

MEMORANDUM

To: Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors
From: G. Patrick O'Dowd, Executive Director /GM
Date: May 21, 2026
Re: IRA Funding Request to Secretary Burgum - Authorization and Signatory Direction

BACKGROUND

The Post-2026 Colorado River Operations Draft EIS identifies the USACE Imperial Streams and Salton Sea Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study as the primary vehicle to address Salton Sea impacts from post-2026 Colorado River conservation measures. Notably, however, the DEIS failed to analyze those impacts on the Salton Sea, federal Salton Sea lands, or the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Tribe.

PRIOR EFFORTS TO SECURE RESOURCES

Over the course of 2026, staff and our support team have pursued multiple avenues to fund activities necessary to ensure the Feasibility Study's success:

In January, at a meeting with Assistant Secretary for Water and Science Andrea Travnicek and Deputy Commissioner David Palumbo, the Authority requested sufficient IRA funding to fully fund the Feasibility Study and support community education and engagement. A follow-up written request was transmitted. No response was received.

Subsequently, with support from CVWD Board Members Estrada and Aguilar, the Authority pursued reprogramming of \$1,000,000 in existing Commitments Agreement funds to implement a defined three-year Outreach, Education, and Relationships Program — designed to help communities understand the Feasibility Study, its benefits, and facilitate meaningful public input. After meetings with Bureau of Reclamation staff from Washington and Temecula, it was determined that insufficient time remained for the Bureau to act on the request before the current fiscal period closed.

The need is real, documented, and unmet.

CURRENT OPPORTUNITY

We have learned that Interior is soliciting requests for allocation of remaining unspent IRA funds, with a submission deadline of Friday, May 23, 2026.

To ensure the Salton Sea is properly positioned in that process, staff has prepared the attached letter to Secretary Burgum requesting that Interior set aside \$332.5 million in remaining IRA funds - based on Reclamation's own FY2021 Budget Justification estimate of its Clean Air Act compliance costs for Reclamation-owned exposed playa lands - to address federal land management obligations and Torres Martinez trust responsibilities at the Salton Sea.

The letter notes that this figure, prepared six years ago, is likely a conservative underestimate, as it does not account for other Interior agency lands, Torres Martinez tribal lands, or the acceleration of playa exposure resulting from conservation actions contemplated in the DEIS. It further notes that the USACE Feasibility Study, while critical, is not targeted to addressing Interior's federal land management obligations - those are a separate and parallel federal responsibility.

ACTION REQUESTED

The Board is requested to:

1. Authorize transmission of the attached letter to Secretary Burgum; and
2. Provide direction as to signatories.

Staff recommends the letter be transmitted under the signature of the Authority Board President, with co-signatures from member agency board representatives as the Board directs.

Attachments:

- Draft Letter to Secretary Burgum (May 18, 2026)
- January 2026 Follow-Up Letter to ASWS Travnicek and Deputy Commissioner Palumbo
- Proposed IRA Work Plan — Outreach, Education, and Relationships Program
- Meeting Request Letters — Acting Commissioner Cameron (March 24, 2026)



May 18, 2026

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum:

As you solicit funding requests from Colorado River stakeholders to address impacts from Post-2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies for Lake Powell and Lake Mead (Post-2026 Guidelines), I urge you to ensure that the Department of the Interior (Interior) first sets aside \$332.5 million from remaining Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds to address impacts to Salton Sea lands owned by Interior and the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian Tribe (Torres Martinez Tribe).

While Reclamation failed to evaluate the impact of the Post-2026 Guidelines Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) alternatives on the Salton Sea, federal Salton Sea lands and the Torres Martinez Tribe, Reclamation has formulated a funding estimate of its own Clean Air Act compliance costs for Reclamation-owned Salton Sea lands associated with reduced Sea inflows.

This estimate provides a meaningful starting point for a federal funding commitment.

In particular, the Trump Administration's FY2021 Reclamation Budget Justification both acknowledged Reclamation's federal Clean Air Act liability for Reclamation-owned Salton Sea exposed playa lands and estimated compliance costs. In that document, attached, Reclamation estimated that 8.75 square miles of its lands would be exposed over the following 10 years. It then estimated the cost to address Reclamation's federal Clean Air Act liability for those exposed lands conservatively at \$332.5 million with annual operations and maintenance costs of \$4.375 million.

