

Salton Sea Federal Update

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Salton Sea Legislation and Hearing

- Congressman Ruiz has been developing Salton Sea legislation that includes many SSA legislative platform priorities.
- Legislation crafted in order to frame the Salton Sea hearing SSA requested in the context of DCP.
- House Natural Resources Committee is expected to formally notice that Salton Sea hearing for September 24, 2020.
- Witness list is being developed.
- Congressman Ruiz will likely release a section-by-section summary of the bill in advance of the hearing.
- Salton Sea-specific federal legislation provides an effective organizing vehicle to mobilize support for SSA priorities and frame congressional action.
- It also provides an effective way to engage with the administration to mobilize support for those priorities.

Federal Appropriations

- Congress will likely pass a continuing resolution (CR) to fund the government in the near term, pushing annual appropriations bills until later in the year or January.
- SSA has Salton Sea language in H.R. 7617, the federal appropriations bill for the Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation.
- Measures in that legislation direct these agencies to expedite federal Salton Sea permitting, direct increased Salton Sea federal investment, and direct a more robust federal partnership in Salton Sea management efforts.

Water Resources Development Act (WRDA)

- Congressional staff from the House and Senate are negotiating the details WRDA. Efforts are bipartisan but we do not expect completion until December.
- WRDA bills authorize Corps of Engineers projects, and are usually enacted every two years.
- WRDA often becomes a legislative vehicle for other water-related measures, including those related to other federal agencies.
- Earlier this year, SSA secured language in H.R. 7575, the House-version of WRDA. Congressmen Ruiz and Vargas led that effort.
- This language authorizes the Corps to adopt a locally-prepared study of the Salton Sea Perimeter/North Lake as meeting Corps feasibility planning requirements.
- This authorization would ensure that such a project would be eligible to seek Corps construction funding without the need for the development of a Corps' authored feasibility study — a process that would take roughly 3 years and additional funding and approvals.

Post-Election Administration Transition

- The election will result in a period of transition regardless of outcome.
- In the case of a second Trump administration term, administration officials typically depart, creating new opportunities and advocacy needs to educate new officials.
- In the case of a Biden-Harris administration, opportunities will likely be more significant as California will have very high-level administration representation.
- And should Senate control change, Senator Feinstein would become chair of the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations subcommittee.
- Senator Harris has been a champion of SSA's federal platform.

Sen. Harris

Support for SSA priorities

- Senator Harris has worked closely with Senator Feinstein to advance SSA priorities.
- Supported providing appropriations to USDA's Watershed Act so that it could be used to benefit the Salton Sea.
- Wrote letters of support for CNRA application for Watershed Act assistance SSA helped to draft.
- Cosponsored SSA's Farm Bill successful amendment to increase funding and authorize use of that funding at the Salton Sea.
- Supported IID's requested modifications to the DCP legislation to ensure Salton Sea protections.
- Wrote a strong letter of support to USDA for the IID DCP request for targeted Salton Sea assistance.

Congress of the United States Washington, DC 20515

December 20, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Ryan A. Fisher
Acting Assistant Secretary
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20314

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

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Secretaries Zinke and Perdue, Administrator Pruitt, and Acting Assistant Secretary Lamont:

We are writing to request that you establish an interagency Salton Sea working group to identify, coordinate and extend financial and technical resources to support Salton Sea management in partnership with the state of California, the Salton Sea Authority (SSA) and other local stakeholders. This working group is critical to achieving the objectives set forth in the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. Department of the Interior and the State of California Natural Resources Agency regarding the coordination of activities to manage the Salton Sea.

Located in Imperial and Riverside counties, the Salton Sea is the largest body of water in the State of California. Since the early 2000s, inflows into the Salton Sea have been significantly affected by drought, reduction in water flow from Mexico, and decreased agricultural runoff due to the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) which permitted the largest agricultural-to-urban water transfer in the nation. One of the requirements within the QSA was a mandate to deliver mitigation water to the Salton Sea for a period of fifteen years. This time period expires at the end of 2017, which will accelerate the Salton Sea's decline. Absent a well-developed and funded Sea restoration plan, the future public health, agricultural, ecological, cultural and economic costs at the Salton Sea are estimated at \$70 billion.

The federal government is a major landowner at the Salton Sea, and has acknowledged its associated responsibility for its management. It is also currently negotiating a Drought Contingency Plan in the Lower Colorado River Basin that seeks additional water conservation from Southern California, which would result in significant additional reductions in inflows to the Salton Sea. Local stakeholders have objected to contemplating such commitments absent a funded Sea restoration program.

The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) recently released its Salton Sea Management Program Phase 1: Ten-Year Plan (March 2017) (State Plan), and has allocated \$80 million toward its implementation. CNRA has been actively working with each of your agencies to secure federal support for the State Plan. For example, CNRA is working with EPA to develop and submit a Salton Sea proposal for Water Infrastructure and Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) financing which will enable them to leverage the State's funding already committed. CNRA is also actively working with the Corps to permit

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Federal Opportunities

- In a new administration, there will be significant advocacy needs and opportunities.
- All high level officials will require Senate hearing and confirmation. This provides California's Senators with the opportunity to secure Salton Sea commitments from the new administration.
- New non-confirmed administration officials will need to be educated on SSA priorities.
- Administration can take executive actions without Congressional approval to advance SSA priorities, particularly through Executive Orders.
- Elements of Congressman Ruiz's bill are drafted to facilitate executive action to benefit the Salton Sea in anticipation of a possible transition.
- In a transition, a new and fast moving budget process would begin that sets critical early precedents for funding policies and priorities