

TKActions

A custom panel for Photoshop

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TKActions p



Tony Kuyper

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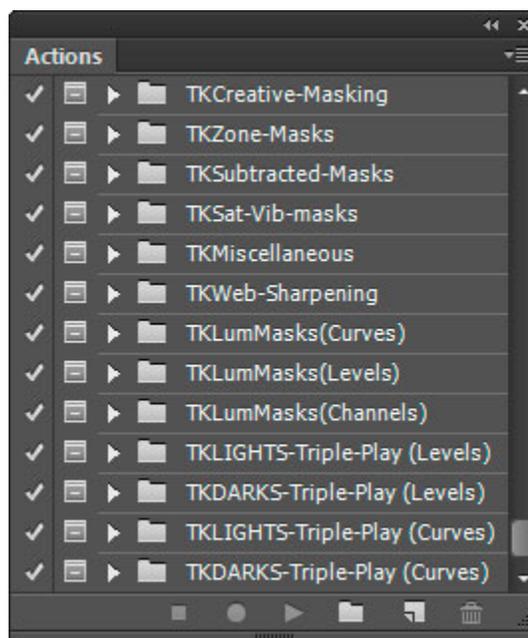
Acknowledgement

[Keith Bauer](#), [Daniel Anderson](#), and [Sean Bagshaw](#) provided valuable feedback and testing of the new panel. Keith helped make sure the panel works on Apple computers. Some of the upgrades in this latest version stem from Sean Bagshaw's video series [The Complete Guide to Luminosity Masks](#). [Doug Kaye](#) showed me the possibilities of using ¼-tone and ¾-tone selections. [Victor Beer](#) and [Al Darby](#) provided suggestions along the way. I am grateful for the creativity, expertise, and honest feedback provided by these photographers.

VERY Important Information

1. In the downloaded ZIP folder there is a PDF called "AA--*Setting Up the Color Working Space*." It explains how to set up the color and gray working spaces in order to get optimal results when creating and using luminosity masks. Please read it and implement its recommendations before using the actions.
2. The custom actions panel works in Photoshop CS5, CS6, CC, and CC (2014). It will not install or work in CS4 and older versions of Photoshop. The panel buttons play actions on Photoshop's regular Actions panel. To do this, several action sets need to first be installed on Photoshop's regular Actions panel. It's best to install these action sets before installing the panel. The action sets are named:

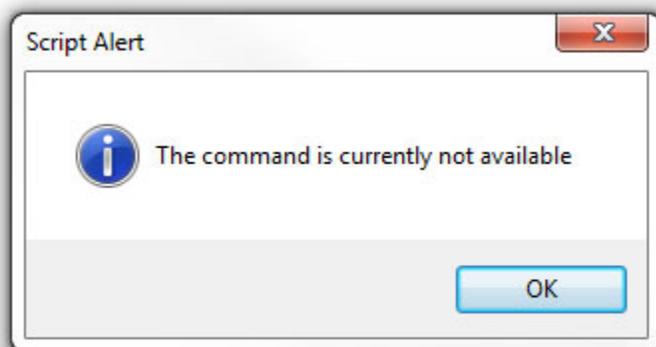
- TKCreative-Masking
- TKZone-Masks
- TKSubtracted-Masks
- TKSat-Vib-masks
- TKMiscellaneous
- TKWeb-Sharpener
- TKLumMasks(Curves)
- TKLumMasks(Levels)
- TKLumMasks(Channels)
- TKDARKS-Triple-Play (Curves)
- TKDARKS-Triple-Play (Levels)
- TKLIGHTS-Triple-Play (Curves)
- TKLIGHTS-Triple-Play (Levels)



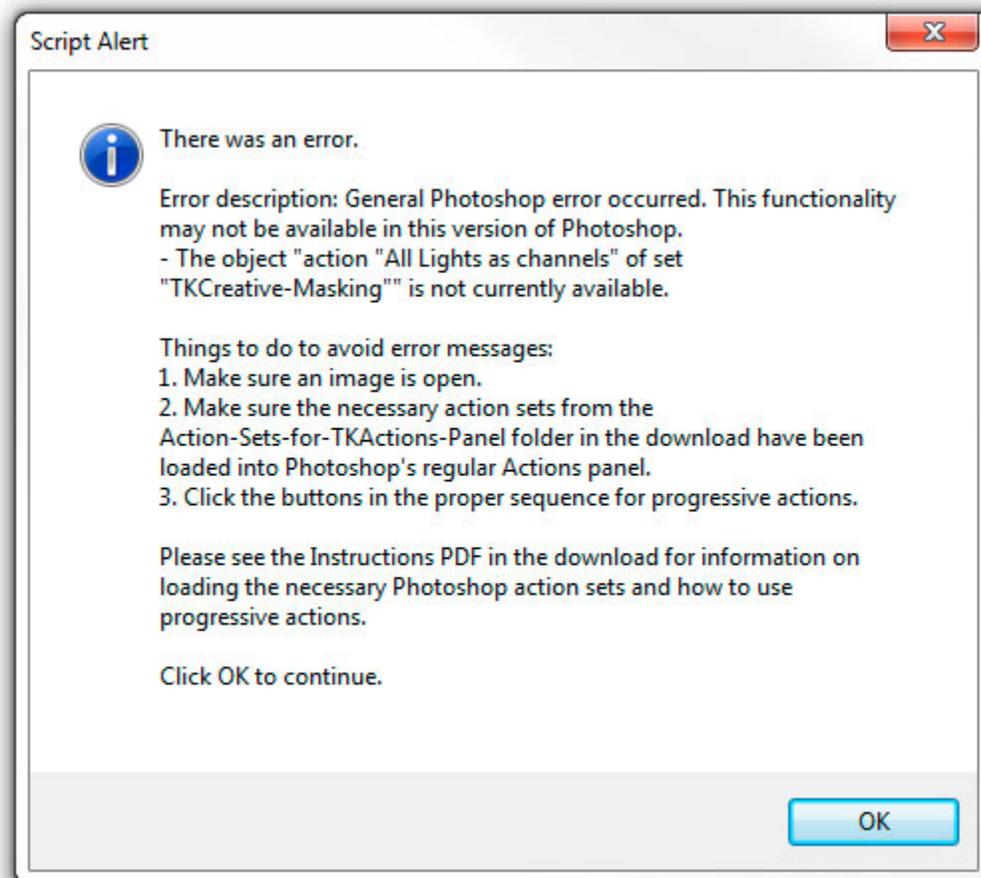
These action sets are in the "Action-Sets-for-TKActions-Panel" folder inside the "TK-panel" folder in the download. Open the folder and double-click each action set file to load it into Photoshop's regular Actions panel. (NOTE: Older versions of "TK" action sets that begin with "TK-" or "TK_" will not work with the new panel. This new panel requires the installation of the new "TK" action sets specific for this panel. Older "TK-" and "TK_" action sets can be removed from Photoshop's regular Actions panel.)

Additional information on installing the action sets can be found here:

<http://goodlight.us/writing/loadingandusingactions/loadingandusingactions.html>



If you click a button on the TKActions panel and get one of the messages shown here or find that nothing happens, it often means that the necessary action is missing from Photoshop's Actions panel. If you load the required action set from the "Action-Sets-for-TKActions-Panel" folder into Photoshop's regular Actions panel, then the button will work and the error message will not appear.



- 3.** The Photoshop CC/CC (2014) version of the panel looks slightly different than the Photoshop CS5/CS6 version. This is the result of a requirement by Adobe to use two different programs to create extension panels for different versions of Photoshop. Both versions have the same layout and work the same. They use the same action sets and produce the same results. See the NOTES section at the end for additional information.
- 4.** The Photoshop CC/CC (2014) version of the panel is locked and will not generate scroll bars on monitors smaller than the panel's vertical dimension. In order to accommodate different size monitors, there are two Photoshop CC versions of the panel: regular and mini. The regular version requires a monitor with a vertical dimension of at least 900 pixels. It is best suited for desktop computers. The mini version requires a vertical monitor dimension of around 750 pixels, so it's better for laptops. See the NOTES section at the end of this guide for additional information.
- 5.** An image needs to be open in Photoshop in order for the buttons on the panel to work. Clicking buttons on the panel without an image being open will likely result in error messages appearing on the screen or nothing happening. Before clicking buttons on the panel, please be sure to open an image.

Installing the Panel

The custom TKACTIONS panel works in Photoshop CS5, CS6, CC, and CC (2014). There are two versions: one for Photoshop CS5/CS6; the other for Photoshop CC/CC (2014). Match the installation to the version of Photoshop you are using by selecting the correct folder; either "Installation-for-Photoshop-CS5-and-CS6" or "Installation-for-Photoshop-CC-and-CC-2014" which are inside the "TK-panel" folder.

The installation procedure for each version is listed below. For CS5/CS6, most people are now using the 64-bit versions of these programs and the installation instructions below are for this version of the application. If you are using the 32-bit version of the program (Windows users), you'll need to locate the correct folder in the "Program Files (x86)" directory.

