



January 10, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
 Secretary
 U.S. Department of Agriculture
 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
 Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable David Bernhardt
 Acting Secretary
 U.S. Department of the Interior
 1849 C Street, NW
 Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Perdue and Acting Secretary Bernhardt:

We write in strong support of the recent request of the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) for a firm federal funding commitment of \$200 million over ten years to address the agricultural, natural resource and public health concerns associated with the impact of the federal drought contingency plan (DCP) on the Salton Sea.

We understand that the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) is urgently working to reach a federal multi-state DCP agreement to secure Colorado River water supplies. Under the current legal framework and seniority system, declining water levels in Lake Mead will first trigger cutbacks to lower priority Arizona users. The BOR DCP agreement aims to modify these mandatory cutbacks by securing voluntary water use reductions from Arizona and from more senior California agricultural districts. We share IID's serious concern that full DCP implementation will ultimately decrease inflows to the Salton Sea and harm the public health, environment and economy of our region.

The Salton Sea is sustained by agricultural drainage waters from the Imperial and Coachella Valleys, and is adjacent to roughly 600,000 acres of prime farmland. Inflows to the Salton Sea have been declining due to drought and prior voluntary agricultural water conservation efforts that have supported state and regional water supply security for over nearly two decades. Decreasing inflows to the Sea have resulted in the exposure of emissive lakebed (playa) and have negatively impacted area air quality. The region is in severe non-attainment with federal air quality standards and has the highest rate of childhood asthma in California. Agricultural producers bear the brunt of increasingly stringent air quality regulation. Poor air quality also has a negative impact on agricultural production.

Anticipating that the worsening Colorado River Basin (CRB) drought would impact the Salton Sea, we began working with the Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2015 to develop Salton Sea conservation pilot projects. We developed these projects with a view toward facilitating a more substantial federal role at the Sea given the substantial federal landownership and tribal trust responsibilities in the region. This ongoing partnership work with USDA demonstrated the need to modify several key USDA conservation programs in order to both expedite our projects and to expand and prioritize conservation work to the highly emissive Salton Sea playa.

In 2016, we began working with our federal representatives to develop drought legislation for the Farm Bill to make these critical changes, all of which were included in the recently enacted Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018.

In particular, the law authorizes USDA to directly target expedited funding through multiple streamlined, noncompetitive processes that include directly contracting with the State of California to cost-share on Salton Sea playa conservation. The conference report directs USDA to use this new authority to mitigate the impact of regional drought agreements on agricultural producers and natural resources.

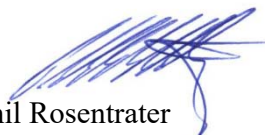
A Salton Sea agreement using these new Farm Bill authorities to facilitate DCP implementation should take the form of a Memorandum of Understanding between USDA and the State of California to expand their existing partnership to provide 1:1 match to California's existing Salton Sea funding. Recognizing that past Department of the Interior funding commitments of this nature have not been fulfilled, it should be required that USDA advance \$40 million of this funding to the California USDA NRCS State Conservationist in order to ensure the ready availability of these federal funds.

At a recent meeting of Colorado River water users, the Commissioner of Reclamation indicated that she would begin the process of regulating agricultural water rights if a DCP agreement is not signed by January 31, 2019. The legislative intent of the new Farm Bill drought legislation is to give USDA the tools and funding necessary to avoid regulating agricultural water rights and to mitigate the impact of agreements like DCP on producers and critical natural resources. Our region is already the most significant contributor to water conservation on the Colorado River. Congress provided USDA with these new tools in order to extend the reach of these collaborative efforts, to avoid the imposition of additional regulatory burdens on agricultural producers, and to protect a critically important agricultural region and natural resource.


We sincerely appreciate your existing efforts to partner with us on Salton Sea conservation and look forward to working with you to implement these important new Farm Bill provisions. The commitment sought by IID and which we strongly support would provide us with some level of assurance that DCP will not increase the regulatory burden on farmers, diminish agricultural production, negatively impact the public health, environment, and economy of our region, or undermine the State of California's substantial investment in Salton Sea conservation.

Sincerely,




Phil Rosentrater
GM/Executive Director
Salton Sea Authority




Bruce Wilcox
Assistant Secretary – Salton Sea Policy
California Natural Resources Agency



James C. Hanks
 James C. Hanks
 Director, Division 3
 Imperial Irrigation District

Erik J. Ortega

Erik J. Ortega
 Director, Division 4
 Imperial Irrigation District



Ryan Kelley
 Ryan Kelley, Supervisor
 Supervisor, District 4
 Imperial County

Luis A. Plancarte

Luis A. Plancarte
 Supervisor, District 2
 County of Imperial



G. Patrick O'Dowd

G. Patrick O'Dowd, Director
 Division 1
 Coachella Valley Water District

Cástulo R. Estrada

Cástulo R. Estrada, Director
 Division 5
 Coachella Valley Water District



Thomas Torte

Thomas Torte, Chairman/SSA Director member
 Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla

Altrena Santillanes

Altrena Santillanes, Secretary/SSA Director member
 Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla



Jeff Hewitt
Fifth District Supervisor
Riverside County Board of Supervisors

V. Manuel Perez
Supervisor, Fourth District
County of Riverside



Sincerely,

Kay Day Pricola
Executive Director
Imperial Valley Vegetable Growers Association