As described in our comments on the DEIS, Interior owns roughly 40% of the lands in and surrounding the Salton Sea. In addition, the Torres Martinez Aboriginal homeland is comprised of 24,000 acres in and around the Salton Sea. The federal Clean Air Act requires Interior to ensure its land management conforms to Riverside and Imperial County air quality plans. Imperial County's Clean Air Act maintenance plan is premised on ensuring that exposed playa lands, including Reclamation-owned lands, are managed to reduce particulate matter pollution. In addition, the federal law provides

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that Interior holds the “highest responsibility and trust” to safeguard tribal assets, including the Torres Martinez Salton Sea reservation lands.

Reclamation’s FY21 \$332.5 estimate, prepared six years ago, is likely a gross underestimation of Interior’s Salton Sea management costs as it does not analyze impacts of reduced Salton Sea inflows to other Interior agency lands, to Torres Martines tribal lands, or account for the acceleration of Salton Sea exposed playa that will result from the conservation actions contemplated in the DEIS. It is also important to note that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Imperial Streams and Salton Sea Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study (Feasibility Study) initiated and sponsored by the Salton Sea Authority to address long-range Salton Sea management, it is not targeted to addressing Interior federal land management obligations at the Sea.

These impacts must all be considered in the DEIS process to ensure that full funding to mitigate the Salton Sea impacts of Colorado River conservation on our communities, to address Salton Sea federal land management needs and to fulfill Interior’s trust responsibilities to the Torres Martinez is provided by the federal government. In the meantime, we urge you to use IRA funds to begin to address these federally recognized obligations.

Sincerely,

Dear Assistant Secretary Travnicsek and Deputy Commissioner Palumbo,
Thank you again for taking the time to meet with Chairman Mirelez, our consultants, and me on Wednesday. We greatly appreciate your engagement and the opportunity to discuss the Salton Sea's role in the broader post-2026 Colorado River framework. While the Salton Sea Authority will be submitting formal comments on the Draft EIS, we hope to serve as an informal and constructive resource to you as negotiations proceed. Our aim is to ensure that the Salton Sea is addressed meaningfully through the IRA mitigation package and as contemplated by the Draft EIS, which relies on our Salton Sea Feasibility Study as the primary mitigation vehicle for post-2026 impacts. The Corps currently estimates approximately \$4.2 million to complete the Feasibility Study, with a target Chief's Report by 2029. We are working with the Corps to develop a cost estimate for accelerating completion. We anticipate that IRA funding to support this acceleration - along with capacity resources for the Authority to build public support as the non-federal sponsor - would likely not exceed \$7 million. While modest in scale, this investment would be highly impactful in advancing our shared goals. We are committed to doing our part to help ensure the success of this effort - and, by extension, to support your leadership in delivering meaningful outcomes for the region. As we also discussed, we are working with the House and Senate to secure WRDA 2026 language that would:

- Clarify the Corps' authority to undertake work on other federal lands;
- Direct the Corps to count benefits to federal lands in its cost-benefit analysis; and
- Ensure that air quality and public health benefits are fully valued in the Feasibility Study.

This language will be critical to securing a favorable Chief's Report and addressing Interior's federal lands obligations through the Feasibility Study.

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 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 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.

Thank you again for your time and leadership. We look forward to supporting your efforts and continuing this important work together.

Sincerely,



PROPOSED WORK PLAN

Outreach, Education, and Relationships Program
Implemented by the Salton Sea Authority
in coordination with the
California Department of Water Resources (DWR)

Submitted by Coachella Valley Water District
(Applicant of Record)

Total Project Cost: \$1,000,309

Federal Request: \$1,000,000

1. Project Overview & Background

Pursuant to the 2022 Commitment Agreement between the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), the Imperial Irrigation District (IID), and the Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), \$1,000,000 in Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) (PL 117-169) funding was identified to support staffing and technical implementation related to drought mitigation and Salton Sea restoration.

The Commitments Agreement was adopted pursuant to IRA § 50233 which provided \$4 billion in funding to address Colorado River drought, including by giving Reclamation broad authority to address Colorado River conservation impacts to the Salton Sea. The Commitments Agreement further directed that Interior “shall coordinate with the ... United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to seek additional financial resources to the Sea.” Commitments Agreement § V.D. The Commitments Agreement further provides that “[i]n addition to the specific commitments described above, the Department will continue to pursue additional funding or provide technical capacity as needed.” Commitments Agreement § VI.B.

This work plan reflects the reprogramming of those funds from CVWD to the **Salton Sea Authority** (“the Authority”) to effectuate PL 117-169 § 50233 and the Commitments Agreement direction to seek additional USACE resources to benefit the Salton Sea. The Authority, together with the **California Department of Water Resources (DWR)**, serves as **joint local sponsor** of the USACE **Salton Sea Feasibility Study (FS)**. The FS evaluates long-term restoration, public health, and environmental conservation alternatives for the Salton Sea, including habitat restoration, dust suppression, water management, infrastructure improvements, and potential water importation concepts.