Installation in Photoshop CS5

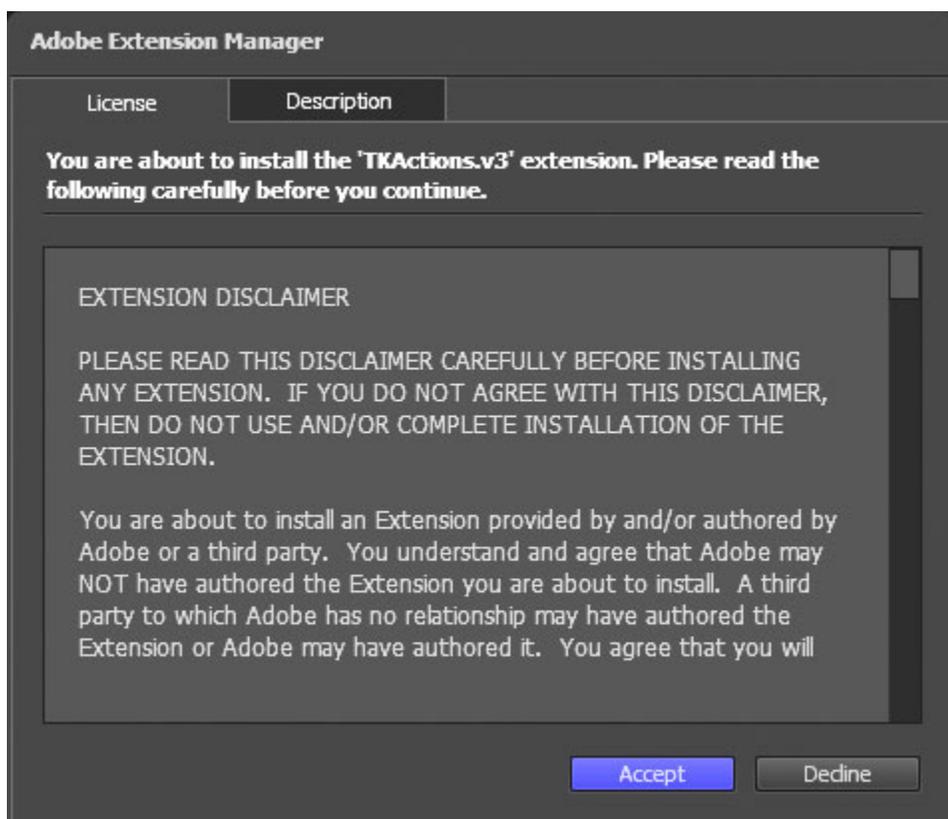
1. Install action sets. See item 2 under Very Important Information on page 2.
2. Close Photoshop.
3. Locate the "TKActions" folder in the download as follows: Download folder > "TK-panel" folder > "Installation-for-Photoshop-CS5-and-CS6" folder > "TKActions" folder.
4. Copy the "TKActions" folder to the "Panels" folder of the Photoshop CS5 application. Do NOT open the "TKActions" folder and copy what's inside the folder. Instead, copy the entire "TKActions" folder to the "Panels" folder.
For Windows, the path to the "Panels" folder is: "C: > Program Files > Adobe > Adobe Photoshop CS5 (64 Bit) > Plug-ins > Panels"
For Mac, the pathway to the "Panels" folder" is: Macintosh HD > Applications > Adobe Photoshop CS5 > Plug-ins > Panels.
5. Restart Photoshop
6. Click through the menu commands: Window > Extensions > TKACTIONS to open the panel in Photoshop.

Installation in Photoshop CS6

1. Install action sets. See item 2 under Very Important Information on page 2.
2. Close Photoshop.
3. Locate the "TKActions" folder in the download as follows: Download folder > "TK-panel" folder > "Installation-for-Photoshop-CS5-and-CS6" folder > "TKActions" folder.
4. Copy the "TKActions" folder to the "Panels" folder of the Photoshop CS6 application. Do NOT open the "TKActions" folder and copy what's inside the folder. Instead, copy the entire "TKActions" folder to the "Panels" folder.
For Windows, the path to the "Panels" folder is: "C: > Program Files > Adobe > Adobe Photoshop CS6 (64 Bit) > Plug-Ins > Panels"
For Mac, the pathway to the "Panels" folder is: Macintosh HD > Applications > Adobe Photoshop CS6 > Plug-Ins > Panels.
5. Restart Photoshop
6. Click through the menu commands: Window > Extensions > TKACTIONS to open the panel in Photoshop.

Installation in Photoshop CC/CC (2014)

1. Install action sets. See item 2 under Very Important Information on page 2.
2. Close Photoshop.
3. Make sure you have downloaded "Extension Manager CC" (version 7.2 or higher) from the Creative Cloud application. The "CC" version of Extension Manager is needed to install the TKActions panel. The "CS5", "CS6", or earlier "CC" version (7.1) of Extension Manager will NOT install the panel in Photoshop CC (2014). The newest version is required.
4. Locate the "TKActions" ZXP file as follows:
Downloaded folder > "TK-panel" folder > "Installation-for-Photoshop-CC-and Photoshop-CC-2014" folder > "TKActions" ZXP file.
5. Double-click or open the "TKActions" ZXP file.
6. Adobe Extension Manager CC will start.
7. Read the license disclaimer and click "Accept" when the option to do so occurs (image at right).
8. Once Extension Manager shows that installation is complete, restart Photoshop.
9. Click through the menu commands:
Window >
Extensions >
TKActions to open the custom panel in Photoshop.



The "TKActionsMini" panel is installed in the same manner. Just open or double-click the "TKActionsMini" ZXP file instead of the "TKActions" ZXP file. The "Mini" panel is just a smaller version of the regular panel in case vertical distance on the monitor is an issue, like with some laptops.

NOTE: If double-clicking the ZXP file does not open Adobe Extension Manager, open the Extension Manager application manually and then use the menu command File > Install Extension to choose the ZXP file to open and install.

Using the Panel

(Don't forget to first open an image.) The TKActions panel is actually two tabbed subpanels (figure at right):

- ACTIONS
- BASIC + TP

Clicking the name at the top of the tab brings up the actions on that subpanel and hides those on the other subpanel.

The custom panel makes it easy to run various actions without searching through action sets on Photoshop's regular Actions panel. The buttons on the panel are linked to specific actions in the action sets that have been loaded onto Photoshop's regular Actions panel. Clicking a button runs the corresponding action.



This panel has many new features.

- CREATIVE MASKING, ZONE MASKS, and SUBTRACTED MASKS are new sections to increase the options with luminosity masks. Their use will be explained below.
- Luminosity masks and selections can now be created based on color channels, not just the composite RGB channel.
- There are new luminosity masks and selections that target off-center mid-tones (blue buttons on the panel image).
- "VIEW" buttons (red buttons on the panel image) provide a preview with a red mask showing the areas of the image that are included in the selection.
- There are several new actions and programmable buttons in the MISCELLANEOUS section (magenta buttons in the image).
- The web-sharpening actions have been updated and include actions for resizing to full-HD dimensions (green buttons on the panel image).
- "Progressive actions" are now an integral part of the panel workflow. This means that the result from one button becomes the starting point for the action called by another button.

It's important to read through the directions in order to use the panel correctly. While it will take a little time to get used to the panel's layout and how the buttons function, the goal is to have the panel be a tool to not only work efficiently with luminosity masks, but to also use it to do many routine tasks associated with image development such as creating adjustment layers and changing blending modes.

The "BASIC + TP" tab

The "ALL LUMINOSITY MASKS" section of the "BASIC + TP" tab is a good place to start for photographers new to luminosity masks and Photoshop actions. Each button on this part of the panel plays a single action that can be useful in developing an image. There are three columns of actions: Curves, Levels, and Channels. The "Curves" column of buttons runs actions that create a Curves adjustment layer with the designated luminosity mask in place as the layer mask. The "Levels" buttons create Levels adjustment layers with the listed mask in place as the layer mask. After the "Curves" and "Levels" actions finish running, it's necessary to go to Photoshop's Properties panel and actually make an adjustment for the adjustment layer. The actions simply make it easy to create the layer with the luminosity mask in place as the layer mask. The layer mask will filter the adjustment through the luminosity selection. It is still up to the photographer to make the desired adjustment.

