

BRIEFING STATEMENT

Prepared For:

State: California

Preparation Date:

Title: Biologically Sensitive Areas of the Salton Sea

Issue: The Importance Of Identified Biologically Sensitive Areas
On The Salton Sea To Migratory Birds Including Endangered/
Threatened/Sensitive Species

Background/Status:

It should be noted that the entire Salton Sea could be designated as a sensitive area. Waterbirds tend to congregate in certain areas, however the entire Salton Sea is used at various times by a wide array of wildlife. Given the drastic decline in wetlands in California (and throughout the country) any decrease in wetland habitat should be evaluated with extreme caution.

The following numbers refer to sections designated on the attached map and discuss locations on the Salton Sea which are considered sensitive due to wildlife use. No attempt has been made to list these in order of importance.

- 1. The Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge:** This includes both the tract under water as well as the managed portions of the refuge. These areas are federally designated refuges for migratory birds and endangered species for nesting, feeding and resting.
- 2. