Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The purpose of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is to promote coordination between Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners through partnership agreements. Funded partnership agreements are implemented through conservation program contracts and easement agreements under programs such as Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

About the Salton Sea Water Quality, Air Quality and Agricultural Wetlands RCPP

The Salton Sea Air Quality, Water Quality and Agricultural Wetlands RCPP can provide technical and financial assistance opportunities to agricultural landowners and producers in the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) service area to improve water quality, reduce negative impacts to air quality, improve on-farm soil health and drought resistance, and improve at-risk species habitat of the Salton Sea.

The Salton Sea is a shallow, saline, terminal lake sustained by agricultural water discharges principally from the California Imperial Valley. The sea provides significant habitat for birds, with an estimated 400 species relying upon the Sea, as well as habitat for threatened and endangered species, and serves as key rest stop for birds migrating on the Pacific flyway.

Over the course of the last two decades, IID has been a party to agreements to generate 408,000 acre-feet per year of conserved irrigation water for transfer to Southern California urban users. This conserved water is generated through fallowing and water use efficiency improvements on agricultural lands within IID. However, this ag-to-urban water transfer is exacerbating the decline of the ecological health of the Salton Sea, which is sustained mostly by water discharges, or return flows, from agricultural lands.

With the end of mitigation water deliveries in 2017, the reduction of drainage inflows will result in the exposure of approximately 50,000 acres of playa at the Salton Sea that is currently underwater, is anticipated to cause significant air quality and habitat issues for the surrounding region. In addition to ongoing mitigation activities being implemented by IID, the state of California and other RCPP partners are engaged in habitat restoration and air quality measures to address these impacts. Technical and financial assistance provided through the Salton Sea Water Quality, Air Quality and Wetlands Habitat RCPP dovetails with these efforts.

First, the RCPP aims to improve the water quality of drainage water flows through organic transition assistance and other measures, which will help assure the success of the first habitat restoration projects at the Sea. Improving water quality discharge from croplands will help contribute to state and national goals of reducing nutrients and sediments in surface waters, and improving fish and wildlife habitat. Second, the RCPP aims to improve air quality surrounding the Sea through soil health and other practices which reduce PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$. Third, the RCPP will provide for wetland creation or restoration work to improve water quality and habitat.

Financial assistance opportunities through the Salton Sea Water Quality, Air Quality and Wetlands Habitat RCPP area include the following conservation programs: Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

Below is a short summary of financial assistance priorities for each program and for more information on ACEP or CSP consult with your local NRCS office. Please refer to the following sections in this document for information about EQIP.

Technical and financial assistance for ACEP-WRE is targeted to agricultural lands and producers:

- In targeted drainages of the New River, Alamo River, or along the Salton Sea margins interested in easements for wetland restoration to improve the water quality of New and Alamo River inflows.

Technical and financial assistance for EQIP is targeted to agricultural lands and producers:

- Who incorporate fallow periods into their planned crop rotation sequence and are interested in transition from conventional to organic production.
- With farmland draining from the Alamo River, New River or along the Salton Sea margins and into the Salton Sea interested in reducing on-farm particulate matter PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$.
- With farmland draining from the Alamo River, New River or along the Salton Sea margins and into the Salton Sea interested in drainage water quality management and on-farm soil health improvements.

Technical and financial assistance for CSP is targeted to agricultural lands and producers:

- Who incorporate fallow periods into their planned crop rotation sequence and interested in enhancing the benefits achieved by implementing conservation practices related to organic standards and production.
- With farmland draining from the Alamo River, New River or along the Salton Sea margins into the Salton Sea interested in enhancing benefits achieved through drainage water quality management, on-farm soil health improvements and reduce air quality impacts.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The purpose of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is to promote agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals; to optimize environmental benefits; and to help farmers and ranchers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations. In order to be considered eligible for EQIP the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural land and meet other program eligibility requirements.

EQIP Application Sign-up and Cut-off Dates

NRCS accepts EQIP applications year-round. EQIP is a voluntary, conservation program administered by NRCS that can provide financial and technical assistance to install conservation practices scheduled in a current conservation plan. NRCS establishes cutoff dates to batch and make funding decisions for eligible, screen and ranked applications.

To be ready for EQIP funding consideration, interested applicants will need to: (1) Develop a conservation plan, (2) Submit an application, (3) Meet program eligibility requirements, and (4) Approve their 'EQIP schedule of operations'. The time needed to complete a conservation plan and process eligibility can vary, from a few weeks to more than a month, depending on the complexity of the farming operation.

