

Salton Sea Authority

May 20, 2020
Federal Report
Lisa Moore, Cultivating Conservation
Lowry Crook, BBK

Federal Update

1. Current legislative measure to address immediate crisis
– HEROES Act
2. SSA and State Coordination on USDA funding –
Watershed Act, RCPP
3. New River
4. Corps of Engineers/Water Resources Development Act
(WRDA) Perimeter Lake authorization

HEROES Act

- House Democrats introduced the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act on May 12.
- \$1 trillion for state, local (counties and municipalities), territorial and tribal governments to pay vital workers.
- \$200 billion Heroes' fund to provide hazard pay to essential workers.
- \$75 billion for testing, contact tracing.
- Additional \$1,200 economic impact payments, Payroll Protection Program emergency grants, and tax credits for employers who keep employees on payroll.
- Democratic starting point for negotiation with Republicans.

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.....
(Original Signature of Member)

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. _____

Making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mrs. LOWEY (for herself, Mr. ENGEL, Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York, Mr. NADLER, Mr. PALLONE, Mr. SCOTT of Virginia, Mr. TAKANO, Ms. VELÁZQUEZ, and Ms. WATERS) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

Making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 SHORT TITLE

4 SECTION 1.

5 This Act may be cited as the “Health and Economic
6 Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act” or the
7 “HEROES Act”.

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May 12, 2020 (12:13 p.m.)

SSA, CNRA Federal Funding Coordination

- SSA Directors May 7 letter to CNRA regarding USDA coordination, particularly on Watershed Act funding, and on stimulus opportunities.
- Cultivating drafted application and secured \$650,000 in planning funding for the state to complete the required plan; this would enable state or SSA to tap USDA Watershed Act project funding that dovetails well with SSMP.
- Through federal legislative engagement, Cultivating increased this overall USDA program funding account from \$0 in 2016 to \$500 million in 2019 to ensure the potential for robust funding.
- Strong potential to secure increases in this program funding as part of stimulus.
- SSA/CNRA followup teleconference 5/13 to discuss plans to move forward.
- SSA drafted updated proposed scope of work for Watershed Plan and provided to CNRA.



May 7, 2020

The Honorable Wade Crowfoot
Secretary
California Natural Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street
Suite 1311
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Secretary Crowfoot:

We are writing in follow up to our recent Memorandum of Understanding to more closely coordinate and collaborate, including in our efforts to secure federal Salton Sea funding. Poor air quality linked to the Salton Sea burdens our region with among the highest rates of asthma and respiratory disease in California and renders our constituents especially vulnerable to COVID-19 health impacts. Given the economic impact of COVID-19 on future state budgets, it is incumbent upon us to expeditiously mobilize additional federal resources to ensure that this new crisis does not slow critical work to restore public, environmental and economic health at the Salton Sea.

As described below, the most immediate need to facilitate this federal work is to expedite CNRA's contracting of its USDA Salton Sea Watershed Act (PL 83-566) grant first with USDA, and subsequently with a contractor to complete the required Watershed Plan. We offer our assistance and expertise in coordinating this contracting between USDA and CNRA, propose that we work closely together with USDA to complete this task by the end of May, and work to facilitate the hiring of a contractor quickly thereafter. In addition, we request your assistance in framing a joint request to our Congressional delegation regarding potential future federal stimulus legislation that would support this and our other priorities at the Salton Sea. We recently reached out to your staff to initiate such an effort.

Since 2014, SSA and CNRA have successfully collaborated to increase federal Salton Sea engagement with the goal of securing federal Salton Sea investment at least equal to that of the state of California. The Department of the Interior has acknowledged its legal obligations as a major landowner at the Salton Sea, and has committed to identifying federal funding to meet these obligations. Notably, for the first time, the President's 2021 budget acknowledges that the federal government "may have a significant funding need in future years to address Reclamation managed lands" including "significant air quality mitigation costs" at the Salton Sea.

The most immediate opportunity to increase federal Salton Sea engagement is through our work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Together we have secured funding for two Salton Sea USDA pilot projects, enacted 2018 Farm Bill legislation to increase USDA funding that could benefit the Salton Sea, and provided USDA with the broad authority to scale

82995 Highway 111, Suite 200, Indio, CA 92201
Phone: 760.863.2695 Fax: 760.262.3008
info@ssajpa.org <http://saltonseaauthority.org>

SSA USDA RCPP

- Cultivating secured SSA and RCPP partners \$7.5 million RCPP grant to improve air and water quality at the sea's south end.
- Partners include IID, CVWD, the Torres Martinez tribe and grower groups.
- Funds growers to implement relevant conservation practices to improve Salton Sea water and air quality.
- Program is now spending out quickly. Goal is to spend out remaining funds by 2021.
- SSA will need to secure a program extension of agreement from CA NRCS (in process).
- Cultivating secured legislation in 2018 Farm Bill to enable USDA to non-competitively renew this agreement to fund additional work and expand scope of this agreement at the Salton Sea to high priority areas.
- RCPP coalition support (state, SSA agencies, grower groups) will be needed to secure a renewal.

