

DRAFT

**Imperial Streams and Salton Sea Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Study**  
***U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, California Department of Water Resources***  
***Salton Sea Authority***

Study Description: The Salton Sea Authority (Authority) worked with the California Congressional delegation to secure new authority in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2020 to enable the Army Corps of Engineers to develop and fund projects at a 65% federal cost-share to facilitate long-range Salton Sea management. Congress subsequently provided \$1.5 million in funding for the prerequisite study via the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) to launch the work.

Status: The Corps, the Authority and the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) developed a cost-sharing agreement for the study which was signed in December 2022. Since that time, the parties have developed and evaluated distinct courses of action (COAs) in order to scope the study.

Preferred Course of Action: The parties evaluated multiple COAs for their effectiveness and ability to address the purpose of the study, to meet the Corps mission objectives, to meet state and local needs, to be scientifically sound, and to meet Corps and Biden administration environmental justice policies. That evaluation led the Corps Los Angeles District, the Corps Pacific Division and the local sponsors to select COA 2 as the preferred course of action as it satisfies the above criteria.

COA2 will investigate the feasibility of alternatives identified in the State of California's Salton Sea Long-Range Plan for restoring the degraded ecosystem structure, function, and dynamic processes at the Salton Sea, as well as improving air quality, in conjunction with ecosystem restoration, that adversely affects residents. Fourteen (14) alternatives were identified in the initial array of alternatives, with six (6) alternatives being screened out. The remaining alternatives, which include Sea importation, will be evaluated to identify the tentatively selected plan. Through the study process, additional alternatives may be identified or dropped from consideration.

Water Resources Development Act Request

Corps policy reflects an administrative preference that this study be completed at a \$3 million cost (divided equally between the Corps and local sponsors) and within 3 years. All parties recognized at the outset that given the purpose of the study, it would require a larger budget. The parties estimate that an additional \$6.5 million in federal funds will be required to implement a COA 2 study.

In working to secure additional funds, the Corps interpreted language in the legislation which provided the Corps' initial \$1.5 million to begin the study to restrict its ability to add additional funds to the study. The Corps advised removing this limitation in the upcoming WRDA legislation.

Accordingly, the Authority (supported by DWR) are seeking language in WRDA to simply make clear that the Salton Sea study may receive additional funds, whether through the Corps administratively or through future appropriations. The language also seeks to clarify that in determining the right course of action in the study, that the Corps consider benefits to public health and federal lands.

### Federal Interests at the Salton Sea

Over 400 fish and wildlife species rely the Salton Sea, including numerous federally protected threatened and endangered species, and it is a critical stopover on the Pacific Flyway. Further, the U.S. Department of the Interior (Interior) owns roughly 40% of the Salton Sea. Interior also has tribal trust responsibilities to the Torres Martinez Tribe, whose reservation occupies 26,000 acres at the sea's north end, and Interior manages the 35,000-acre Sonny Bono National Wildlife Refuge at the sea's south end.

In its FY2020 budget submission to Congress, Interior conservatively estimated that, if left unabated, continued exposure of Salton Sea playa will cost the Department roughly \$330 million to address its environmental mitigation responsibilities as a landowner. Interior further estimated an annual operations and maintenance cost of \$4.5 million for such mitigation.

The Department of Defense manages the 357-square mile Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range located directly to the east of the Salton Sea, a critical national security asset used by the Marines and Navy.

The Salton Sea is also a nationally significant source of renewable energy, harboring the largest known source of geothermal energy in the nation. The geothermal extraction process at the Salton Sea is now being modified to produce critical stores of lithium to facilitate the nation's transition to electric vehicles and the Biden administration's climate agenda.