Develop a Conservation Plan

A conservation plan includes all practices, regardless of the program's financial assistance, that a producer or landowner has agreed to adopt for the agricultural operation and/or associated agricultural lands. Interested applicants are encouraged to request conservation planning and technical assistance from a local NRCS field office to help with the development of a conservation plan.

Submitting an Application

Interested applicants may apply for EQIP by completing and submitting the application, Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, to the NRCS field office in person, by phone, email, or fax in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation or non-industrial private forest land.

Program Eligibility Requirements

In order to be considered eligible for EQIP the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural or non-industrial private forest land and meet other program eligibility requirements.

'EQIP schedule of operations'

The basis for an application is the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and is derived from the applicant's conservation plan. The EQIP 'schedule of operations' identifies the conservation practices to be implemented, timing of the implementation, practice location, and payment rates.

EQIP Screening, Ranking and Funding

EQIP funding decisions are based on an application evaluation process that includes screening tools and ranking criteria. Screening tools are worksheets used is to prioritize an application based on factors such as: a completed conservation plan; readiness to implement practices; history of contract compliance; and resource priorities addressed in the 'EQIP schedule of operations'. Ranking criteria considers the anticipated benefit of a conservation system, or practice, in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' to a natural resource concern.

NRCS Field Office Contact Information

For more information about EQIP, how to apply and program eligibility, interested applicants should contact the NRCS field office in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation.

USDA-NRCS, Imperial County
Imperial Service Center
(760) 355-2208
Cydean Gillespie, District Conservationist

Approved NRCS Land Uses

Only applications for agricultural operations that address resource concerns on at least one land use type listed below will be considered for financial assistance from this EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are the general NRCS land use definitions - applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- Crop: Land used primarily for the production and harvest of annual or perennial field, forage, food, fiber, horticultural, orchard, vineyard, or energy crops.
- Farmstead: Land used for facilities and supporting infrastructure where farming, forestry, animal husbandry, and ranching activities are often initiated. This may include dwellings, equipment storage, plus farm input and output storage and handling facilities.
- Associated Agricultural Lands: Land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands. This could include incidental areas, such as idle center pivot corners, odd areas, ditches and watercourses, riparian areas, field edges, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and other similar areas.

- Irrigated: Where an operational irrigation system is present and managed to supply irrigation water.
- Wildlife: Where the applicant is actively managing for wildlife.

Resource Concerns for the EQIP Fund Pool

Only applications for agricultural operations that address at least one resource concern listed below will be considered for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are general NRCS natural resource definitions, applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

❖ SOIL EROSION – Erosion removes topsoil, reduces levels of soil organic matter, and contributes to the breakdown of soil structure.

- Wind: Wind erosion is the detachment and transportation of soil particles caused by wind. Symptoms of wind erosion may be identified by dust clouds, soil accumulation along fence lines, and a drifted appearance of the soil surface.

❖ SOIL QUALITY DEGRADATION – Soil quality degradation effects rooting depth, plant growth, animal habitat and soil biological activity.

- Organic Matter Depletion: Soil organic matter is carbon-rich material that includes plant, animal, and microbial residue in various stages of decomposition. Managing for soil carbon can enhance soil productivity and environmental quality. Increasing soil organic matter levels can reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO_2) levels. Ground and surface water quality can improve too because better structure, infiltration, and biological activity make soil a more effective filter.

❖ WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION – Water quality degradation impacts the beneficial use of the receiving waters.

- Excess Nutrients in Surface Water: Nutrients, organic and inorganic, are transported to receiving surface waters through runoff in quantities that degrade water quality. Increased nitrogen and phosphorus levels in water can produce excessive aquatic vegetation and algal blooms resulting in reduced dissolved oxygen, harmful toxins, and increased water temperature.
- Pesticides Transported to Surface Water: Pest control chemicals are transported to receiving surface waters in quantities that degrade water quality. Pesticides typically enter surface water when rainfall or irrigation exceeds the infiltration capacity of soil and resulting runoff transports pesticides to streams, rivers, and other surface-water bodies.
- Excessive Salts in Surface Water: Irrigation or rainfall runoff transports salts to receiving surface water in quantities that degrade water quality. White crusting of soil, irregular crop growth, and lack of plant vigor is an indicator of salinity. Salinity in surface water is an ecological factor, influencing the types of organisms that live in a body of water, and increases the cost of treating water for drinking.
- Excessive Sediment in Surface Water: Off-site transport of sediment to surface water can impact water quality and aquatic habitat. Not only does sediment carry nutrients and pesticides that can negatively impact water quality, but the physical characteristics of sediment can clog stream channels, silt in reservoirs, cover fish spawning grounds, and reduce downstream water quality.

