



RAUL RUIZ, M.D.
Member of Congress
25th District of California

Congress of the United States
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Washington, DC 20515-3605

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May 9, 2024

The Honorable Michael L. Connor
Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Dear Assistant Secretary Connor,

I am writing to request an exemption from the USACE 3x3 policy for an allocation of \$400,000 in funding within the FY24 USACE work plan to progress with the recommended Course of Action 2 outlined in the Feasibility Study

In 2020, I advocated for the authorization of the Feasibility Study through the Water Resources Development Act of 2020, aiming to tackle the notable public health and environmental issues at the Salton Sea.

Salton Sea region is home to disadvantaged communities that are already grappling with significant public health and environmental challenges. Dust from the exposed Salton Sea playa has been associated with higher rates of asthma, especially among children. Approximately one in five residents of the Salton Sea area has been diagnosed with asthma, and pediatric emergency room visits for respiratory issues are two to three times more frequent in our region compared to the rest of California.

Without federal investment, the public health challenges at the Salton Sea will persist and worsen. Since 2003, the Salton Sea has receded by 11 feet, leading to the exposure of approximately 30,000 acres of dry playa. By 2045, it is projected that there will be a total increase of 105,000 acres of exposed playa compared to 2003. These projections do not even include the impacts on the Salton Sea playa that will arise from further near-term and long-term federal Colorado River water conservation measures that are under active consideration.

Since the Feasibility Study was initiated in December 2022, the study has seen active involvement from its cosponsors: USACE Los Angeles District, the Salton Sea Authority, and the California Department of Water Resources. Together, they have assessed various courses of action (COAs) to define the study's scope. These parties rigorously evaluated multiple COAs based on their ability to fulfill the study's objectives, align with the USACE's mission, address state and local requirements, maintain scientific integrity, and adhere to the environmental justice mandates set forth by the Biden administration.

This evaluation led the parties to select COA 2 as the preferred course of action. COA 2 will investigate the feasibility of alternatives identified in the State of California's Salton Sea Long-Range Plan for improving public health and air quality and restoring the degraded ecosystem and function. Most important, COA 2 was determined to be necessary to address the significant environmental justice concerns of the surrounding community. Implementing COA 2 will require extra time and approximately \$6.5 million in additional federal funding.

Most of the funds for the extended study will be pursued through future appropriations. However, there is currently a FY24 shortfall of \$400,000 needed to enable the USACE Los Angeles District to proceed with COA 2. Previously, the USACE was barred from allocating the required funds to the Feasibility Study by prior legislation, but this restriction was lifted in the FY24 Energy and Water Appropriations law. Additionally, this law grants the USACE access to over \$4 million in unallocated funding, from which you can now allocate the \$400,000 needed by the USACE Los Angeles District.

I value the commitment the USACE Los Angeles District has shown towards this Feasibility Study. The USACE has proven to be an invaluable collaborator in our vital mission to safeguard the public health and environment of the Salton Sea area. I kindly request that you make an exception from the 3x3 policy for the Feasibility Study and allocate \$400,000 in the FY24 work plan to ensure the seamless continuation of this crucial endeavor.

Thank you for your support of this vital program and please provide this request with full and fair consideration in compliance with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations. I look forward to our continued collaboration and am eager to support the progress of this significant initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raul Ruiz". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress

CC: Major General William H. Graham, Deputy Chief of Engineers/Deputy Commanding General