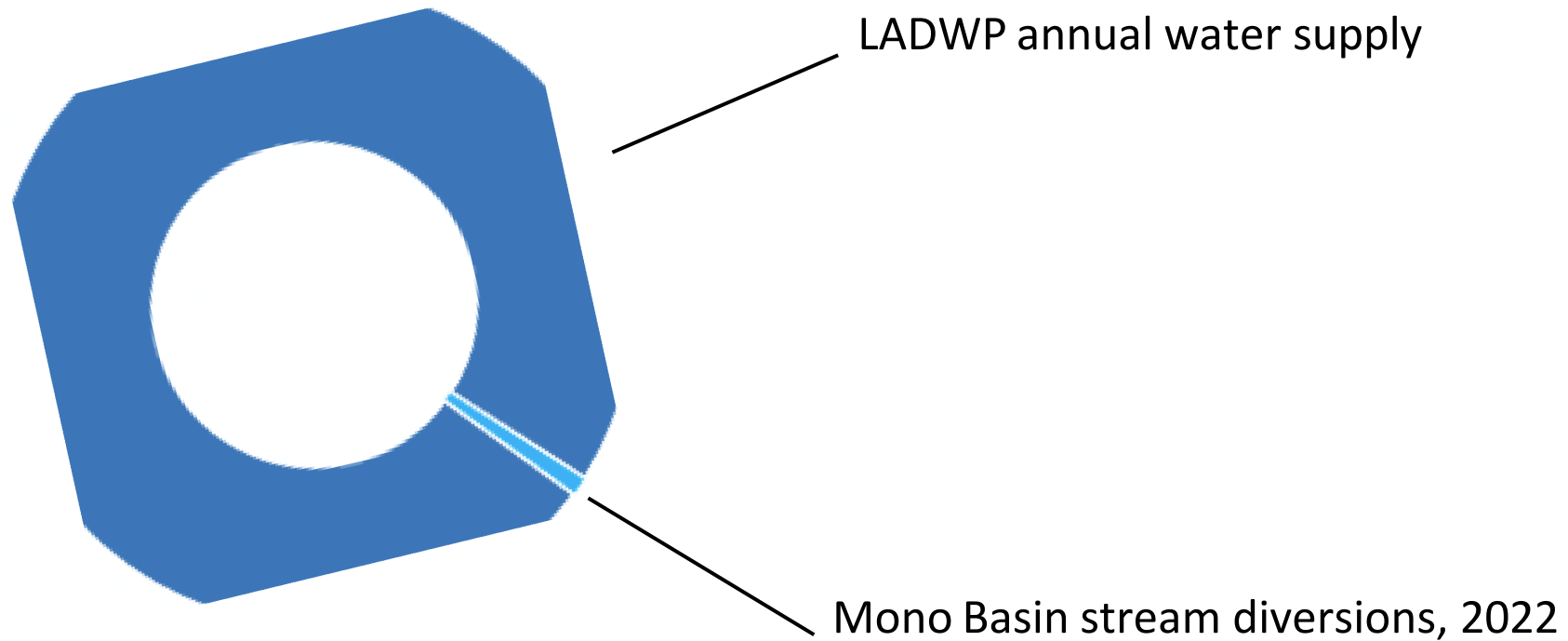


“If future conditions vary substantially from the conditions assumed in reaching this decision, the SWRCB could adjust the water diversion criteria in an appropriate manner under the exercise of its continuing authority over water rights.”