- AIR QUALITY IMPACTS – Direct or indirect emissions of compounds to the atmosphere that impact air quality
  - Emission of Particulate Matter (PM) and PM Precursors: Particulate matter is classified by its size, as $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10}. $PM_{2.5}$ is directly emitted from combustion and as dust from roads or tillage. $PM_{2.5}$ is also formed by chemical reaction of PM precursor gases; oxides of nitrogen (NOx), volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and ammonia (NH_3). Sources of PM precursor gases can be engines, fertilizer application, and animal operations. PM_{10} is typically mechanically generated and directly emitted from tillage operations, road and field travel, animal movement and harvesting operation

- INADEQUATE HABITAT FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE – Quantity, quality or connectivity of food, water, cover/shelter, habitat continuity and/or space is inadequate to meet requirements of identified fish, wildlife or invertebrate species.
  - Habitat Degradation: Conserving existing habitat and restoring habitat improves the odds that fish and wildlife communities will thrive. The availability and arrangement of food, water, cover, shelter, habitat continuity and space determine the number of organisms that a region can support, also known as carrying capacity. Increasing carrying capacity is critical to attaining long-term population stability.

Approved NRCS Conservation Activity Plan

Only applications for NRCS conservation activity plans listed in the table below are eligible for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool. A Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) can be developed for an applicant to identify conservation practices needed to address a specific natural resource need.

Applications for a conservation activity plan (CAP) must address all the identified and applicable resource concerns and include all the eligible fields that: 1) the CAP is designed to address (i.e., all farmstead, crop or pasture operations); 2) are within the operating unit; 3) the producer has control of the land; and, 4) are included in the NRCS-certified conservation plan.

Information about CAP services from Technical Service Providers (TSP), including how to find a certified TSP in your State, can be found on the NRCS national TSP website:
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/technical/tsp/?cid=stelprdb1042981

Table 1. Eligible Conservation Activity Plans

Practice Code	Conservation Activity Plan Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
104	Nutrient Management Plan - Written	no	1
118	Irrigation Water Management Plan - Written	no	1
130	Drainage Water Management Plan - Written	no	1
138	Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition – Written	no	1
142	Fish and Wildlife Habitat Plan - Written	no	1
146	Pollinator Habitat Enhancement Plan - Written	no	1

Eligible NRCS Conservation Practices

All conservation practices planned for financial assistance must be included in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and address a resource concern identified in this EQIP Fund Pool. NRCS conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool are listed in the below table.

