

Salton Sea Authority
Colorado River Policy Platform (2026)
*A federally aligned, regionally legitimate framework
for post-2026 Colorado River operations*

I. Foundational Principles

1. The Salton Sea is critical infrastructure for the Colorado River system.

It is the reservoir (Cooledge, 1924) for the largest agricultural return-flow system in the Lower Basin. Its condition directly affects public health, the environment, and binational treaty compliance.

2. Any post-2026 operating regime must account for Salton Sea impacts.

Reductions in inflows must be analyzed under NEPA and the Clean Air Act, and mitigated to comply with Clean Air Act requirements, as well as to ensure compliance with federal tribal trust responsibilities.

3. Local equity must be embedded in basin-scale decision-making.

Counties, tribes, and public-health agencies must have a formal voice in Colorado River governance and implementation because Colorado River decisions have a direct impact on the rights and responsibilities of these local entities.

4. Federal feasibility planning must continue uninterrupted.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Imperial Streams Salton Sea and Tributaries Feasibility Study -- jointly sponsored by the Authority, developed and sustained through the Authority's advocacy -- is the only basin-scale federal planning process. It is also the only such process focused on long-term restoration, and which will secure significant federal funding for Salton Sea projects to mitigate the effects of further federal water conservation efforts. The Authority's role in this work is to both ensure federal funding is provided to keep this work on track and that local concerns are fully addressed in the plan. It must be protected from governance instability and fully funded through completion.

II. Policy Objectives

A. Protect inflows to the Salton Sea to the maximum extent feasible

The Authority supports water conservation and system efficiency but opposes uncompensated or unmitigated reductions in inflows that exacerbate public health and environmental harm.

B. Require mitigation for any reduction in inflows

Any post-2026 Colorado River operating plan that reduces flows to the Sea must include enforceable mitigation measures, including air quality protections, habitat replacement, and community health investments.

C. Secure federal cost-share for long-term restoration

The Authority supports WRDA authorization and appropriations for Salton Sea restoration consistent with the Feasibility Study and the State's Long-Range Plan.

D. Ensure public-health impacts are analyzed and mitigated

The Authority supports full NEPA and CEQA analysis of dust emissions, respiratory health burdens, and environmental impacts from reduced inflows. The federal government must also ensure that Colorado River actions and own actions to manage federal Salton Sea lands conform with local air quality maintenance plans as required under the federal Clean Air Act and provide federally-funded mitigation to ensure such conformity. Colorado River actions and federal Salton Sea land management impact local jurisdiction air quality compliance and could jeopardize federal transportation funding if not mitigated by the federal government.

E. Ensure tribal sovereignty and participation

Federal and state implementation processes should reflect the Authority's governance structure relating to and respecting tribal sovereignty.

F. Ensure local governments have a formal role in basin-scale decisions

Imperial and Riverside Counties, cities, and other regional entities must be included in implementation planning, mitigation design, and funding decisions.

III. Long-Term Operation & Maintenance (O&M)

The Authority recognizes that successful restoration at the Salton Sea will require not only capital investment, but also a **consistent, reliable, and permanent stream of revenues** to support **operations and maintenance (O&M)** of completed works.

Policy Commitments:

- The Authority supports the development of a **federally recognized O&M framework** for projects implemented under the Feasibility Study or other federal and state authorities.
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- The Authority will work with **DWR, CNRA, the Salton Sea Conservancy, and federal partners** — including **USACE, Reclamation, and DOI** — to define **roles, responsibilities, and cost-share structures** for long-term O&M.

- The Authority affirms that **federal participation in O&M funding is essential**, consistent with WRDA precedent, Reclamation policy, and the federal trust responsibility to tribal and disadvantaged communities.
- The Authority supports the establishment of a **dedicated, recurring revenue mechanism** to ensure that completed restoration projects are maintained, monitored, and adapted over time — one that is **consistent, reliable, and predictable in perpetuity**.
- The Authority will pursue **state, federal, and regional funding mechanisms** to support its burden associated with O&M, including:
 - Current and future public grant allocations
 - grant administration overhead
 - regional cost-share agreements
 - philanthropic and tribal partnerships

Federal Alignment:

- The Authority will ensure that all O&M planning is **integrated into the Feasibility Study**, including:
 - lifecycle cost estimates
 - adaptive management frameworks
 - NEPA/CEQA/Clean Air Act compliance
 - tribal and public-health considerations
 - long-term federal–state–local cost-share modeling

IV. Implementation Commitments

The Authority commits to:

- Maintaining a **stable, federally-aligned governance structure**
 - Serving as **joint non-federal sponsor** of the Feasibility Study
 - Coordinating with **DWR, CNRA, and the Salton Sea Conservancy**
 - Integrating **public health, tribal leadership, and air-quality agencies** into planning
 - Responding formally to the **Draft Post-2026 EIS**
 - Supporting **early-action projects** that align with federal and state priorities
 - Seeking **state and federal funding** to support federally required work
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