



Salton Sea Authority

Executive Director's Report

To the Board of the Directors

May 27, 2021

Executive Summary

With the groundbreaking of the Species Habitat Project in January activity at and around the Sea is beginning to show real momentum. The Salton Sea Authority ("Authority") in conjunction with or in support of its members and partners has been actively advancing projects in the Desert Shores, North Shore, and Bombay Beach communities. In addition, and in conjunction with the State and our partners, plans are being formalized for a more comprehensive approach to public outreach, engagement, education, and advocacy.

Much of the past month has been focused on cultivating relationships with partners and community representatives regarding issues, challenges, and opportunities around the Sea. As contemplated by the Authority's 2021-2022 draft budget and business plan we anticipate significant increased investments in our communications and education efforts in the coming year, and we have initiated the process to accomplish that.

Public Relations

State of California

The Authority has been consulting with the State to develop a coordinated plan to outreach and engage the communities around the Sea regarding the important work of the SSMP and the Authority to mitigate the risks to human health and safety, to stabilize the communities, and to revitalize the region. While nothing has been finalized to date, conversations have been productive. Authority staff anticipates that a near-term agreement with the State will facilitate a more comprehensive outreach and education program for both the large-scale projects such as SCH and other landscape-scaled mitigation and restoration efforts, while addressing the expressed needs and concerns of the individual communities around the Sea.

Local Media

In addition to the work with the State, the Authority participated in the development of a four-part series focusing on the Salton Sea which aired this month on KESQ-TV. Maintaining working relationships with local and out of market media is important to protecting our brand and telling our story.

Outreach

In conjunction with the various projects, the Authority is developing plans and will begin initiating in the coming months community outreach efforts associated with upcoming projects, including Desert Shores and the North Shore Demonstration Pilot Project. This effort will be in collaboration with the principal project sponsors and the local leaders, and will include a robust vetting of the project program, timeline, costs, and constraints. Input from the community outreach effort will further refine the project development effort as it moves forward.

Education

The Authority has a long history of involvement with academia in the science and history realm. Much of that work historically, however, has largely been academic in nature. Recently, the Authority along with its partners have begun to pursue a more fulsome engagement by the universities to enhance the value-added nature of the efforts being undertaken at the university level. Universities from around the world have come to the Sea to write thesis papers which end up on the shelves or in archives, lending little value to the immediate needs at the Sea. By working closely with local and regional universities, we are endeavoring to change this cycle.

- *Cal State San Bernardino* has long been the repository or archival records for the Authority through its Water Resources Institute which maintains its records at the Palm Desert Campus. Recently we have initiated dialogue with the Communications program at Cal State, collaborating on the development of a class for the fall tentatively titled "Cultural Narratives and Environmental Policy Concerning the Salton Sea". Teams of students (3-4 each) would be tasked with focusing on different communities and organizations, and interview representative to gather the stories they share about the Salton Sea – an oral history project of sorts but focusing on the here-and-now. The end-product would be a collection of the prominent, widely shared stories about the Salton Sea, which could be analyzed for the values and perceptions revealed in the narratives about how different groups of people view the challenges and opportunities of the Salton Sea. This work is expected to spawn additional work by the History Department in documenting historical accounts from the region.

- *UC Riverside* has also been involved in studying various issues at and around the Sea for years. Recently UC Riverside sought federal funds to support research to determine the health impacts of the environmental crisis at the Salton Sea, and its disparate impact on the Indigenous and Latino communities. The research will also provide important data on the sources of toxic dust in the region and assessment of benefits, if any, from ongoing and planned dust mitigation projects in the Salton Sea region.
- *Cal Poly San Luis Obispo* also recently entered the picture at the Salton Sea by way of introduction from a community group at Desert Shores. The Civil Engineering program has expressed an interest and to the fullest extent possible will be engaged in the design of the improvements which will facilitate the refilling of the “finger lakes”. Beyond that, the university has inquired about being involved in future projects which might afford the Authority and the State opportunities to do some advanced planning for future projects. This information could prove valuable for budgeting, planning, and entitlement purposes going forward.
- We plan to cast a broad net to the educational communities, both at the university level and to the local kindergarten through twelfth grade students to engage them in the conversation about the Sea and its future. With the right resources properly aligned, these investments should pay significant dividends in future years.

Conclusion

Next month’s board meeting will feature our university and academic partnerships and provide greater insights into the operationalization of our public outreach investments and efforts associated therewith.