

Memorandum

To: Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors
From: G. Patrick O'Dowd, Executive Director /GM
Date: July 16, 2026
Re: **Approval of Revised Retainer Agreement with Cultivating Conservation**

Background

Cultivating Conservation has served as the Authority's federal legislative and policy consultant since 2014. The retainer began at \$4,100 per month (2019), rose to \$7,000 per month (2020 amendment), and was last set at \$7,350 per month by approved budget in June 2022, unchanged since. The proposed agreement takes effect June 1, 2026 for an initial one-year term, renewing annually absent 60 days' notice, with a 3 percent annual escalator thereafter.

Scope Increase

Most of the new scope language consolidates prior project-specific items (Farm Bill/USDA, Drought Contingency Plan, New River, North Lake, renewable energy) into general authority to advise on federal legislation, a change in form rather than substance. Two elements are genuinely new: authority to advise on federal administrative policy, extending beyond legislation into agency rulemaking, and to draft Authority public comments on federal agency actions. Agency engagement also broadens from a closed list (BOR, EPA, Corps) to an open-ended "other federal agencies."

Cost

The proposed rate of \$10,000 per month is a \$2,650 (representing approximately 8% compounded annually since last adjustment) increase over the \$7,350 rate in place since June 2022, the first change in four years. This increase was fully accounted for in the recently approved Salton Sea Authority 2026/2027 operating budget.

Recommendation: Approve Increase

Staff recommends the Board approve the revised retainer agreement with Cultivating Conservation, including the increase to \$10,000 per month effective June 1, 2026 and the 3 percent annual escalator

Proposed Retainer Agreement with Cultivating Conservation available upon request.