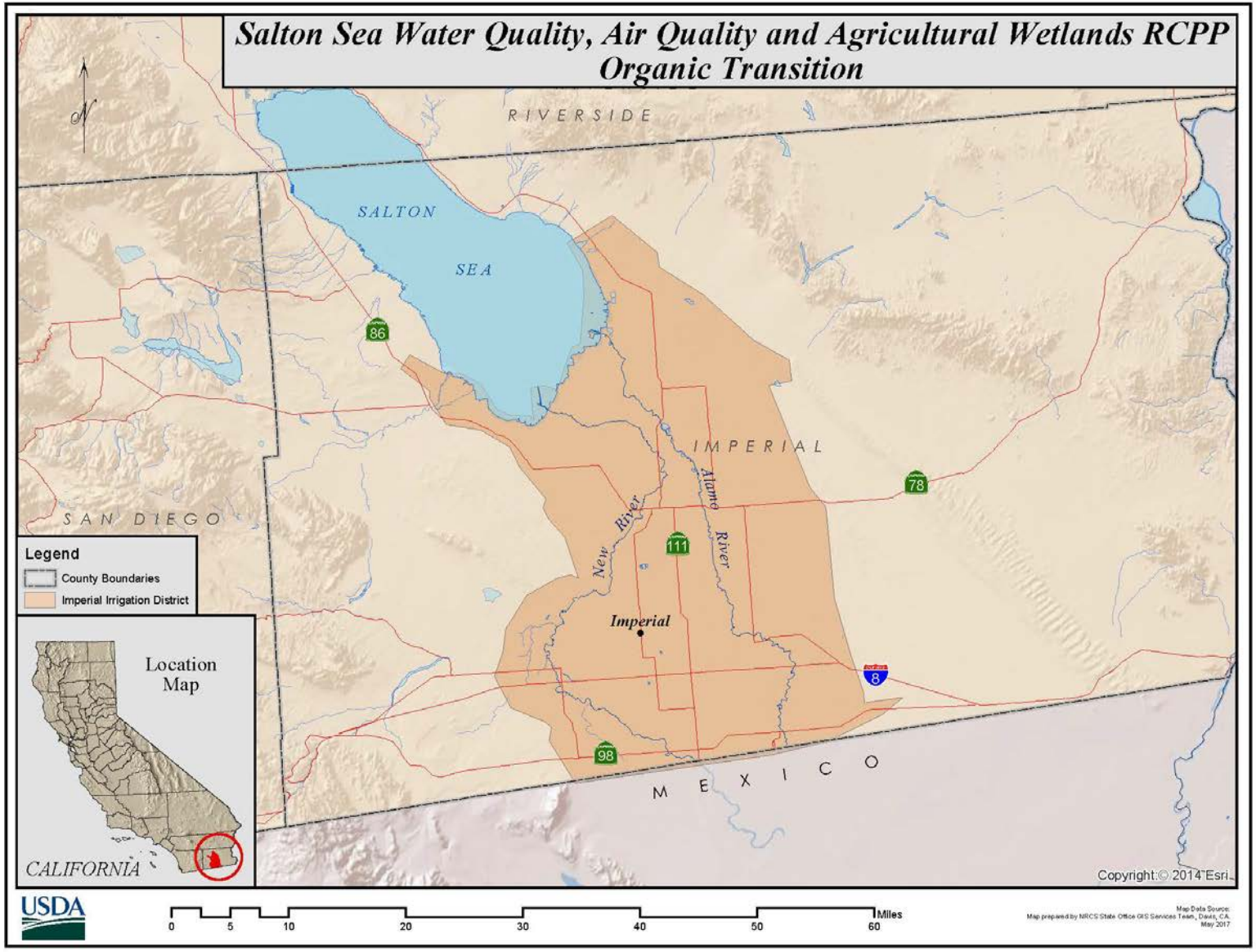
For more information about NRCS conservation practices visit the following website link for NRCS conservation practice standards:
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11_001020

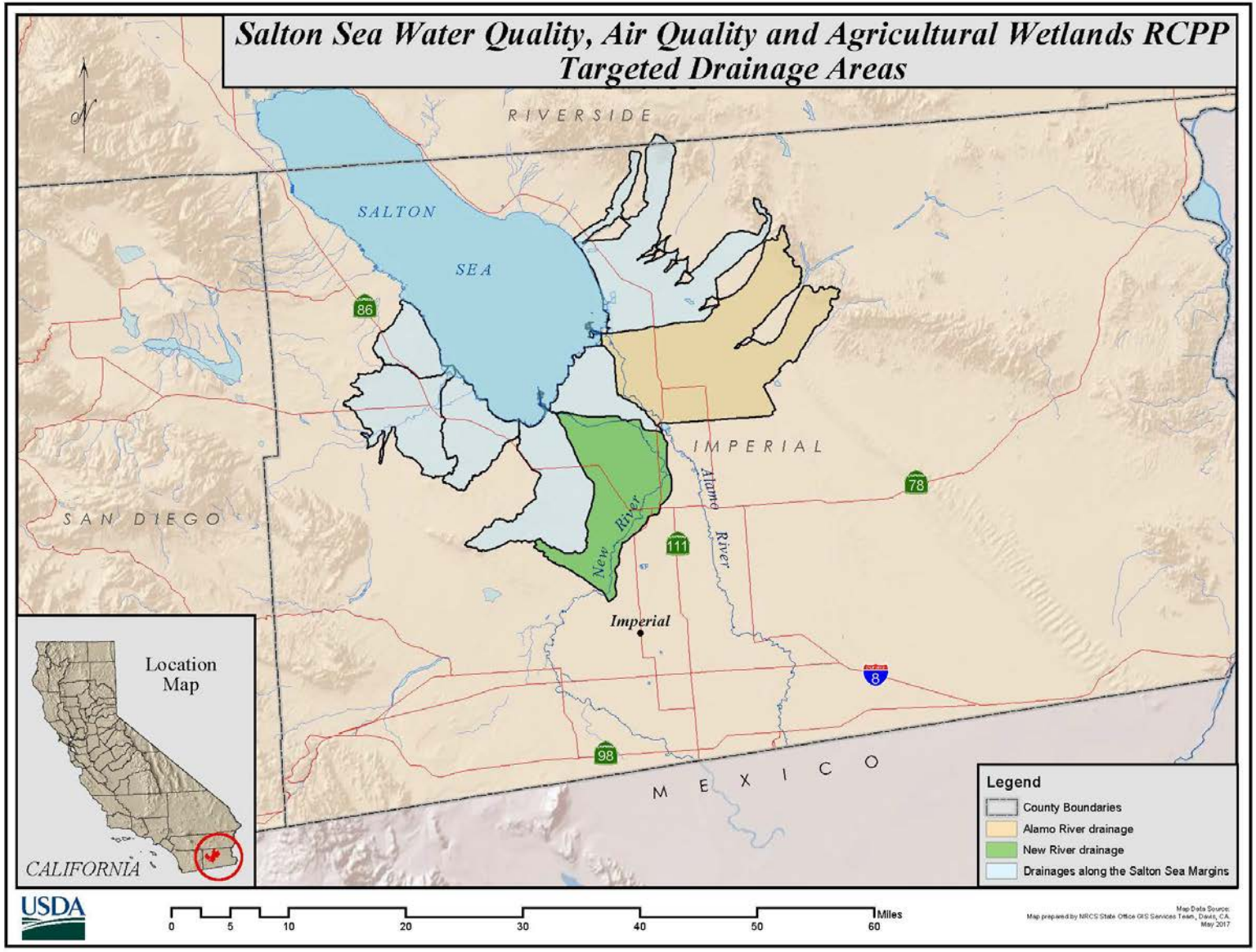
Table 2. Eligible Conservation Practices