The Authority will implement this three-year Outreach, Education, and Relationships (OER) Program to support federally required engagement, interagency coordination, and public communication associated with the FS. The Authority will **leverage the resources, expertise, and community relationships of its member agencies** to maximize regional capacity and ensure effective outreach.

CVWD will withdraw its previously submitted biologist proposal **only after** Reclamation approves the reprogramming, ensuring the \$1,000,000 allocation remains protected.

2. Regulatory Context

The outreach and engagement activities described in this work plan support and align with three interconnected federal NEPA and planning processes:

A. SEIS for Interim Conservation Measures (2023–2026)

The Bureau of Reclamation’s **Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS)** for interim conservation measures addressed short-term Lower Basin operations and system conservation actions through 2026.

Reclamation issued a **Record of Decision (ROD)** for the SEIS, which acknowledged the need to address Salton Sea impacts associated with conservation actions, although it did not include specific mitigation measures.

B. Post-2026 Colorado River Operations EIS/DEIS

Reclamation’s draft **Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)** for post-2026 Colorado River operations will establish long-term operating guidelines for the river system. The DEIS and Final EIS reinforce the need for a long-term federal management (or conservation) pathway for the Salton Sea.

Outreach conducted under this work plan will support Reclamation’s reliance on the USACE FS as a key measure to its efforts to ensure Colorado River water supply security.

C. USACE Feasibility Study NEPA Process

The FS includes preparation of a **Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)**, a **Final EIS**, and a **Record of Decision (ROD)**. The ROD completes NEPA compliance but **does not authorize project implementation**.

D. USACE Planning Process

Separate from NEPA, the Corps’ planning process culminates in a **Chief’s Report**, which is the Corps’ formal recommendation to Congress.

Congressional authorization through a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) is required before implementation.

This work plan directly supports both the NEPA process and the development of the Chief’s Report.

3. Goals and Objectives

Goal 1 — Support the Feasibility Study (FS) and Chief’s Report Development

- Provide coordinated outreach and engagement aligned with Corps planning milestones.
- Ensure community input informs the Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) and final recommendation.
- Support DWR–Authority joint sponsor responsibilities.

Goal 2 — Strengthen Regional Engagement

- Conduct inclusive outreach to Tribal governments, local communities, agricultural districts, and local governments.
- Provide clear, accessible information about FS purpose, alternatives, and implications.

Goal 3 — Enhance Interagency Coordination

- Facilitate communication among the Corps, Reclamation, Interior, DWR, CNRA, IID, CVWD, and Authority member agencies.
- Support alignment of federal, state, and regional priorities.

Goal 4 — Build Sustainable Outreach Capacity

- Establish a dedicated OER Manager.
- **Enhance the Authority’s long-term restoration capacity** through specialized communications, facilitation, and member agency integration.

4. Detailed Work Plan Tasks

Phase 0 — Pre-Hire Period (Months 1–6)

Purpose: Maintain continuity of outreach while recruiting the Manager.

Activities:

- Contractual communications advisory services provide interim support.
- Recruitment, interviews, and onboarding of the Manager.
- Issuance of a one-time signing incentive to secure a qualified candidate.

Task 1 — Outreach & Public Education

Purpose: Provide clear, accessible information about the FS, DEIS/EIS, and drought-related mitigation activities.

Activities:

- Develop outreach materials explaining FS purpose, alternatives, schedule, and decision framework.
- Coordinate messaging with DWR and the Corps.
- Conduct community meetings, workshops, listening sessions, and briefings.
- Produce multilingual materials and digital content.
- Ensure continuity with SEIS and post-2026 EIS engagement commitments.

Task 2 — Stakeholder & Tribal Engagement

Purpose: Ensure meaningful engagement with Tribal governments and regional stakeholders.

Activities:

- Coordinate with DWR’s Tribal Affairs Office and the Corps’ Tribal liaison.
- Conduct government-to-government engagement support activities.
- Document stakeholder concerns and integrate them into joint sponsor coordination.
- Ensure Tribal perspectives are incorporated into the FS DEIS/EIS process.

Task 3 — Interagency Coordination

Purpose: Support alignment among federal, state, and regional partners.

Activities:

- Facilitate coordination between the Authority, DWR, the Corps, Reclamation, Interior, CNRA, IID, CVWD, and member agencies.
- Prepare briefing materials for joint sponsor meetings.
- Support Corps planning milestones and FS schedule alignment.
- Maintain continuity with SEIS and post-2026 EIS implementation.

Task 4 — Public Events, Tours, and Summits

Purpose: Provide on-the-ground visibility into FS alternatives and regional conditions.