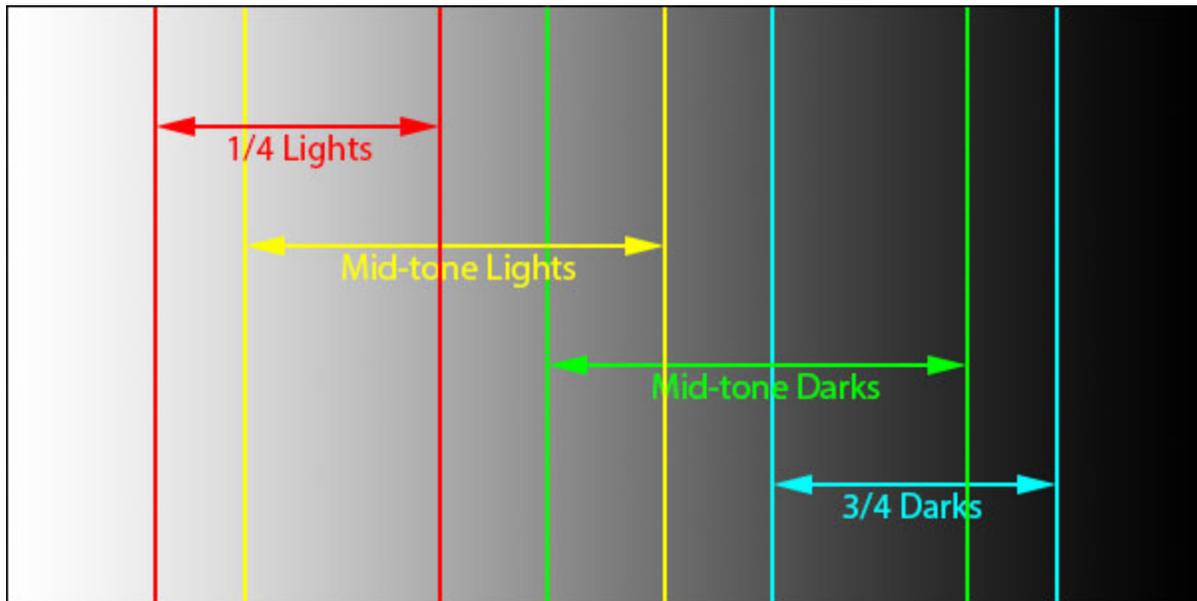
The "Channels" column of buttons plays actions that place the listed luminosity mask(s) on the Channels panel. After these actions finish running, check the Channels panel for the results. Masks on the Channels panel can be loaded as selections and used for luminosity painting. Making multiple masks on the Channels panel also allows the corresponding selections to be loaded and combined through subtraction and intersection to make new luminosity selections that target specific tones in the image.

This version of the custom panel introduces actions to make four new luminosity selections/masks (yellow highlights):

- Mid-tone Lights (ML)—selects tones with gray values around 160
- 1/4 Lights (1/4)—selects tones with gray values around 192
- Mid-tone Darks (MD)—selects tones with gray values around 96
- 3/4 Darks (3/4)—selects tones with gray values around 64



The new selections are like off-center, mid-tone selections (see image below). They select tones around their stated gray values, but, unlike the "straight" luminosity masks, they exclude the very lightest and very darkest tones in the image. As such, the tones selected by these masks feather in both directions, toward both light and dark tones. This results in overall image contrast being maintained regardless of whether the adjustment through these selections is to lighten or darken the image.



(NOTE: A useful strategy to employ when using these new selections is to create an adjustment layer with one of these masks in place as the layer mask, and then, instead of making an adjustment to the layer using the Properties panel, simply change the blending mode of the layer to either Screen (to lighten the selected tones) or Multiply (to darken the tones). Finally, use the layer's opacity setting to fine-tune the adjustment to the desired level.)

These four new luminosity mask actions can also be found on the "ACTIONS" subpanel, but because of space considerations, their abbreviations (ML, MD, 1/4 and 3/4) are used instead of their full names.

The "TRIPLE PLAY" section of the "BASIC + TP" tab has buttons to run actions for the triple play process. The various triple play actions affect either light or dark tones in the image. There are separate arrow buttons to create either Curves or Levels adjustment layers on the Layers panel depending on your preference. The entire Triple Play process is described in the *Luminosity Mask Triple Play and Advanced Masking* tutorial PDF that is included in the download folder.

The "Create Burn/Dodge layers" button at the bottom of the "Basic + TP" tab creates layers that can be used for burning and dodging an image. The burn/dodge layers created by this new panel (described by Sean Bagshaw in [this video](#)) help maintain appropriate contrast when lightening and darkening an image using the [luminosity painting](#) technique.

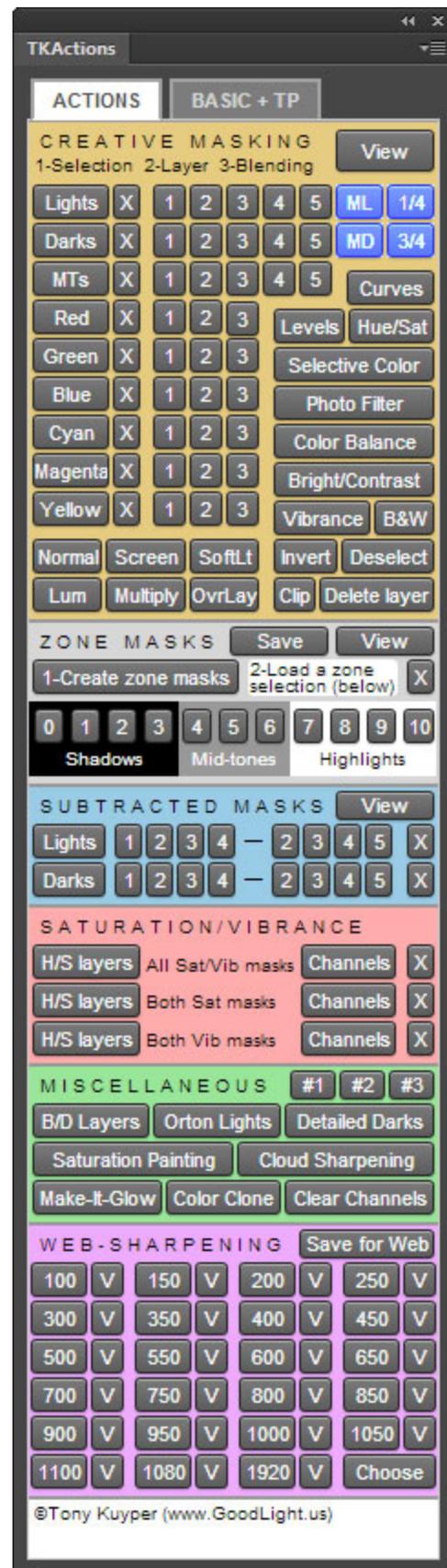
The "Delete Layer" button at the bottom of the "Basic + TP" tab removes the current layer from the Layers panel. It makes experimentation with luminosity masks easier since anything that's not working can be quickly deleted allowing for a clean start.

The "ACTIONS" tab

The "Actions" tab (image at right) introduces "progressive actions" into the workflow. This means that the result obtained by pressing one button on the panel becomes the starting point for an action called by pressing another button. This allows for an infinite combination of selections, layers, masks, and blending modes to be created, tried, and/or deleted. Instead of one button only doing one thing, the buttons in this section work sequentially WITH other buttons to produce the desired effect.

It's important to understand the organization of this section in order to use the buttons in the right sequence to avoid error messages. The layout of this subpanel and the brief overview of the sections on the following pages should make it easy to create selections, make adjustment layers, change blending modes, and delete layers and masks. There are also many "stand-alone" actions in the "Miscellaneous" and "Web-Sharpener" sections where each button is intended to perform one specified function and these will be explained as well. Even though this subpanel seems to contain a lot of options, each section has a distinct purpose, and it's generally easy to find the designated area and concentrate on completing one task. However, this subpanel is also meant to spark creative exploration—a large number of actions with a wide range of results can be accessed with just a few mouse clicks. Once you gain familiarity with the sections and actions, it will be easy to move around to take advantage of many unique possibilities.

The **blue** buttons show the location of the new actions for the Mid-tone Lights, 1/4 Lights, Mid-tone Darks, and 3/4 Darks selections.



CREATIVE MASKING

The "Creative Masking" section is meant to be a luminosity mask command center. It incorporates several ideas discussed in Sean Bagshaw's [The Complete Guide to Luminosity Masks](#) video series. For example, instead of limiting luminosity selections to just Lights, Darks, and Mid-tones where the composite RGB channel is the starting point, this section makes it possible to create luminosity selections based on color channels as well. And instead of limiting luminosity adjustments to Curves and Levels adjustment layers, several different types of useful adjustment layers can be generated in this section with the luminosity selection incorporated as the layer mask. And lastly, since the blending mode of the adjustment layer can also significantly influence how the adjustment is applied to the image, the "Creative Masking" section makes changing the blending mode as easy as clicking a button.

In this section, the series names—Lights, Darks, MTs, Red, Green, etc (**red** rectangle)—are actually buttons. Clicking any of these creates all the masks in that series on the Channels panel. This allows the photographer to view the individual masks and determine if one would be helpful in targeting the tones for a specific adjustment. Once created, masks on the Channels panel can be loaded as selections (Windows: Ctrl+click, Mac: Command+click) if desired. The "X" button to the right of the series name (**blue** rectangle) deletes all the Channel masks that were generated for that series and helps keep the Channels panel free of unneeded masks. (This is an example of "progressive actions." In order for the "X" button to work, the series button will have to have been used to first create the masks on the Channels panel.)