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (years)
314	Brush Management	ac	10
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	ac	5
317	Composting Facility	no	15
324	Deep Tillage	ac	1
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
329	Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till	ac	1
328	Conservation Crop Rotation	ac	1
340	Cover Crop	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
345	Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till	ac	1
350	Sediment Basin	no	20
351	Water Well Decommissioning	no	20
373	Dust Control on Unpaved Roads and Surfaces	sq ft	1
378	Pond	no	20
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	ft	15
382	Fence	ft	20
386	Field Border	ac	10
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	ac	5
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	ac	15
393	Filter Strip	ac	10
395	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management	ac	5
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	no	15
412	Grassed Waterway	ac	10
422	Hedgerow Planting	ft	15
428	Irrigation Ditch Lining	ft	20
430	Irrigation Pipeline	ft	20
436	Irrigation Reservoir	ac-ft	15
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation	ac	15
442	Sprinkler System	ac	15
447	Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery[1]	no	15
449	Irrigation Water Management	ac	1
462	Precision Land Forming	ac	10
464	Irrigation Land Leveling	ac	15

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (years)
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	ft	15
484	Mulching	ac	1
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	ac	1
520	Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil	no	15
521A	Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane	no	20
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
554	Drainage Water Management	ac	1
560	Access Road	ft	10
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	ac	10
574	Stormwater Runoff Control	no	1
572	Spoil Spreading	ac	1
578	Stream Crossing	no	10
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	ft	20
584	Channel Bed Stabilization	ft	10
585	Stripcropping	ac	5
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
590	Nutrient Management	ac	1
595	Integrated Pest Management	ac	1
606	Subsurface Drain	ft	20
610	Salinity and Sodic Soil Management	ac	1
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment	ac	15
614	Watering Facility	no	10
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
643	Restoration and Management of Rare or Declining Habitats	ac	1
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management	ac	1
645	Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	ac	1
649	Structures for Wildlife	no	5
650	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation	ft	15
657	Wetland Restoration	ac	15
658	Wetland Creation	ac	15
659	Wetland Enhancement	ac	15

Conservation Practice, 447-Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery, is an irrigation tailwater recovery system and practice payment rates will be based on eligible conservation practices included in the system.


Salton Sea Water Quality, Air Quality and Agricultural Wetlands RCPP
Organic Transition
RIVERSIDE
SALTON
SEA
IMPERIAL
SAN DIEGO
New River
Alamo River
Imperial
86
111
78
8
98
M E X I C O
Legend
County Boundaries
Imperial Irrigation District
Location Map
CALIFORNIA
Copyright © 2014 Esri
USDA
0 5 10 20 30 40 50 60
Miles
Map Data Source:
Map prepared by NRCS State Office GIS Services Team, Davis, CA
May 2017


Salton Sea Water Quality, Air Quality and Agricultural Wetlands RCPP
Targeted Drainage Areas
RIVERSIDE
SALTON
SEA
IMPERIAL
SAN DIEGO
New River
Alamo River
Imperial
86
78
111
8
98
M E X I C O
Location Map
CALIFORNIA
Legend
County Boundaries
Alamo River drainage
New River drainage
Drainages along the Salton Sea Margins
0 5 10 20 30 40 50 60
Miles