

Memorandum

To: Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors
From: G. Patrick O'Dowd, Executive Director /GM
Date: April 27, 2023

Re: Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Salton Sea Impacts

On Tuesday, April 11th, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) released a draft Supplemental Impact Statement for Near-term Colorado River Operations (SEIS). That document was prepared to address impacts from various alternatives being considered by the Bureau to address increasing operational risk on the Colorado River. We have been provided by Ms. Lisa Moore of Cultivating Conservation a [preliminary overview of that SEIS](#), which is included in your board packet. The SEIS is now subject to a 45-day public comment period.

In summary, and as we were informed by Ms. Jaci Gould of Reclamation at the January meeting of this Board, environmental and public health impacts to the Salton Sea and associated regional impacts are unaddressed in the SEIS. And while the State and Reclamation under the current negotiations (as contemplated by the Commitment Agreement) are working to implement a program to create 250,000 acre foot of conserved water for the benefit of the basin, the apparent preferred alternative in the SEIS would likely require far greater sacrifice.

We were also recently provided by the State a copy of an analysis titled "[Updating the US Bureau of Reclamation's Salton Sea Spreadsheet Model \(SSAM\) for Future Inflow Scenarios](#)" which evaluates the physical impacts to the Sea from conservation measures that could yield 250,000 acre feet of water for benefit of the Colorado River. The model as presented demonstrates the same results as have been anecdotally shared with the Authority and [discussed in some detail by staff at this Board's February gathering](#). However, in addition to the analytical concerns raised in that February memo, a cursory scan of the document reveals that the word urban is used once, to refer to runoff in the New River (pollution), and words such as community, human, health, and safety are nowhere to be found therein.

The Board was previously informed of our efforts to seek funding from Reclamation to conduct an independent review of the State's analysis for the benefit of the community, and that we were instructed by Reclamation in at a meeting in Washington, DC

February to elevate this request to what is now referred to as the “Salton Sea Coordinating Committee”. The request was formally made at a meeting of that committee on Tuesday, April 25th, where we were advised that the State would be providing “appropriate indemnifications” and securing the necessary “environmental coverages” to facilitate the objectives of the Commitments Agreement, but that due to the urgency of this action the State was not inclined to commit to an independent study of the impacts, including impacts that might flow from the SEIS. Nonetheless, and to be fair, Secretary Crowfoot did agree to further these discussions offline. We believe that the State is sincere in its efforts to appropriately evaluate the risks to our community from these actions. But is that good enough?

Staff recommends that the board provide the following direction:

1. Prepare and submit comments consistent with Ms. Moore’s memo highlighting the concerns therein and others that a closer review might identify;
2. Continue to pursue state and federal funding for an independent assessment of impacts to the Sea our communities from potential conservation measures as contemplated by the SEIS, the Commitment Agreement, and in anticipation of future actions for the Colorado River and its water users that might impact the Salton Sea and region.