



MEMO

TO: Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors and G. Patrick O'Dowd
FROM: Lisa Moore
RE: Federal Report
DATE: January 13, 2026

This memo details the Authority's success in securing \$1.76 million in federal appropriations for the Salton Sea Feasibility Study in the FY26 Energy and Water Appropriations bill enacted by the House last week and expected to be approved by the Senate this week. It also describes the Authority's draft Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2026 request to ensure internal Corps policies do not impede that work. That request must be submitted to our Senators by January 20, 2026.

I. Appropriations

The Authority, as the local sponsor, has led the advocacy to secure funding and policy to ensure the Corps Salton Sea Feasibility Study is completed and produces federal authorization to undertake Salton Sea projects to address the public health and environmental problems associated with the receding sea.

This week, the House enacted the FY26 Energy and Water Appropriations bill **including the \$1.76 million requested by the Authority** for the Corps to ensure that the Corps Salton Sea Feasibility Study to develop 65% federally-funded Salton Sea projects stays on track. **Provided the Senate follows the House (as expected) and enacts the FY26 legislation, the Authority will have secured \$7.187 million for this work thus far.** In order for the Corps to continue working on the Feasibility Study and to ensure it not be cut back in scope, federal appropriations or administratively provided funds must be secured and directed to the Corps to undertake this work. Since the Feasibility Study's enactment (secured via the Authority's work in 2020), the Authority has done this work.

Senator Padilla secured the inclusion of the Authority's \$1.76 million request in the Senate version of the FY26 Energy and Water Appropriations bill. The original House version of this legislation did not include the earmark. Through negotiations in December and January, the Authority advocated to Congressman Ruiz and Congressman Calvert that they work in the House to urge the inclusion of the Senate earmark in the final legislation. Congressman Calvert is on the House Appropriations Committee and the relevant subcommittee. The inclusion of the Senate earmark in the final House legislation was accomplished through these efforts.

Corps policy initially dictated that the Feasibility Study be limited to \$3 million and completed in 3 years. This was a problem because this policy would have had the effect of

limiting the scope of recommended projects and not address all communities surrounding the Sea. The Authority secured a waiver of this policy. In order to ensure that this work fully addresses the scope of the problems at the Sea, full funding each year must be secured.

II. Water Resources Development Act 2026 (WRDA)

In addition to securing full funding to keep the Feasibility on track to produce federally-fundable projects, the Authority works to ensure that Corps policies that may interfere with that objective are modified. Our work to waive the 3x3 policy noted above falls in this category.

One way to achieve these beneficial policy changes is through WRDA legislation. Typically enacted every two years, Congress enacts WRDA legislation to authorize new Corps projects and adopt related policy. The Salton Sea Feasibility Study was enacted through the Authority's advocacy in WRDA legislation in 2020. In WRDA 2024 the Authority worked to fix a policy issue that was impeding funding into the Feasibility Study. In WRDA 2026, we have developed additional policy that will help to ensure that the final Feasibility Study addresses the most pressing of community concerns.

In particular, the language below will ensure that the Corps can undertake projects on federal lands, and that it shall count the benefits delivered to those lands in its cost benefit analysis under the Feasibility Study. In addition, the language provides that the Corps shall consider the benefits to public health and air quality in framing projects and counting benefits. Current Corps policy may limit the Corps ability to consider these benefits which could impact our ability to demonstrate that the benefits exceed the costs of implementing the projects directed at protecting public health recommended in the Feasibility Study.

WRDA legislation is written by the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (Senate EPW) and the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. Both Senators Padilla and Schiff sit on the Senate EPW Committee and have solicited WRDA requests which must be submitted by **January 20, 2026**.

Authority WRDA 2026 Request

Language Request: "Imperial Streams Salton Sea, CA — In carrying out the Imperial Streams Salton Sea investigation, the Secretary shall consider the comprehensive benefits of alternative plans, including air quality and public health benefits and benefits of portions of alternatives that would be constructed on federal lands. The Secretary and Chief of Engineers are authorized to recommend a project that includes construction on federal lands, and that is justified by comprehensive benefits, including air quality and public health benefits and benefits of portions of a project that would be constructed on federal lands."

Justification: The Corps, the Salton Sea Authority, and CA DWR are currently formulating the Imperial Streams Salton Sea Feasibility Study which will extend over federal

lands. The Salton Sea and surrounding lands are located on federal lands (BLM, BOR, FWS, NPS, and DOD), among other entities. Historically, there have been policy questions whether the Corps should recommend projects that include work on other federal lands and the whether it could consider benefits to those lands. In addition, the Corps has traditionally focused on a project's benefits to aquatic resources and has not weighed air quality or broader public health benefits. The 2016 Imperial Streams Salton Sea feasibility study authorization and the 2014 Principles Requirements and Guidelines authorize consideration of public health benefits. The requested WRDA language would clarify that the Corps can recommend projects on other federal lands and consider the associated benefits to such lands, as well as air quality and public health benefits.