



MEMO

TO: Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors and G. Patrick O’Dowd
FROM: Lisa Moore
RE: **Federal Report**
DATE: September 10, 2024

I. Appropriations

Congress is working on its annual appropriations legislation for FY25. As I reported during the last meeting, the House has advanced the Energy and Water Appropriations bill through committee. This legislation includes a \$2 million plus up from Congressman Ruiz to increase funding for Reclamation’s Salton Sea Research Program — the account through which Reclamation funds some of its Salton Sea work.

On September 6, the Senate advanced its Energy and Water Appropriations bill through Committee. That legislation also includes a \$2 million plus up requested by Senator Padilla for the same Reclamation program. Typically if identical legislation is included in appropriations measures in both the House and Senate, that measure will be retained in final legislation. This would double the Salton Sea Research Program funding from \$2 million to \$4 million.

II. Corps Feasibility Study

The Corps has been working on a budget for both the full Course of Action 2 (COA2/full study) for the Salton Sea Feasibility Study and for “early implementation projects” that could be advanced while the full study is prepared. Looking ahead, the Corps has estimated a \$2.146 million need for both the feasibility study and early implementation projects for FY26.

As reported in prior meetings, the Authority successfully secured a legislative fix in the FY24 federal appropriations process to enable the Corps to dedicate additional funding to our feasibility study. By Corps policy, feasibility studies are required to be implemented in 3 years and for \$3 million (split 50/50 with the local sponsor/s). The Corps, Authority and State determined that to address the Salton Sea holistically, we would need a waiver from this policy and additional funding to implement a full study, dubbed COA2. After securing the legislative fix, the Authority worked to secure Corps funding through its 2024 work plan, which included \$3.8 million for the Salton Sea Feasibility study — the largest amount approved by the Corps for any project.

The ultimate goal of this work is to fund long-range Salton Sea projects at a 65% federal share. This would amount to the most significant federal commitment to the Salton Sea in its history. The partnership among the Corps, the Authority and the State is strong and an example of what can be accomplished when state, federal and local entities like the Authority work together. Congress in particular is apt to support efforts like this where all levels of government are working together toward a common cause.

Our approach to securing funding for FY24 and FY25 has been to pursue multiple legislative and administrative vehicles in order to ensure the funds are made available to the Corps to keep this critical work on track. For FY26, this will include working to secure funds in the Corps work plan administratively and pursuing FY26 appropriations through Congress.

III. Bicameral New River and Tijuana Cross Border Pollution Legislation Introduced

On September 5, Senators Padilla and Butler and Representatives Vargas, Ruiz and Peters introduced the Boarder Water Quality Restoration and Protection Act of 2024. The legislation would designate the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as the lead to coordinate all state, Tribal, federal and local agencies to address cross border pollution in these watersheds; to implement a comprehensive water quality management program for each watershed; require the identification of priority projects to address cross border pollution; and allow EPA to receive funds and distribute funds to local partners to construct, operate and maintain priority projects.

The bill would also designate a new Geographic Program within EPA to better manage and prioritize these watersheds. EPA manages 12 Geographic Programs around the country that aim to protect local ecosystems through local capacity building. The legislation would implement a number of recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office (GAO)'s 2020 report on the International Boundary and Water Commission and its work in our region.