The screenshot shows the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service California website. The page title is "Salton Sea Water Quality, Air Quality and Agricultural Wetlands". The page includes a navigation menu with "Topics", "Programs", "Newsroom", and "Contact Us". A sidebar on the left lists "Programs" such as "Farm Bill", "Conservation Compliance", "Financial Assistance", "Easements", "Landscape Initiatives", and "Landscape Planning". The main content area provides details about the program, including the application cut-off date (7/10/20), year awarded (Fiscal Year 2016), USDA funding (\$7,528,760), partner-contributed funding (\$50,555,000), and project timeline (2016 - 2020). It also lists the conservation programs funded (ACEP-WRE, CSP, and EQIP) and the California counties involved (Imperial County). The page includes a "Project Summary" section with a "Project Summary" heading and a "Project Summary" sub-heading. The text describes the Salton Sea Air Quality, Water Quality and Agricultural Wetlands RCPP, its goals, and the challenges it addresses. It also mentions the technical and financial assistance provided to agricultural lands and producers.

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You are Here: Home / Programs / Farm Bill / Regional Conservation Partnership Program / Salton Sea Water Quality, Air Quality and Agricultural Wetlands

Salton Sea Water Quality, Air Quality and Agricultural Wetlands

Application Cut-off: 7/10/20
Year Awarded: Fiscal Year 2016
USDA Funding: \$7,528,760
Partner-Contributed Funding: \$50,555,000
Project Timeline: 2016 - 2020
Conservation Program Funded: Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
California Counties: Imperial County

Lead Partner: The Salton Sea Authority (SSA) was created by the state of California to oversee the comprehensive restoration of the Salton Sea. SSA is comprised of the major local entities with the most direct stake in the future of the Salton Sea, including the Coachella Valley Water District, the Imperial Irrigation District (IID), Riverside County, Imperial County and the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians.

Project Summary
EQIP Application Sign-up and Cut-off Dates
NRCS Contact

Project Summary

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 PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}. Third, the RCPP will provide for wetland creation or restoration work to improve water quality and habitat.

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

- > In targeted drainages of the Alamo River, New 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

New River

- 2011 New River Improvement Project Strategic Plan divided the river into five reaches, making recommendations for each reach.
- Calexico reach recommendations included 3 structural components: trash screen, conveyance structure and disinfection facility — at a total capital cost of \$107 million and \$4.5 million in O&M.
- The proposed disinfection facility to treat 140 CFS of water was priced at \$85 million with a \$4.5 million/year O&M cost.
- Recommendations also included constructed wetlands.
- Reconnaissance studies dating back to 2002 identified 40 sites along the New River for constructed wetlands. Plan identified sites in the Seeley, Brawley and Salton Sea reaches.



Colorado River Basin RWQCB 2016 Recommendations

- The New River Technical Advisory recommended maintaining the structural components of trash screen and conveyance.
- That \$28 million project is included in the Governor's recent budget proposal.
- Instead of a disinfection facility, the 2016 modified proposal recommended aeration structures and constructed wetlands at 11 sites on 1,523 acres.
- Estimated costs for constructed wetlands in 2012 were \$70,000 per acre (construction and O&M).
- Estimated that 1 acre of wetland is required to treat 1 CFS of water.
- A consensus proposal supported by local, state and federal officials is key to securing funding support.



Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board

TO: Matthew Rodriguez, Chairman
California-Mexico Border Relations Council

FROM: Jose L. Angel, P.E.
Co-chair Technical Advisory Committee for New River Strategic Plan

DATE: January 11, 2016

SUBJECT: Proposed Revised Recommendations for Calexico Reach of New River

Dear Chairman Rodriguez,

On behalf of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) charged with drafting the New River Improvement Project Strategic Plan, I am respectfully submitting for the California-Mexico Border Relations Council's consideration revised structural recommendations for the New River in the Calexico area. These revised recommendations are a natural evolution of the original recommendations contained in the Strategic Plan and are necessary to address fiduciary constraints and declining New River flows at the International Boundary. They are also necessary to maximize environmental benefits downstream from Calexico. This memorandum provides an overview of the TAC's proposed revised recommendations for Calexico, background on the matter, details on the proposed revised recommendations, and the rationale for them.