State Water Board, 1994

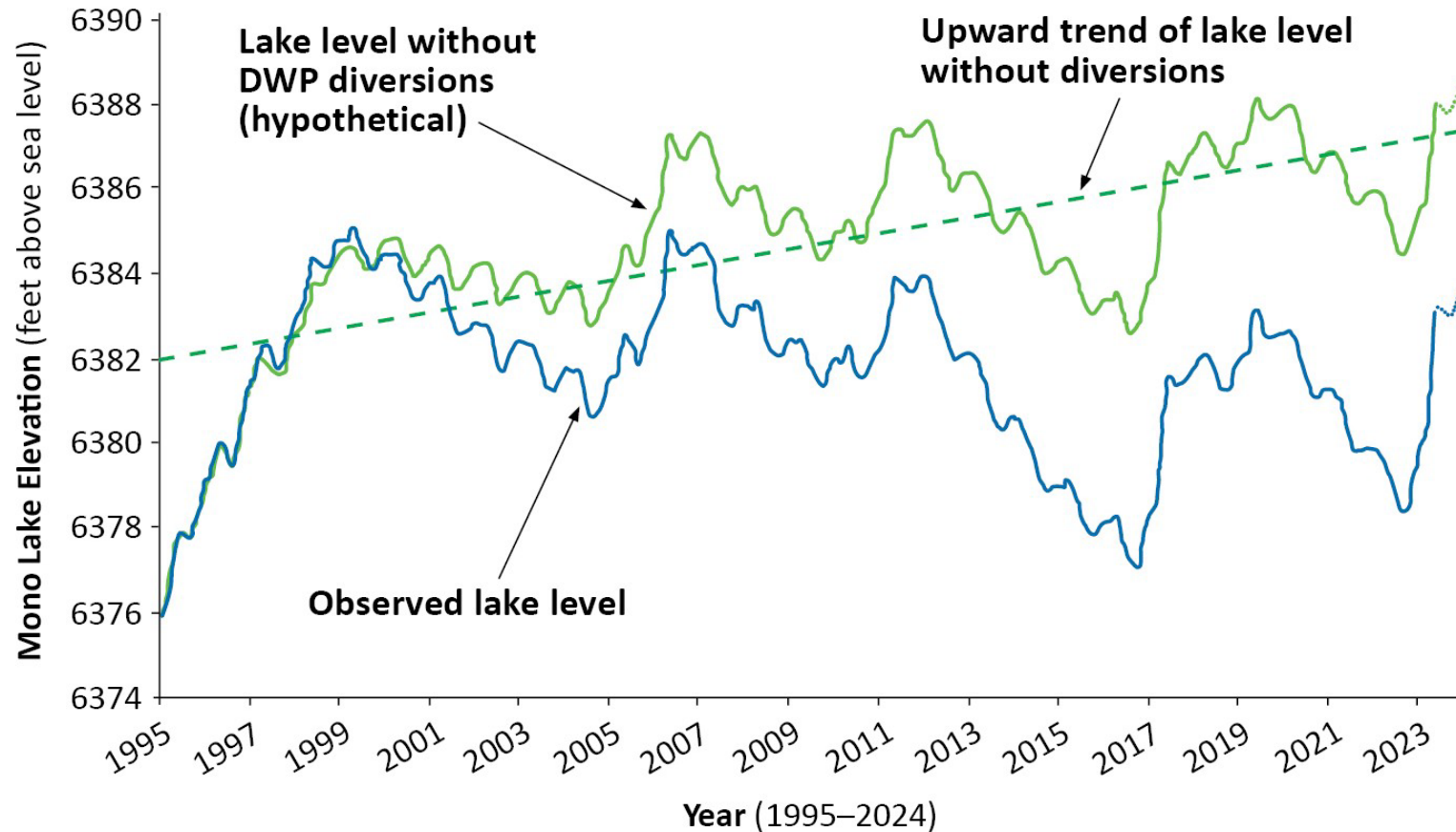
Los Angeles Annual Water Supply

2016–2020 Average



Source: LADWP 2021 Water Strong Fact Sheet, Fiscal Year-End 2016–2020 Average, 497,386 acre-feet.

LADWP diversions suppress Mono Lake's level



MODELED BY THE MONO LAKE COMMITTEE

Mono Lake elevation rose an incredible five feet this year. But the lake has peaked in response to big winters four times since State Water Board Decision 1631 in 1994, only to fall in ensuing dry years. Had DWP paused stream diversions in 1994, the lake would be following an upward trend—it would rise in wet years and fall in dry years, but each peak would be higher than the last. This summer's rise would have put the lake in reach of the 6392-foot Public Trust lake level.

The LA – Mono watershed

Connecting Communities at Both Ends of the Aqueduct

East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice

Communities for a Better Environment

Pacoima Beautiful

Homeboy Industries

Port of Los Angeles High School

East LA Performing Arts

... And many more



Shared Values, Shared Solutions:

Environmental Justice

Environmental Protection

Local supply solutions

“Decisions regarding Mono Lake have impacts that span generations into the future.”

Dean Tonnena, Mono Lake Kutzadika’a Tribe Vice Chair

“Los Angeles has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore one of California’s ecological treasures and begin to reverse a century-old habit of relying on water from afar to quench our thirst.”

Bruce Reznik, Los Angeles Waterkeeper

“I brought generations of youth from the LA area to do restoration work at Mono Lake, which resulted in instilling core values that last a lifetime and made stewards for the environment. We need to be responsible in LA for our own water and DWP should do everything it can to help Mono Lake rise.”

Elsa Lopez, Mothers of East Los Angeles



2023 Pacoima Beautiful Environmental Justice Leader Award honoring Mono Lake educator Santiago Escruceria and watershed partnership

2023 – Progress on Mono Lake

February

- **State Water Board workshop.** 365-person virtual forum and over 3,000 public comments call for implementation of the established lake protection.

April

- **Discussions with LADWP and Mayor's Office**
- Affirm raising Mono Lake to 6392 lake level is a requirement, and is overdue
- **Opportunity identified:** explore diversion scenarios that allow the lake to rise to the public trust lake level while considering years of high water need in LA

August and onward

- **Mono Lake Committee and LADWP launch joint technical discussions** to explore diversion scenarios with State Water Board, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Kutzadika'a Tribe, CalTrout
- Third workgroup meeting tomorrow. Report due April 2024





Marie Read

What's Next?

1. **Continue technical discussions to model diversion scenarios that allow the lake to rise to the 6392-foot Public Trust Lake Level.**
2. **Fund local supply projects to provide flex water to Angelenos and nature-based solutions to Mono Lake**
3. **State Water Board hearing required by D-1631 to implement the 1994 Public Trust Lake Level.**
4. **Preserve the five-foot lake rise of this extremely wet year.**
5. **Come visit Mono Lake!**

Thank you!

Mono Lake Surface Elevation

8.8 vertical feet below the Public Trust lake level

