

September 15, 2023

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Frank Ruiz
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Mariela Loera
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Leadership Counsel for Justice and
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Dr. Ryan Sinclair
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Loma Linda University School of Public Health

Aydee Palomino
Environmental Justice Project Manager
Alianza Coachella Valley

Erin Woolley
Senior Policy Strategist
Sierra Club California

via email

RE: North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project water supply & impacts

Dear Mr. Cohen, Ms. Loera, Ms. Palomino, Mr. Ruiz, Dr. Sinclair and Ms. Woolley:

On behalf of the California Natural Resources Agency and the Salton Sea Management Program (SSMP), the County of Riverside (County), and the Salton Sea Authority (SSA), we thank you for your letter. We hear your concerns regarding the challenges related to securing water supply for the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project (NLPDP), potential challenges associated with the use of drain water for the project, and the opportunities for recreational access. We hope that this letter will provide assurance that we have explored all water supply options for the project, will diligently review potential impacts related to the use of drain water and are working on incorporating associated recreational features to increase project benefits.

Water Supply

Identifying and securing water supply for the project has been a foundational task since the onset of project planning. We evaluated surface water, groundwater, drain water, Salton Sea water, and a combination of water supply options as is reflected in the attached Water Supply Assessment Matrix. Surface water via the Coachella Canal was initially the preferred water supply option for the project. Unfortunately, after consultation with the Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) regarding water rights, water supply options that utilize Colorado River water or contractually non-Colorado River water via transfer or exchange agreements were deemed ineligible for this project. Also, as part of our conversations with CVWD, groundwater from the Indio groundwater subbasin was also deemed an insufficient source of water because it is a highly managed groundwater basin that is subject to the state's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) as a medium priority basin and is regulated by CVWD's Coachella Valley Groundwater Management Plan. After the completion of the Water Supply Assessment Matrix evaluation, an updated preferred water supply option was selected for further evaluation and that was a blend of groundwater from the adjacent Orocopia Valley and/or Chocolate Valley groundwater basins with drain water. Two technical memorandums, one on groundwater and another on drain water, were prepared to evaluate these water supply options. These reports are also attached. The groundwater technical memorandum found insufficient groundwater data is available for

the Orocopia Valley and Chocolate Valley basins and based on information from another region in the state with similar hydrological conditions, the water supply is not adequate for this project. With further evaluation and testing, groundwater could be available as a supplemental source of water. The drain water technical report analyzed flow data from tile drains east of the Coachella Valley Stormwater Channel. This report found that there is enough drain water for the NLPDP. This report also includes an evaluation of three proposed pipeline alignments to capture and convey drain water to the project. However, more information is needed to determine water quality and impacts to downstream emergent wetland habitat. The drain water technical memorandum is currently in the process of being updated to address these considerations.

Water Quality

The SSMP is coordinating with CVWD on water quality monitoring and sampling. This information will be shared with the Salton Sea Authority and the County of Riverside to inform the development of the NLPDP and the recreational potential on the lake. Until that information is gathered and analyzed, the recreational opportunities within and on the lake are unknown.

Evaluation of Environmental Impact

Dudek, a consultant to the County, is in the process of updating the technical memorandum on drain water to include an assessment of water supply needs for the emergent wetland habitat. After this assessment is prepared, it will be reviewed by the SSMP. This information will inform planning for drain water collection; including identifying an alignment that prevents or reduces impacts to emergent wetland habitat as well as an evaluation of the number of drains and the percentage of flow needed and available for diversion. Environmental surveys and assessments will also occur. These include bird and fish surveys, wetland delineations, cultural and archeological surveys, and other federal, state, and local compliance requirements. Collectively, these efforts will assist the SSMP, SSA and the County to identify avoidance areas and mitigation requirements.

Recreational Access

The County agrees with your assessment of being more consistent with the outreach and collaborating with the local communities to inform the design and development of this project. The team has held two community outreach meetings and is currently planning its third.

Thank you for your support of the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project. We appreciate your offer to support this project as it advances through the planning process and into project implementation. We look forward to collaborating with all of you.

Sincerely,

Samantha Arthur
Assistant Secretary for Salton Sea Policy
California Natural Resources Agency

G. Patrick O'Dowd
Executive Director / General Manager
Salton Sea Authority

Juan Perez
Chief Operating Officer
County of Riverside