

Memorandum

To: Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors
From: G. Patrick O'Dowd, Executive Director /GM
Date: June 18, 2026
Re: **Federal Engagement Update: Post-2026 Colorado River DEIS, Coalition Comment Record, and FY27 Feasibility Study Funding**

Summary

Over the past five months, the Authority has continued to pursue a sustained, multi-track effort to keep the Salton Sea inside the Colorado River post-2026 framework rather than treated as a separate, deferred problem: direct outreach to Interior and Reclamation leadership, a coordinated coalition comment record regarding the Draft EIS, an active FY27 appropriations request with strong congressional backing, and a supplemental historical submission for the administrative record. Staff recommend the Board direct staff to continue its escalation of engagement to convert this record into a funded, enforceable federal commitment.

The Coalition Comment Record

Seven comment letters were filed by Salton Sea stakeholders regarding the DEIS, and together they function as a coordinated record. Each targets a different leg of Reclamation's rationale for excluding Salton Sea impacts:

- [The Authority](#) converted Reclamation's own FY2021 budget justification into an affirmative \$332.5 million funding demand;
- The [Colorado River Board](#) challenged deferring impacts to a separate USACE study;
- [Imperial County](#) and [Imperial Irrigation District](#) built the detailed factual and legal record;
- [CVWD](#) addressed drainage infrastructure;
- The [environmental justice coalition](#) supplied the public health record under Executive Order 12898; and
- The [Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians](#) followed with a sovereign consultation demand under Executive Order 13175 that remains open.

Because each letter carries different standing - regional authority, state board, county, irrigation district, environmental justice coalition, tribal government - no single rebuttal can dismiss the record as parochial or redundant. The shared premise, conceded in Reclamation's own DEIS language, is that the Sea is the engineered terminus of the federal delivery system, not an externality, which undercuts the agency's stated basis for non-analysis.

Direct Outreach and Its Reception

In parallel, the Authority and CVWD leadership have engaged Interior and Reclamation directly:

- The January follow-up to Assistant Secretary Travnicsek and Deputy Commissioner Palumbo on WRDA 2026 language and Feasibility Study acceleration;
- Formal CVWD board member meeting requests in March;
- The draft Outreach, Education, and Relationships (OER) work plan presented in April;
- The May 22 letter to Secretary Burgum on the IRA set-aside; and
- The June 8 historical appendix submitted to the administrative record.

The response to date has been extremely limited - an acknowledgment from Assistant Secretary Travnicsek and a non-committal reply from Reclamation regarding the OER citing internal review timing. *The Torres Martinez consultation request of May 28, which carries an independent obligation under Executive Order 13175, remains unacknowledged.*

FY27 Appropriations Request

The Authority's \$2,146,000 FY27 request to further fund the Feasibility Study and reach a timely Chief's Report is fully matched by DWR and builds on \$7,187,999 in federal funding already secured through the Authority's persistent effort. Senators Padilla and Schiff have included the full amount in their congressional CDS requests, with Representatives Ruiz and Calvert providing continued advocacy. This is another substantial increment of an nearly fully funded, locally matched project, timed to be in place as Reclamation's new conservation mandates further reduce Sea inflows.

Path Forward

Staff intend to keep this record moving: securing a substantive response to the Tribe's consultation request before the Final EIS issues, pressing Interior and Reclamation for a decision timeline on the FY27 request given existing congressional support, and ensuring the coalition record - reinforced by the historical appendix - is before the drafter of the Final EIS and Record of Decision. The region has historically been treated as easy to defer while broader system fights dominate attention; the breadth of this record, paired with active congressional backing, gives the Authority and the broader local community a stronger basis than in past cycles to insist the Salton Sea remain inside the Colorado River decision, not outside it.