Activities:

- Plan and execute tours for DWR, the Corps, Reclamation, and stakeholders.
- Organize regional summits and public events.
- Provide logistics, translation, facilitation, and event staffing.

Task 5 — Communications Advisory Services

Purpose: Provide strategic communications support throughout the project.

Activities:

- Develop messaging, materials, and digital content.
- Support media engagement as appropriate.
- Provide graphic design and web content support.

Task 6 — Reporting & Documentation

Purpose: Ensure compliance with federal reporting requirements.

Activities:

- Maintain records of outreach activities.
- Prepare quarterly reports consistent with USBR and Corps requirements.
- Document joint sponsor coordination with DWR.
- Support documentation required for the FS DEIS/EIS and Chief’s Report.

Task 7 — Member Agency Coordination and Resource Integration

Purpose: Leverage the Authority’s regional structure to maximize efficiency and impact.

Activities:

- Coordinate with member agencies to utilize staff expertise, facilities, and community networks.
- Integrate member agency technical staff into briefings and tours.
- Use member agency facilities for public meetings and events.
- Maintain a regular coordination schedule with member agency leadership.

5. Schedule of Milestones

Milestone	Expected Completion
Recruitment and Hiring of Outreach Manager	Month 3
Initial Communications Strategy & Materials Drafted	Month 6
Launch of First Community Tour/Public Forum Series	Month 9
Annual Progress Review and Work Plan Update	Months 12, 24, 36
Final Project Summary & Closeout Report	Month 36

6. Performance Monitoring & Reporting

Programmatic Reporting

- Quarterly updates detailing progress toward tasks
- Metrics on public attendance, materials distributed, and engagement outcomes
- Documentation of joint sponsor coordination with DWR
- Support for FS DEIS/EIS public engagement documentation
- Support for Corps planning documentation required for the Chief’s Report

Financial Reporting

- Submission of SF-425 Federal Financial Reports
- Compliance with USBR financial management requirements

Final Report

- Comprehensive summary of accomplishments
- Recommendations for long-term community engagement beyond the initial 3-year term

7. Budget Summary

Category	Total Project Cost (3 Years)
Salaries & Wages (Incl. COLA and Bonus)	\$378,300
Fringe Benefits (40% Rate)	\$139,320
Equipment & Supplies	\$21,900
Contractual Services (Advisory, Events, Design)	\$361,000
Travel (Community & Interagency)	\$20,000
Indirect Costs (7.5% Rate)	\$69,789
GRAND TOTAL	\$1,000,309

**Salton Sea Authority
Summary Budget**

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	TOTAL
PERSONNEL					
OER Manager Salary	Salary	90,000	126,000	132,300	348,300
Recruitment Incentive	One-time	30,000	-	-	30,000
TOTAL PERSONNEL		120,000	126,000	132,300	378,300
FRINGE BENEFITS (40%)					
Fringe on Salary	40% Rate	36,000	50,400	52,920	139,320
TOTAL FRINGE		36,000	50,400	52,920	139,320
EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES					
Laptop	Equipment	2,500	-	-	2,500
Phone/Tablet	Equipment	1,200	-	-	1,200
Portable Projector/Speakers	Equipment	1,000	-	-	1,000
Meeting Equipment	Equipment	1,500	-	-	1,500
Printing & Outreach Materials	Supplies	7,500	-	-	7,500
Translation/Interpretation Materials	Supplies	5,000	-	-	5,000
Software Licenses	Supplies	1,200	-	-	1,200
General Office Supplies	Supplies	2,000	-	-	2,000
TOTAL EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES		21,900	-	-	21,900
CONTRACTUAL					
Communications Advisory Services	Contract	72,000	72,000	72,000	216,000
Public Events/Tours/Summits	Contract	25,000	15,000	10,000	50,000
Facilitation & Engagement Consultants	Contract	20,000	20,000	10,000	50,000
Graphic Design/Web Content	Contract	10,000	5,000	5,000	20,000
Translation & Interpretation Services	Contract	10,000	10,000	5,000	25,000
TOTAL CONTRACTUAL		137,000	122,000	102,000	361,000
TRAVEL					
Community Meetings	Travel	6,000	4,000	2,000	12,000
Interagency Meetings	Travel	4,000	2,000	2,000	8,000
TOTAL TRAVEL		10,000	6,000	4,000	20,000
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS		324,900	304,400	291,220	920,520
INDIRECT COSTS (7.5%)	plied to Direct Costs	24,368	22,830	22,591	69,789
GRAND TOTAL		349,268	327,230	313,811	1,000,309