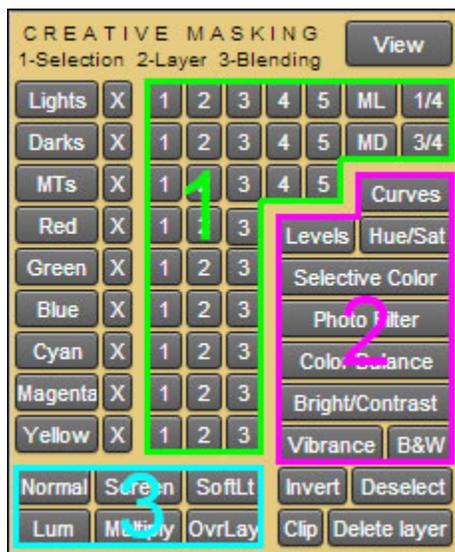
The utility of these progressive actions becomes more apparent when using other buttons in the "Creative Masking" section, and there are essentially three steps for using the progressive actions in this area of the panel:

1. Create a selection—Click one of the number buttons
2. Choose an adjustment layer—Click one of the adjustment layer buttons
3. Choose a blending mode—Click one of the blending mode buttons

1. Each of the number buttons on the "Creative Masking" section generates a luminosity selection (**green-bordered area** in the image on the next page). Given the space limitation of the panel, the names of the traditional luminosity masks have been changed to numbers. The number "1" always corresponds to the most basic selection for that tonal group or color. The number "2" corresponds to the basic selection intersected with itself. The number "3" is the number "2" selection

intersected with itself, and so on. In this way, the following masks correspond to the following numbers (or abbreviations):

Lights-1 = Lights	Darks-1 = Darks	MT-1 = Basic Mid-tones
Lights-2 = Light Lights	Darks-2 = Dark Darks	MT-2 = Expanded Mid-tones
Lights-3 = Bright Lights	Darks-3 = Shadow Darks	MT-3 = Wide Mid-tones
Lights-4 = Super Lights	Darks-4 = Super Darks	MT-4 = Super Mid-tones
Lights-5 = Ultra Lights	Lights-5 = Ultra Darks	MT-5 = Ultra Mid-tones
ML = Mid-tone Lights	MD = Mid-tone Darks	
1/4 = 1/4 Lights	3/4 = 3/4 Darks	



The numbers for the color channel masks likewise progressively intersect the basic mask with itself. For example:

Green-1 = the Green channel
 Green-2 = the Green channel intersected with itself
 Green-3 = The Green-2 selection intersected with itself

So, generally, as the numbers in a series increases, fewer pixels are included in the selection. The mid-tone masks are the exception; higher numbers actually select more pixels, but these masks are made using the corresponding Lights- and Darks-series masks as explained in the [Luminosity Masks tutorial](#).

Usually after clicking one of the number buttons there will be marching ants to indicate the selected areas of the image. In some instances where no pixels are more than 50% selected, though, there will be no selection edges. However, the selection will still be active and ready to use for whatever purpose is desired.

2. After using one of the number buttons to create a selection, the next step in these progressive actions is to create an adjustment layer. Various adjustment layer types are listed along the right side of "Creative Masking" section (**magenta-bordered area**). By clicking one of these buttons, an adjustment layer is created with the active selection in place as the layer mask. Whatever adjustment is eventually applied using this adjustment layer will be filtered through the luminosity selection defined by the mask. The "Creative Masking" section greatly expands the options for choosing which type of adjustment layer to use with a particular selection beyond Curves and Levels. Hue/Saturation, Selective Color, Photo Filter, Color Balance, and Brightness/Contrast are adjustments that I've found particularly useful when using luminosity masks, and Sean Bagshaw describes using some of these in his videos.

3. After creating an adjustment layer with a luminosity layer mask, the next option comes from the blending mode buttons. Sometimes, instead of actually changing the properties of the adjustment layer to make an adjustment, simply changing the blending mode of the layer will create the desired effect. The six buttons in the lower left of the "Creative Masking" section (cyan-bordered area) allow this to be accomplished without having to go to the Layers panel drop-down menu. Changing the adjustment layer's opacity can then be used to fine-tune the blending mode's effect on the image. If the chosen blending mode doesn't seem to work, clicking the "Normal" button changes the blending mode of the adjustment layer back to Normal, and you can then proceed to the Properties panel to make the adjustment there. Or, it's also an option to sequentially click blending mode buttons to experiment with their possible effects on the image.

Even without an active selection, the adjustment layer buttons (Section 2) and blending mode buttons (Section 3) can still be used. Clicking an adjustment layer button when there is no active selection creates an adjustment layer with a reveal-all layer mask instead of a luminosity mask. Clicking a blending mode button changes the blending mode of whichever layer is the active layer on the Layers panel.



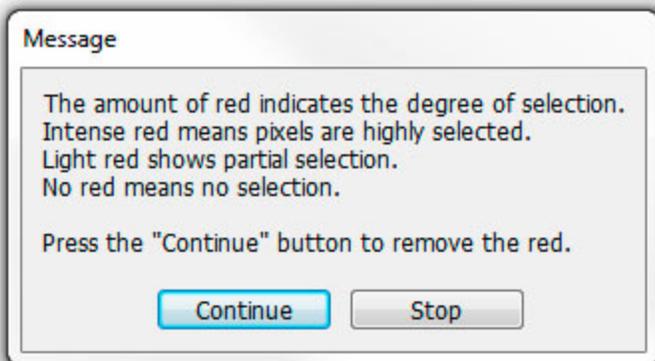
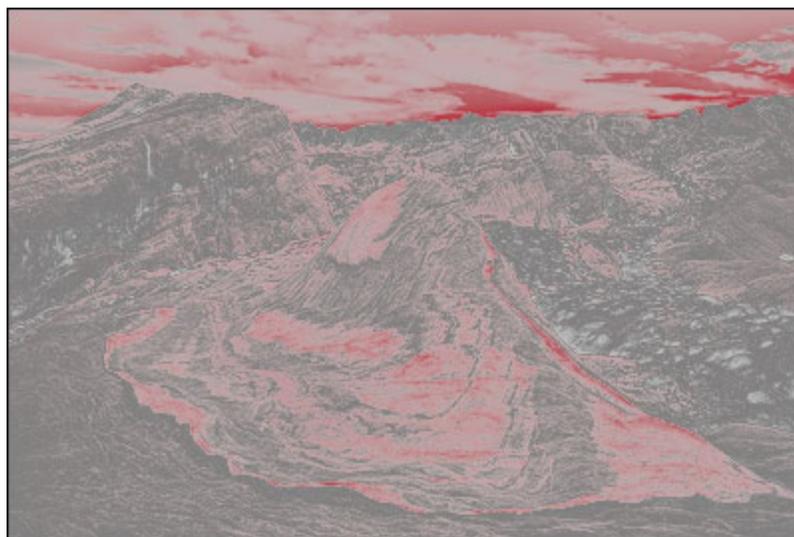
The purple rectangle has additional actions that be played progressively to assist in image processing when using masks.

- Invert–Inverts an active selection. A selection needs to be active for this button to work.
- Deselect–Turns off an active selection. Again, a selection needs to be active for this to work.
- Clip–Clips the current layer to the previous layer to form a clipping mask for just that layer.
- Delete layer--Deletes the current active layer. This is useful when experimenting. When something isn't quite working, hit the "Delete layer" button and try again.

The "View" button, shown here in red, allows a quick preview of which pixels in the image are included in the selection. Once there is an active selection, clicking the "View" button creates a low-contrast black and white version of the image. Superimposed on the soft gray image will be a red overlay wherever pixels are selected. The more intense the red, the more the pixel is selected. Pixels 100% selected are completely red. Partially selected pixels are lighter red.

In the image at the right, a Bright Lights selection is active and marching ants are enclosing pixels that are at least 50% selected.

The picture below shows how this image looks after clicking the "View" button. The image turns low contrast monochrome and the red mask shows pixels selected by the Bright Lights selection. Everything enclosed by marching ants is significantly red in the second image indicating a relatively high degree of selection. However, there is also quite a bit of less intense red outside the area defined by the marching ants. These are pixels that are less than 50% selected but are still partially selected by the Bright Lights selection. They represent the feathering of the Bright Lights selection into the surrounding tones. Parts of the image are also completely gray without any red. These are pixels that are not included at all in the Bright Lights selection.



The dialog box on the left always appears after clicking the "View" button. Its appearance provides a stopping point to evaluate the red-enhanced selection and decide whether it looks right for the desired adjustment or not. ALWAYS press the "Continue" button when ready to return to the original image. Remember, an action is being played to provide this enhanced view, and it's necessary to continue the action by pressing the "Continue" button on

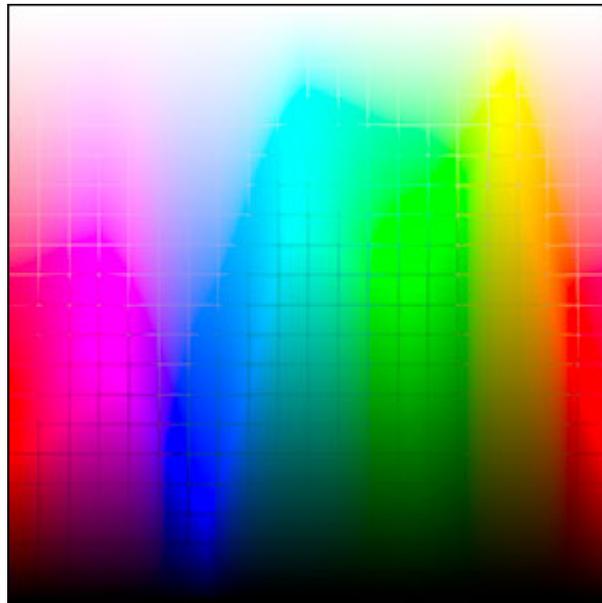
the message box. Pressing "Continue" restores the image and the active selection, including the marching ants. Clicking the "Stop" button instead will require removing the "View Mask Group" from the Layers panel and reloading the selection.

