



June 23, 2020

Cástulo Estrada, President  
Phil Rosentrater, Executive Director  
Salton Sea Authority  
82995 Hwy 111, Suite 200  
Indio, CA 92201

*Submitted via email*

**Re: North Lake Pilot Project Community Engagement**

Dear President Estrada and Mr. Rosentrater:

Thank you for talking with us on June 15th about the North Lake Pilot Project and the Authority's proposed efforts to reach out to the public. As you noted, we have strongly supported the concept of a North Lake for many years and have encouraged the Authority to lead this effort, as shown in our December 18, 2019 letter to the Authority (attached). That letter specifically urged the Authority to:

1. Take a leadership role;
2. Promote community engagement; and
3. Lead regular community education and outreach sessions.

Time is of the essence. We share your frustration with the SSMP's very slow pace and the state's delays in expending funds the voters dedicated to the Salton Sea. We believe the Authority can model best practices. We again encourage the Authority to demonstrate leadership and show that it can design and implement functional projects quickly, engage local communities meaningfully, and ensure stakeholder interests are reflected. We encourage the Authority to be proactive, to develop and implement a community engagement plan now, prior to receiving Prop. 68 funds, to avoid further delays and to show that the Authority is the appropriate local lead agency.

To demonstrate this leadership to Salton Sea stakeholders, the community in general, and to the state, we urge you to add the following items to the Authority's next Board of Directors meeting agenda:

1. Presentations:
  - a. Authority's public outreach efforts to date
  - b. Tetra Tech – North Lake Plan, as shown on September 25, 2019 in Palm Desert
  - c. North Lake Pilot Project, as described in the Budget Change Proposal
2. Action Items
  - a. Direct a portion of FY 2019-20 \$345,000 budget carryover to community engagement
  - b. Community engagement plan, as described below
  - c. Scope of work and schedule for North Lake Pilot Project

### **Community Engagement**

It is crucial for SSA to start developing a community outreach and engagement plan to ensure thoughtful engagement of all stakeholders, an equitable distribution of project benefits, and support and partnership with communities who will be most impacted by the development of the North Lake. There are many elements that should be included, and our collective organizations have deep expertise in how to design engagement and can provide guidance and support.

Primarily, a community engagement plan shall include the following:

- A public process for developing the financial agreement between DWR and SSA for the \$19.25 million allocated for the project. This financial agreement must also include community engagement language.
- A dedicated budget for conducting community outreach and engagement.
- A timeline or schedule that clearly articulates all opportunities for outreach and engagement where the public can weigh in on the design and development of projects.

- A list of the project phases along with their respective comment periods for the public to be able to provide written comments and recommendations on the development of the project.
- A clear process for considering and incorporating public input into the project that ensures adequate lead time and educational materials for outreach that maximizes participation from a diverse representation of communities throughout the region.

This plan shall also highlight and provide guidance on how to address engagement accessibility issues, such as language, virtual accessibility, meeting times, and others that will help and encourage community residents to engage and participate.

As we noted on our call, the North Lake Pilot Project offers the opportunity to leverage additional funding to meet a range of objectives. The \$19.25 million from Prop. 68 is not a cap; other funds, from a variety of sources, could supplement this to support additional project elements. Now is the time to engage the community and other stakeholders to develop and finalize a clear set of goals and objectives for the North Lake Pilot Project and begin the process of identifying additional funding sources. The North Lake Pilot Project could be showcased as a demonstration multi-benefit project, providing wildlife habitat, dust suppression, community and recreational amenities, and economic development opportunities. The Project should also include a well-defined monitoring and adaptive management program, to inform the development of subsequent, larger Salton Sea projects.

We commend your commitment to transparency. We encourage you to post relevant North Lake materials to the Authority's website. Currently, the only relevant materials on the website are a low-resolution graphic and a chapter from the 2016 financing and feasibility study.

We thank you for reaching out to Alianza to request support in drafting the scope for an outreach and engagement task that SSA will include in your proposed agreement with the Natural Resources Agency for the North Lake Pilot Project. We appreciate this good-faith effort and look forward to working with you to finalize the description, goals, and objectives of the North Lake Pilot Project in cooperation with our community and environmental partners. We reaffirm our commitment to working with you and the community to advance the restoration of the Salton Sea.

Sincerely,

Michael Cohen  
Senior Associate  
Pacific Institute

Rebecca Zaragoza  
Senior Policy Advocate  
Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

Brandon Dawson  
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