Overview of Proposed Revised Recommendations

The 2011 New River Improvement Project Strategic Plan envisions a River Parkway for the City of Calexico, near and around the current channel of the New River in Calexico, just north from the International Boundary. It also recommends three key structural units/components to address the human health and environmental hazards associated with the water quality of the New River in the Calexico area so that the River Parkway can safely materialize. These components are: (1) a trash screen, (2) a conveyance structure, and (3) a disinfection facility. Under this strategy, the trash screen would be located immediately downstream from the International Boundary; the conveyance structure is necessary to pipe the River from the International Boundary to the disinfection facility; and the disinfection facility would be located at a point sufficiently far from and downstream of the proposed River Parkway (e.g., near the existing City of Calexico Wastewater Treatment Plant).

Construction of Phase 1 of the River Parkway—a bicycle and pedestrian pathway—is presently taking place. However, completion of the River Parkway, as envisioned in the Strategic Plan, was contingent on the construction of the disinfection facility. With an estimated price tag of \$85M and an annual Operations and Maintenance (O&M) cost of \$4.5M, the disinfection facility is of questionable utility in light of the accelerated decline of the New River's flow at the Border with Mexico and the availability of a more ecologically and fiscally sound strategy. This revised strategy would still include the first two structural components originally recommended in the Strategic Plan (the trash screen and the conveyance structure) and fundamentally address the above-mentioned human health and environmental hazards. However, it would eliminate the

Corps of Engineers/WRDA/Perimeter Lake

- Congress adopts Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) legislation to authorize Corps projects roughly every two years, and is currently considering such legislation.
- SSA's Corps engagement has focused on speeding Corps permitting SSMP and jurisdictional determinations to avoid further delays in Salton Sea work.
- For example, last year, SSA secured Corps agreement to perform shorter EA on SSMP rather than full blown EIS, saving valuable time.
- Securing Corps' project funding for a Perimeter Lake requires the authorization and completion of Corps feasibility study, and then additional congressional authorizations for construction funding.
- Corps does have authority, however, to adopt a locally-developed plan as such a feasibility study, provided that this "non-federal sponsor" study is authorized by Congress.
- Such an arrangement keeps the project planning in local hands and control, and avoids duplicative planning and time delays.



April 30, 2020

The Honorable Juan Vargas
U.S. House of Representatives
2244 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Vargas:

I am writing to convey the strong support of the Salton Sea Authority (SSA) for the attached Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) request which clarifies prior Salton Sea WRDA feasibility study authorizations. SSA is a Joint Powers Authority comprised of the Torres Martinez Tribe, Riverside and Imperial Counties, Imperial Irrigation District and Coachella Valley Water District.

The Salton Sea, California's largest lake, occupies approximately 370 square miles in Imperial and Riverside counties in southeastern California. It provides habitat for over 400 species of birds and is a critical stop on the Pacific Flyway. Since the early 2000s, inflows to the Salton Sea have been decreasing due to drought, agricultural water conservation measures to benefit regional water supply security, and other causes. Decreasing inflows to the sea have resulted in the exposure of emissive lakebed, diminishing habitat values and negatively impacting area air quality. The region is in severe non-attainment with federal air quality standards, and has the highest rate of childhood asthma and respiratory illness in California.

In 2007, the state of California finalized the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program Preferred Alternative Report (Preferred Alternative) which identified the construction of a Perimeter Lake at the Salton Sea to facilitate the construction of habitat complexes at the sea's north and south ends as the preferred course of action. WRDA of 2007 authorized the Secretary to review California's Preferred Alternative to determine the feasibility of projects to be undertaken under the program, to cost share in the construction of projects under the program, and authorized \$30 million for such work. PL 110-114 § 2032. This authority was enhanced in the WIIN Act of 2016. PL 114-322 § 1181.

Since these original studies and authorizations, much work has been undertaken to advance Salton Sea restoration at the state and local level, including significant planning efforts and the provision of nearly \$300 million in state of California Salton Sea funding. SSA is currently

WRDA/Corps/Perimeter Lake, Continued

- SSA has pursued EPA funding through WIFIA as main strategy for Perimeter/North Lake, securing legislative changes to the program in 2016 to facilitate a sea project, EPA engagement, and local efforts on an Enhanced Infrastructure Finance District.
- SSA recently requested WRDA language that would enable a locally-developed Salton Sea plan for Perimeter/North Lake to be adopted by the Corps as a feasibility study.
- Such an approach would keep the door open to future Corps funding for a Perimeter Lake as an alternative to WIFIA, while avoiding duplicative planning and time delays.