ZONE MASKS

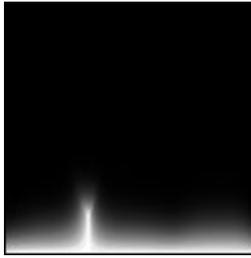
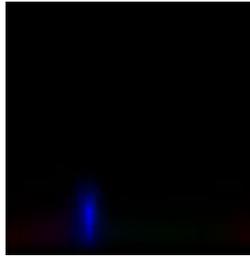
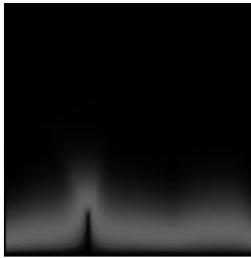
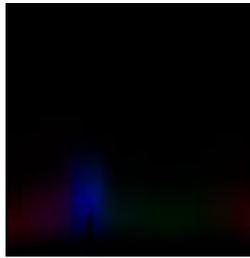
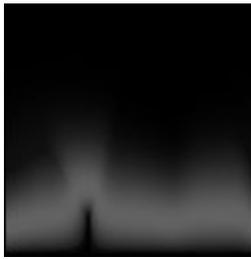
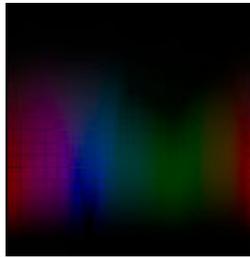
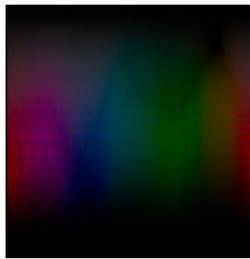
Zone masks are luminosity masks with very narrow tonal ranges created by subtracting one luminosity selection from another. [The Digital Zone System](#) by Robert Fisher discusses these masks in greater detail. Mask subtraction is an important technique described in "[The Magic Mid-tones](#)" and "[Questions and Answers about Luminosity Masks](#)" tutorials. *The Digital Zone System* takes certain subtracted masks and connects them with the Zone System, a method made popular by Ansel Adams for controlling brightness and contrast in an image. While these zone masks and the Zone System have some significant differences, as discussed below, the narrow tonal range selections can be useful for making adjustments, and photographers familiar with the Zone System might find it practical to employ a "zone approach" in deciding which selection would work best to target specific tones.

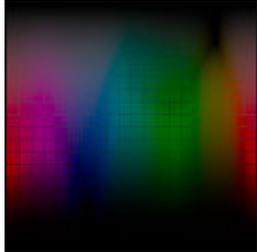
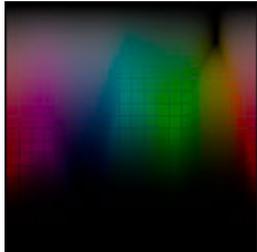
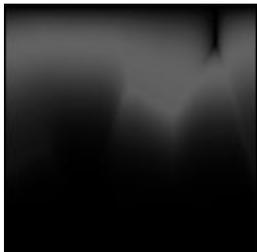
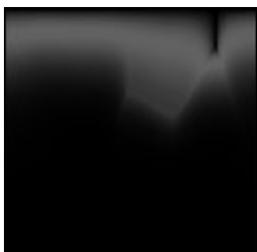
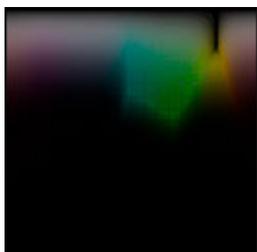
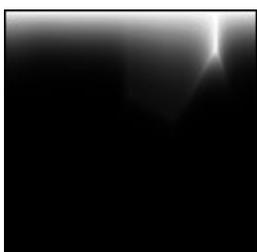
Zone masks are made from the basic Light-series and Darks-series luminosity masks according to the chart below. For most of the masks, the zone selections are created by subtracting adjacent selections in the Lights- and Darks-series of luminosity masks. The exceptions are:

- Zone 0, which is the Ultra Darks selection
- Zone 5, which is the Basic Mid-tones selection, and
- Zone 10, which is the Ultra Lights selection.



The graphic at the right shows color and texture varying across the tonal spectrum. The pictures in the chart below show which parts of this image are selected in each zone and provide a sense of how color, brightness, and texture are captured by the different zone selections.

ZONE	DESCRIPTION ¹	METHOD ²	MASK	IMAGE
0	Total black in print.	<i>Ultra darks</i> selection		
1	Effective threshold. First step above complete black in print, with slight tonality but no texture.	<i>Super Darks</i> minus <i>Ultra Darks</i>		
2	First suggestion of texture. Deep tonalities representing the darkest part of the image in which some slight detail is required.	<i>Shadow Darks</i> minus <i>Super Darks</i>		
3	Average dark materials and low values showing adequate texture.	<i>Dark Darks</i> minus <i>Shadow Darks</i>		
4	Average dark foliage, dark stone, or landscape shadow. Normal shadows value for Caucasian skin portraits in sunlight.	<i>Darks</i> minus <i>Dark Darks</i>		
5	Middle gray (18% reflectance). Clear north sky as rendered by panchromatic film, dark skin, gray stone, average weathered wood.	<i>Basic Mid-tones</i> selection (Select "All" then minus "Lights" and minus "Darks")		

6	Average Caucasian skin value in sunlight, diffuse skylight or artificial light. Light stone, shadows on snow in sunlit landscapes, clear north sky on panchromatic film with light blue filter.	<i>Lights</i> minus <i>Light Lights</i>		
7	Very light skin, light gray objects, snow with acute side lighting.	<i>Light Lights</i> Minus <i>Bright Lights</i>		
8	White with texture and delicate values, textured snow, highlights on Caucasian skin.	<i>Bright Lights</i> minus <i>Super Lights</i>		
9	White without texture approaching pure white, thus comparable to Zone 1 in its slight tonality without true texture. Snow in flat sunlight.	<i>Super Lights</i> minus <i>Ultra Lights</i>		
10	Pure white on the printing paper base. Specular glare or light sources in the picture area.	<i>Ultra Lights</i> selection		

¹From *The Negative* by Ansel Adams; Little, Brown and Company; Boston ©1981

²Method by which the particular zone selection is created using the basic masks in the Light-series and Darks-series of luminosity masks.

For those familiar with Ansel Adams' Zone System, the 11 zones of the zone masks are already well-known (though Adams used Roman numerals instead of Arabic numbers). However, it's important to note that the "Zone System" and "zone masks" have differences both in terms of the actual tones they describe and in their overall application to photography. With regard to the tones selected, zone masks aren't as precise as the zone system descriptions might suggest. The self-feathering

nature of luminosity masks means that the selected tones are appropriately blurred tonally into adjacent zones as can be seen from the illustrations of the zone selections in the chart. With a Zone 7 selection, for example, selected tones taper significantly into Zone 6 on the dark side and Zone 8 and Zone 9 on the light side. Zone 5, being the Basic Mid-tones selection, is also much broader than just a strictly designated Zone 5 tone might suggest. Zone 5 selections will appear to affect Zones 3 through 7 somewhat, even though the midpoint gray (Zone 5) will be selected most. This isn't to say that zone masks aren't useful. Knowing an approximate tonal range by understanding the Zone System makes choosing a selection potentially easier. The feathering merely means that an adjustment through a zone selection will blend effortlessly into the rest of the image.

Concerning their application to image processing, using zone masks is quite different than using the Zone System. The Zone System was a method for metering various parts of a scene with a spot meter and deciding into which zone these metered areas should appear in the printed image. Based on the spot meter's values, film development time was adjusted to either expand or contract the overall tonal range of the negative to help insure that the metered areas would land in the designated zones when the negative was printed. Since there is no chemical development with digital images, the expansion or contraction of tonal range that was key to using the Zone System doesn't apply when using zone masks. The zone masks should instead be seen as luminosity selections of very narrow tonal ranges that can be used like other luminosity selections to adjust, blend, brush in, or tweak the selected tones. The narrowness of the selected tonal range makes for more narrowly applied adjustments, and it's possible, and sometimes necessary, to do multiple adjustments to different zones to achieve the desired contrast and brightness in the image. So instead of a global change to contrast facilitated by changing development time in the Zone System, zone masks allow the photographer to work with one zone at a time to achieve the desired tonal goals for the image.

