

**DRAFT**  
**MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION**  
**SALTON SEA ON-WATER FISH RECOVERY PILOT PROJECT**

SALTON SEA AUTHORITY  
78-401 Highway 111, Suite T  
La Quinta, California 92253

**PROPOSED FINDING**

Based upon the information contained in the Initial Study, the Salton Sea Authority finds that there would not be a significant effect to the environment because the mitigation measures described herein would be incorporated as part of the project. The facts supporting this finding are presented in the attached Initial Study.

**PROJECT PROPONENT**

Salton Sea Authority

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Introduction.** The fish community in the Sea experiences large, periodic die-offs. Salton Sea Authority has selected a contractor, Environmental Recovery Solutions (ERS), to conduct an on-water fish recovery pilot project, which consists of removing fish from the surface of the sea during die-off events. Removing the fish would reduce odors and nutrients from the Sea. The pilot project would determine what effect fish recovery would have on the water quality in the Salton Sea.

**Construction.** The base of operations would be located approximately 0.8 mile west of Highway 111. The buildings and equipment would be in an approximately 0.5-acre secure area accessed by an existing dirt road. The security area would contain:

- one 36-foot by 12-foot office trailer;
- one 40-foot by 8-foot by 10-foot lockable steel storage container mounted on blocks for storage of miscellaneous tools and spare parts;
- three 20-foot by 10-foot by 4-foot watertight cargo containers for transport of recovered fish;
- a secondary containment system for equipment wash water;
- one above-ground 200-gallon tank for wastewater generated from the office trailer toilet facility and the secondary containment system;
- three motorized vessels (two recovery vessels and one work vessel), and one non-motorized barge;
- one 20-ton lifting crane;
- one pickup truck with a 100-gallon rear-mounted portable diesel tank to refuel fleet vessels; and
- one 10-ton flatbed truck to transport recovered fish.

None of the structures would be permanent. Minor construction improvements would be required to accommodate buildings and equipment for the project. These improvements are anticipated to take approximately 2 weeks to complete. Existing material and dirt on the site would be used to regrade the existing access road and security area. Existing material and dirt on the site would also be used to construct earthen berms on the Highway 111 north-south frontage to the access road. A gate is planned for the access road near the Highway 111 entrance. The gate would not be placed within the Caltrans right-of-way. A 6-foot high chain link fence would be constructed around the secure area and security flood lighting would be provided at the gate, access road, and security area, as required. Two-foot wood docking pilings would be installed along 150 feet of the existing seawall. The wood pilings would be secured above the seabed level and timber fenders would be added to the wood pilings to tie off the three pontoon vessels. The Imperial Irrigation District (IID) would repair and re-establish electrical power to the existing power poles along the access road. Coachella Valley Water District would repair and re-establish water service to the secure area.

**Operation.** Once construction improvements have been made, an on-site duty manager would be available 24-hours per day, 7 days per week for 12 months to receive notification of an event (fish die-off). Employees would be dispatched within 12 to 24 hours with two recovery vessels and one work vessel, which tows a non-motorized barge with the cargo container, to retrieve the dead fish. The recovery vessels require two employees and the work vessel requires one employee. Two employees would man the shore-side lifting crane and disposal truck, resulting in a maximum of five employees on the site during an event. The fish would be placed in a cargo container on the water and the container would be lifted with the lifting crane, placed on the 10-ton flatbed truck, and taken to an organic recycling facility (California Bio-Mass) 50 miles northeast of the site in Thermal, Riverside County. In the event that the recycling facility could not take the fish, they would be trucked to the Edom Hill Landfill in Cathedral City, Riverside County, approximately 80 miles northeast of the project site. The truck would make a maximum of 5 round trips per day for the duration of the cleanup, which is estimated to take 3 to 14 days for 8 to 16 hours per day, depending on the magnitude of the event. After the event, all vessels would be lifted ashore using the lifting crane, placed in the secondary containment system, and washed off to remove salt and debris. The rinse water would drain into a portable septic tank. ERS would contract with a private sanitation company to pump the wastewater as need and take it to an approved facility for disposal. The vessels would then be lifted back into the Sea with the crane. The duty manager would release the employees, and return to 24-hour alert status.

## **PROJECT LOCATION**

As shown on Figures 1 and 2 of the attached Initial Study, the Proposed Project is located at the closed Playa Bob's RV Park. The property is located in Imperial County, just south of the Riverside County/Imperial County boundary west of Highway 111 and east of the Salton Sea. Property for the pilot project would be leased for one year from IID.

## **MITIGATION MEASURES INCORPORATED INTO THE PROJECT TO AVOID POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS**

### **Air Quality**

The effect of fugitive dust on drivers along Highway 111 and the Corvina Estates Mobile Home Park would be reduced to a level that is not significant through daily application of water or chemical dust-control methods during the grading operation.

The Salton Sea Authority (or its contractor) will water the access road to the site 2 times per day during events to comply with Imperial County APCD Rule 800.

## **Biological Resources**

Sensitive nesting shorebird and desert pupfish areas will be identified by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and avoided (avoidance during breeding season for the shorebirds and complete avoidance of desert pupfish areas). The project will comply with all aspects of the guidance provided by CDFG.

## **Cultural Resources**

In the event that human remains are encountered during ground-disturbing activities, all activities must cease immediately and a qualified archaeologist and the Imperial County Coroner must be notified. If the coroner determines the remains to be of Native American origin, he or she will notify the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC). The NAHC will then identify the most likely descendants to be consulted regarding treatment and/or repatriation of the remains. Clearance from these authorities must be obtained before work can continue.

## **Traffic and Transportation**

All Caltrans standards and requirements will be followed, including the provision of a paved apron and maintenance of proper sight distances at the junction of the existing dirt access road and Highway 111.

## **Utilities and Service Systems**

Riverside County Waste Management Department has agreed to accept the recovered fish material at the Edom Hill Landfill, subject to conditions listed in Appendix B of the Initial Study. Salton Sea Authority and ERS have agreed to add these conditions to the project's operational procedures.

## **INITIAL STUDY PREPARED BY:**

CHAMBERS GROUP, INC.  
302 Brookside Avenue  
Redlands, CA 92373

**FILING DATE:** January 15, 2002

**PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD:** January 15, 2002 to February 13, 2002

**DATED:** January 14, 2002