

September 13, 2023

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senate  
331 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Alex Padilla  
United States Senate  
112 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Feinstein and Padilla:

California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) and California Department of Water Resources (DWR) strongly support the request to clarify the Army Corps' authority to supplement funds for the Imperial Streams Salton Sea Feasibility Study, that the Army Corps should consider benefits of project alternatives that include work on the significant federal lands under the Sea, and that air quality benefits be included in formulating, screening, and recommending project alternatives. We respectfully request the inclusion of this clarifying language in the upcoming Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2024 legislation, which will be essential to California's Salton Sea work for years to come.

Advancing projects at the Salton Sea to improve air quality and provide critical environmental habitat for birds along the Pacific Flyway has been a key priority for Governor Newsom since the early days of this Administration. Declining flows into the Salton Sea have resulted in a shrinking, increasingly saline lake that exposes submerged lakebed and creates dust that is of concern to local communities. CNRA, DWR, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife are focused on implementing the Salton Sea Management Program (SSMP), which includes a 10-year plan that aims to improve conditions by constructing 30,000 acres of habitat and dust suppression projects around the Sea.

The federal feasibility study is essential to the long-term restoration of the Sea. The feasibility study will evaluate and recommend projects and actions from restoration concepts identified by the SSMP in the Long-Range Plan for the Salton Sea. In order for the feasibility study to be scoped adequately to analyze reasonable alternatives; to capture comprehensive benefits of alternatives on state, local and federal lands using rigorous modeling; and to conduct meaningful outreach to the area's sizable disadvantaged and tribal communities — the study's costs and timeline will need to extend beyond that contemplated by the general Army Corps' 3x3x3 rule for feasibility studies.

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In addition, in formulating and justifying ecosystem restoration projects, the Army Corps has traditionally focused on a project's benefits to aquatic resources and habitat and has not weighed air quality or broader public health benefits in considering projects. The 2016 Imperial Streams Salton Sea feasibility study authorization and the 2014 Principles Requirements and Guidelines authorize consideration of public health benefits, which are a critical piece of any solution at the Salton Sea. The proposed language would clarify that the Army Corps should consider benefits of project alternatives, and can justify and recommend projects, that include work on the significant federal lands under the Sea. It would also clarify that the Army Corps should consider air quality and public health benefits in formulating, screening, and recommending project alternatives.

The Newsom Administration is committed to making progress toward our commitments to the Salton Sea and surrounding communities. We thank you for your ongoing leadership to support the health of California's critical ecosystems and for your partnership to secure federal investment in these and other critical projects.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wade Crowfoot". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Wade Crowfoot  
California Natural Resources Secretary