Because they are so narrow in terms of the tones selected, most of the zone selections will NOT show marching ants. Only zone 0 and zone 10 will show marching ants and then only if there are some very dark or very light tones in the image. The subtractions used to create all the zones in between (Zone 2 through Zone 9) result in selections in which no pixels are more than 50% selected. This means that even though there is an active selection, no marching ants show on the monitor. However, the zone selection will be active and a mask of the selection on an adjustment layer or the Channels panel will clearly show this by displaying dark gray tones that correspond to the selection. So it's important to remember that even though no marching ants are visible after loading a zone selection, a selection is active and will be targeting the corresponding tones in the image.

Like the CREATIVE MASKING section of the panel, the ZONE MASKS section uses progressive actions. The first step is to create all the zone masks using the "Create Zone Masks" button (blue rectangle). This creates all the zone masks on the Channels panel. Once these are present, clicking any of the



zone numbers (green rectangle) loads the corresponding zone as a selection. (Remember, most zones will have no marching ants even though the selection is active.) With an active selection, the CREATIVE MASKING section of the panel can then be used to make adjustment layers with the zone mask in place as a layer mask. Alternatively, if the Burn/Dodge layers are present, the brush tool can be used to add white or black paint to the Burn/Dodge layers through the zone selection to lighten or darken the corresponding tones in the image.

As long as the zone masks are present on the Channels panel they can be loaded as selections simply by clicking one of the zone numbers. So if one zone selection doesn't quite target the desired tones, simply click another number to try a different zone.

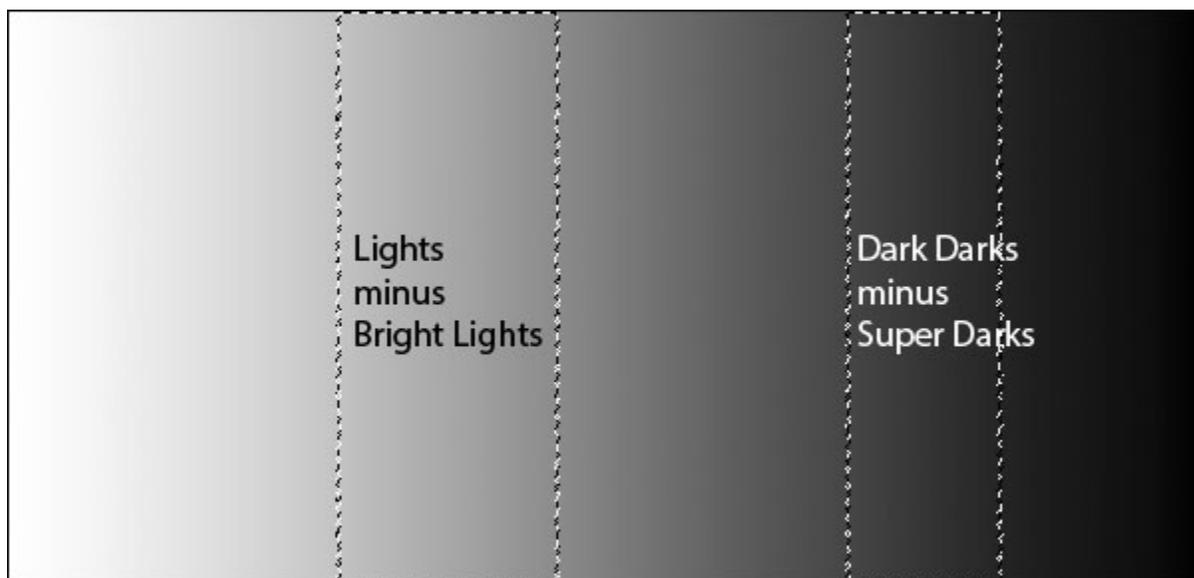
The "View" button in the upper right of the section (shown in red here) creates a low contrast black and white image with the selected areas showing in red (see page 15 for more information). Because the zone selections are narrow with no pixels more than 50% selected, the mask will be pale red to indicate this.

Once the zone masks have served their purpose in developing the image and are no longer needed, the "X" button (cyan rectangle) in the section removes the masks from the Channels panel.

The yellow "Save" button in this section allows the saving of any active selection as a mask on the Channels panel. It is not specific to zone masks; it can be used for any selection that has been created and is felt to be of sufficient importance that saving it might prove useful. Clicking this button brings up a dialog box where the mask can be given a name that will then appear on the Channels panel along with the mask of the selection. Sometimes, for example, a subtracted mask created in the blue section can be very useful, and saving it as a mask for future use is a good idea.

SUBTRACTED MASKS

The zone masks in the previous section are mostly a group of masks made by subtracting one luminosity selection from another luminosity selection. Collectively, these types of selections are referred to as subtracted masks and are made by subtracting a selection containing fewer selected pixels from one containing more selected pixels. The result is a new mid-tones-like selection that feathers into both lighter and darker tones surrounding the selection. These have long been one of my favorite ways to use luminosity masks since adjustments or painting through these subtracted selections generally maintains or improves contrast in the tones being adjusted. Examples of subtracted masks would be a Lights selection minus a Bright Lights selection, or a Dark Darks selection minus the Super Darks. In each case, the tones at the extreme end of the tonal gradient have been removed leaving a selection of off-center mid-tones. Subtracted selections are a great way to create customized selections to target specific tones.



There are many different combinations of subtracted selections and it would be difficult to create a set of actions that creates all them. Progressive actions, however, make it possible for the user to create all the different possibilities quite easily, and the "Subtracted Masks" section of the panel is intended to do this.

The way this section works is as follows:

1. The desired series of luminosity masks is first generated on the Channels panel by clicking either the "Lights" or "Darks" button (purple rectangle).
2. One of the newly generated masks is then loaded as a selection by clicking a number button immediately to the right of the "Lights" or "Darks" series button (green rectangle). These numbers correspond to the same masks as in the "Creative Masking" section. Marching ants will generally appear to show the selection edges.



3. To subtract a second selection from the first, click a button to the right of the minus sign (**magenta** rectangle) The new "subtracted" selection may or may not have marching-ant selection edges depending on the degree of pixel selection after the subtraction process. Narrow selections, like the zone masks, don't have a high degree of pixel selection, so there are no marching ants. *(NOTE: When choosing which selection to subtract, ALWAYS subtract a mask with a higher number than the original selection that was loaded. This insures that some pixels are still selected after subtraction. This follows the rule of subtracting a selection with fewer selected pixels from one with more selected pixels. So, for example, a Lights-2 minus Lights-4 subtraction would work. It subtracts the Super Lights (Lights-4) from the Light Lights (Lights-2) resulting in pixels still being selected after subtraction. However, reversing this and subtracting the Light Lights (Lights-2) from the Super Lights (Lights-4) results in extremely limited pixel selection after subtraction.)* The **red** "View" button can be used to preview which pixels are selected in the image (see page 15). *(NOTE: If the initial subtraction doesn't target the desired tones properly, do another one. As long as the Lights- or Darks-series masks are present on the Channels panel, the subtraction process can be repeated until the most useful subtracted selection is obtained.)*
4. Once the subtracted selection has been generated, the two most common options are:
 - a) Click one of the adjustment layer buttons in the "Creative Masking" section to create a layer mask of the subtracted selection on an adjustment layer. Then adjust the properties of the adjustment layer using the Properties panel or change the blending mode of the layer using the blending mode buttons.
 - b) Use the subtracted selection for luminosity painting—a personal favorite since subtracted masks do a very good job of confining paint to specific tones. *(NOTE: Use the "Deselect" button in the "Creative Masking" section to turn off the selection once luminosity painting is complete.)*
5. After the subtracted selection/mask has been properly generated and applied, the "X" button (**blue** rectangle on the right of this section) removes the masks that were generated for the subtraction process from the Channels panel.

SATURATION/VIBRANCE

As an image develops, changes to contrast, brightness, and color can also affect saturation. It's not unusual to be working on a scenic image for awhile and to suddenly realize the sky is now looking too blue, or the foliage is looking a bit unreal in its coloration. Saturation changes tend to accumulate during image processing and it's often useful to purposefully address saturation balance at some point to impart a more natural look to the image. Surprisingly, properly balancing saturation frequently allows heightened saturation to be actually be used. When it's evenly distributed across the frame, it doesn't look excessive.

The "Saturation/Vibrance" section provides useful tools for obtaining proper saturation balance through use of saturation and vibrance masks. Saturation

masks select the most saturated colors in an image and vibrance masks select the least saturated colors. The buttons in this section of the panel actually create two levels of selection: regular and focused. The "focused" selections are the "regular" selections intersected with themselves. In this way, the "focused" selection can be thought of as an "ultra" selection—the focused saturation mask only selects the very most saturated colors in an image and the focused vibrance mask only selects the most unsaturated colors. (NOTE: The colors in most photographic images are relatively unsaturated compared to what is possible for colors in Photoshop. As such, the saturation mask generally contains significantly fewer selected pixels than the vibrance mask. The masks/selections generated by the buttons on the panel take this into account to some degree by decreasing the colors included as "unsaturated" in the vibrance masks. This tends to increase the usefulness of the vibrance masks (especially the focused vibrance mask) since fewer selected pixels generally results in a more targeted adjustment.)



The "Saturation/Vibrance" section provides two ways to adjust saturation. The first is through the use of Hue/Saturation adjustment layers. The "H/S Layers" buttons (red rectangle) create various combinations of these Hue/Sat layers with the designated masks in place as layer masks. Usually, over-saturation (global over-saturation or over-saturation of a particular color) is addressed by decreasing saturation through a saturation or focused-saturation mask using the Hue/Sat adjustment. The saturation mask targets the over-saturated colors and the Hue/Sat adjustment decreases their saturation. Vibrance masks in combination with a Hue/Sat adjustment layer are used to enhance saturation of weakly saturated colors. The vibrance or focused vibrance mask targets the under-saturated colors and the Hue/Sat adjustment increases saturation in these pixels to make their color more vibrant. By using Hue/Sat adjustment layers with both saturation and vibrance masks, overall saturation can be balanced across the image. Additionally, because the Hue/Sat properties panel has a drop-down menu for colors, the masked Hue/Sat adjustment layers can also be used to target saturation of specific colors. (NOTE: Creating color channel luminosity masks using the buttons in the "Creative Masking" section is another method for targeting specific colors for saturation/vibrance adjustments.)

Saturation painting is a second method for adjusting color saturation in an image using saturation/vibrance masks, and can do so in a very controlled manner. It uses a special saturation painting layer. The "Saturation Painting" button in the "Miscellaneous" section sets up the saturation painting layer and changes the default brush colors to red and gray. The "Channels" buttons (blue rectangle) create the necessary masks that define the selections to paint through. These masks are placed on the Channels panel when they're created. Loading a saturation or focused saturation mask as a selection and painting gray through it onto the saturation painting layer decreases saturation in saturated colors. Loading a vibrance or focused-vibrance mask as a selection and painting a saturated color, like red, through the selection increases saturation of pixels with unsaturated color. The [Saturation Painting](#) tutorial describes this process in detail. The "X" button (green rectangle) clears the masks off the Channels panel.

MISCELLANEOUS

The "Miscellaneous" section of the "Actions" tab has a variety of actions that can be useful for image processing.



B/D layers—Sets up two layers that are used for luminosity painting. White paint is applied on the "Dodging" layer (set to Overlay blending mode) to lighten the image and black paint is applied on the "Burning" layer (set to Soft Light blending mode) to darken the image. Painting through luminosity selections created in the "Creative Masking" section confines burning/dodging brushstrokes to specific tones. [This video](#) by Sean Bagshaw describes these two layers and how they work.

Orton Lights—The Orton effect blurs an image slightly and increases saturation. It works particularly well for light tones. This action creates the Orton effect for the image and then masks the effect to the light tones using a Lights luminosity mask on the layer group for the effect. The user is given the opportunity to choose the level of blur to tailor the effect to the image. The opacity of the group can be adjusted to fine-tune the effect. This [blog post](#) describes the technique.

Detailed Darks—This action is somewhat the opposite of the Orton Lights. It subtly increases detail in the darker tones of the image. Again, the user is given the opportunity to choose the amount of blur applied, which can affect the degree of detail enhancement. This [blog post](#) describes the effect.

Saturation Painting—This button creates the saturation painting layer and changes the default brush colors to red and gray. Saturation painting works like luminosity painting except it controls saturation in the image. The [Saturation Painting](#) tutorial details the technique.

Cloud Sharpening—This is the action for the [Cloud Sharpening tutorial](#).

Make-It-Glow—This is an action described in the Make-It-Glow tutorial, which is included in the download, that imparts a glowing quality to the image.

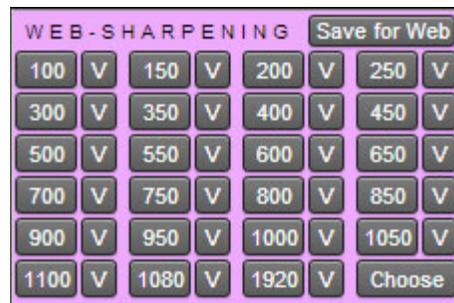
Color Clone—This button creates a layer for changing color but maintaining texture as described in the [Cloning Color, Retaining Texture](#) tutorial.

Clear Channels—This button runs a script to remove non-color, non-layer mask channels from the Channels panel. The script is slow on large image files with multiple layers, so it's best used for small image files or flattened images.

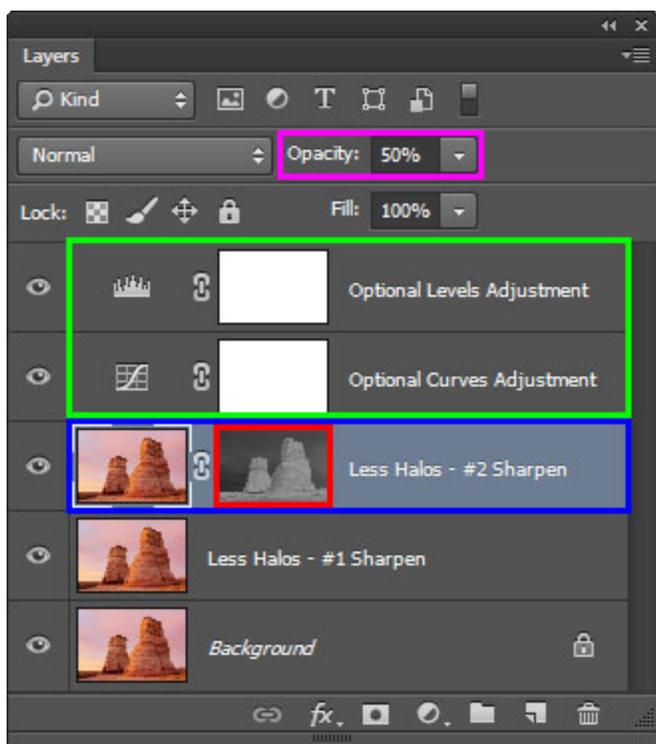
#1, #2, and #3 buttons—These buttons, located in the upper right of this section, are spare buttons with no particular action associated with them. They allow the user to record actions that become part of the panel. If there are repeated steps in your workflow that you do while this panel is open, it's advantageous to record the steps as an action into one of these buttons. Then, simply pressing the button will play the keystrokes and/or menu commands to execute that maneuver. Press a button to get a pop-up to describe the process.

WEB-SHARPENING

The "Web-Sharpening" section of the "Actions" tab has buttons that downsize and sharpen an image for web presentation. This is done on a duplicate image in order to preserve the original file intact. (NOTE: The buttons are NOT intended to sharpen images for print. That's an entirely different process.) The number buttons run actions that provide a sharpened image with the number providing the final horizontal pixel dimension. The vertical dimension is resized automatically in proportion to the original image. So, for example, if an image 45 cm wide and 30 cm high is being developed in Photoshop and a 600-pixel wide jpeg is needed for web presentation, clicking the "600" button will provide an image sharpened for the web that is 600 pixels wide by 400 pixels high.



The "V" button to the right of each number button provides a sharpened image with that number as the final vertical dimension, instead of as the horizontal dimension. Again, when using the "V" buttons, the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the final sharpened image are proportional to the dimensions of the original image.



The Layers panel for the sharpened image is shown at the left. Depending on how the image was developed and if any sharpening was applied during RAW conversion, the sharpened image may be more sharp or less sharp than desired. The opacity of the "Less Halos - #2 Sharpen" layer (blue rectangle) is set to 50% by default (magenta rectangle). Increasing or decreasing the opacity of this layer can be used to increase or decrease the final sharpness of the image. The "Less Halos - #2 Sharpen" layer has a special luminosity mask (red rectangle) to help reduce halos in the sharpened jpeg. Inactivating or changing the density of this layer mask will provide still more sharpening for the resized image if that is desired.

The top two layers of the sharpened image are unadjusted Curves and Levels adjustment layers (green rectangle). Sometimes, downsizing and sharpening can slightly change brightness and contrast. Either of these layers can be used to correct this if brightness/contrast changes are noted to occur. (NOTE: If a particular after-sharpening adjustment is being used repeatedly, it can be programmed into one the "#1, #2, or #3" buttons in the "Miscellaneous" section.)



The "Choose" button (shown in **blue**) allows the user to choose a different pixel dimension if one of the pre-programmed buttons doesn't match what is needed. To use the "Choose" button, first multiply the desired final pixel dimension by 1.667. The action will stop and allow this value to be entered. The action will stop a second time to allow the insertion of the final pixel dimension. For example, if the desired final pixel dimension is 625

pixels on the vertical dimension, first multiply 625 by 1.667. This equals 1042. When the action stops the first time, enter 1042 pixels as the vertical dimension and click "OK" to continue. The action will stop a second time, and this time 625 pixels should be entered as the vertical dimension. Click "OK" to continue. The action will then run to completion with the luminosity mask being added to the "Less Halos - #2 Sharpen" layer and the Optional Curves Adjustment and Optional Levels Adjustment layers being created above. Layer opacity or a Curves/Levels adjustment can then be made if needed.

The "Save for Web" button (shown in **red**) opens the "Save for Web" dialog box in Photoshop so that the image can be quickly saved for upload or other purposes.

The **green** buttons are new to this version of the panel. They provide resizing and sharpening for high-definition (HD) devices sized 1080 x 1920 pixels. Remember, the actual number will provide resizing to that number of pixels as the horizontal dimension. The "V" button to the right of the number provides resizing to that number as the vertical dimension. Because the final resized image for these HD sizes are larger than normal web display, the opacity of the "Less Halos - #2 Sharpen" layer has been increased to 75% (instead of the default 50%). While this works for many images, the opacity of this layer can still be adjusted higher or lower to provide optimal sharpening for the image at this size.

NOTE: The web-sharpening actions had their origins in a post by Alex Nail on FredMiranda.com many years ago. The main feature that survived from that thread in these actions is a double down-sizing where the first down-sizing is 1.667 times the final dimension. The main feature that has been added is a luminosity mask to control the over-sharpening halos that come from using this method. Alex Nail continues to write about web-sharpening. His latest information is here: <http://www.alexnail.com/blog/tutorials/resize-and-sharpen-for-web/>

Workflow Considerations

There are many ways to develop images in Photoshop. Personally, I prefer a very "free-form" approach where the image determines the next step instead of some predetermined process that uses the same steps each time. This requires the photographer to engage with the image and ask, "OK, what does this image need most right now?" and then figure out a way to meet that need. Contrast, color, saturation, and brightness are the four big items to think about. Getting these four elements balanced across the entire frame usually results in an image where the

viewer doesn't even realize there has been manipulation. As a nature photographer, when I view the natural world, I'm NOT thinking "The sky over there is too blue." or "The contrast here looks unnatural." or "The red in that flower looks wrong." No! It's all naturally right and my eyes see it as right. And so it's necessary, as the image is developed, to bring this natural rightness to the picture. Even if the photographer's interpretation of the scene differs markedly from what was captured by the camera, properly balanced contrast, color, saturation, and brightness means the viewer remains unaware of what was done in Photoshop to create this. When the picture looks right, the development process will be invisible.

The purpose of the TKActions panel is to help photographers bring this perfect balance to their images. By using seamlessly feathered selections of specific tones, imbalances that could easily draw the eye are instead easily removed with an adjustment layer or a paint brush. Saturation, contrast, color, and brightness can be addressed individually or in combination; locally or globally. It's just necessary to discover what needs to be done.

The question "What does the image need right now?" might have answers like:

- "More overall contrast."
- "More saturation in the light tones."
- "Better mid-tone contrast."
- "The sky (blue/cyan) is a little too red."
- "The image is too dark."
- "That corner is too light."
- "The shadows feel heavy."
- "The light tones lack detail."
- "The colors feel weak."

These are things the viewer will see too . . . and quickly pick up on as looking unnatural. It's the photographer's job to spot these things first and correct them before presenting the image to the viewer.

1. Evaluate the image.
2. Identify the need.
3. Find a way to fix it.

These three steps are the workflow associated with using this panel, and the panel is really only involved in the third step, but it plays a very important role. The right mask or the right selection allows Photoshop adjustment layers and brushes to do some pretty amazing things with the results being so perfectly integrated into the image that the technique and process remains completely hidden from the viewer. The panel quickly generates and makes available a wide variety of selections and masks to correct many problems, but it's still the vision and feelings of the photographer that guides the process. Evaluate, identify, fix—it takes some thought, it takes some effort, and it takes some time, but it also allows a very personal engagement with the image during the development process so that the final result ends up being very personal as well. The image presented to the viewer is not a step-by-step, paint-by-numbers product that could have been produced by

anyone following the same procedure. Instead, it reflects the photographer's hand, not only in holding the camera to take the picture, but also in manipulating the light to achieve what they consider to be the perfect balance. The hallmark of art is something that is uniquely beautiful, and this process—this free-form workflow—insures that no two images are ever developed the same. "Evaluate, identify, fix" means that each image dictates and follows its own special path to its own final form. It is driven by the eye, the mind, and the emotions of the photographer who took the picture in the first place, and as such uniquely reflects the sensibilities of the one individual who knows the image best. When the photographer works with the image in this manner, "evaluate, identify, fix" eventually becomes "listen, respond, listen, respond, listen, respond. . ." This is the symbiosis by which art is created—the photographer and the image work together in a silent but active relationship to create the final product. And after some time and with the creation of a body of work, it's this purposeful development by a conscientious photographer that becomes the keystone of personal style.

NOTES

In August 2013 I received notification from Adobe that Flash-based panels would no longer be supported in Creative Cloud applications starting in mid-2014. This included the custom TK-ACTIONS and TK_ACTIONS panel that I had developed for my personal use in Photoshop and had made available to other interested photographers. The new standard for Photoshop extension panels would be HTML5, not Flash. Photoshop CS5 and CS6 would continue to only support Flash-based panels, but Photoshop CC (2014) would require HTML5-based panels starting in mid-2014.

I had made the switch to Photoshop CC by the time I received notification from Adobe and had plans to further improve the panel based both on my own needs and from feedback and requests received from other users. Creating an HTML5-based panel is accomplished with an integrated design environment that utilizes HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. Through a bit of trial and error, the custom panel to run my actions has been updated to the HTML5 format, and several changes were incorporated in the process. The revised panel is called "TKActions".

The panels I make available has been tested on Mac and Windows. Because of the necessity to support previous versions of Photoshop, there is now a Flash-based version of the panel for Photoshop CS5/CS6 and an HTML5-based version for Photoshop CC/CC (2014). Both versions have the same layout and buttons, both use the same actions installed on Photoshop's regular Actions panel, and both produce the same results. While they look slightly different, they do exactly the same thing.

Installation procedures for the two panels differ. As explained above in the "Installing the Panel" section, the Flash-based panel for Photoshop CS5/CS6 is installed by copying the "TKActions" folder to the "Panels" folder of the Photoshop

application. The Photoshop CC/CC (2014) version of the panel is installed using Adobe Extension Manager CC via a ZXP file.

There are two other differences between the HTML5 and Flash-based panel that users should be aware of.

1. Locked panel dimensions. As mentioned on page 4, the dimensions of the Photoshop CC version of the panel are locked. This was necessary to keep scroll bars from appearing and interfering with button access whenever the panel was moved or rearranged within the workspace. Frequent and unexpected scroll-barring was observed anytime the panel was moved using its name or grab bar, with the only fix being to close the panel and reopen it. Locking the dimensions removed this annoying behavior as an issue. As mentioned on page 3, there are two Photoshop CC versions of the panel: regular and mini. The regular panel works well on most desktop computer monitors. Its 830-pixel vertical dimension generally requires a screen that displays at least 900 pixels vertically. The mini panel works on most laptops or smaller desktop screens. Its 720-pixel vertical dimension generally requires monitors of 766 pixels or greater vertically. The two versions of the panel have identical layouts and buttons, use the same action sets, and install in a similar manner. The Photoshop CS5/CS6 version of the panel does generate scroll bars on smaller screens and has sides/edges that can be grabbed and resized to insure access to the buttons on the panel regardless of monitor dimensions.

2. Clicking on panel takes the focus off Photoshop as the active application.

The HTML5 panel is essentially like opening a browser window inside Photoshop. It has many of the same properties, and HTML5 extension panels can actually provide many of the same functions as browsers. Unfortunately, clicking on an HTML5 panel is similar to clicking outside of Photoshop and making the browser the active application instead of Photoshop. As a result, there is a known issue that clicking on the HTML5 panel inactivates keyboard shortcuts in Photoshop since it's no longer seen as the active application. Adobe states they are aware of the issue, but have not yet provided a solution. ***To overcome this problem, the buttons on the TKActions panel have been programmed to restore Photoshop as the active application after the action has completed running. So this known issue is essentially a non-issue when clicking any button on the panel.*** However, clicking an area of the panel that is not a button (such as a tab, or blank area, or a written label) makes the panel the active application and temporarily inactivates Photoshop. Clicking anywhere back in Photoshop restores Photoshop as the active application. Clicking buttons is by far the most common way to interact with the panel, so it should be rare to encounter an unresponsive Photoshop application (as evidenced by inactive keyboard shortcuts) after clicking on the panel. But it may occasionally occur, and clicking anywhere in the main screen of Photoshop will restore its functionality. To reiterate, at this time this is believed to be a problem that needs to be solved by Adobe. A solution has not been provided yet, but Adobe is also mandating that extension panels be HTML5-based for Creative Cloud applications by mid-2014. So there really isn't a way to completely avoid this issue at this time. Fortunately, because the buttons on the TKActions have been

programmed to always restore Photoshop as the active application, this should generally be an uncommon occurrence.

I hope the panel is useful to you and that it helps you achieve your artistic goals in Photoshop. Please feel free to [contact me](#) if you have any questions, problems, or suggestions.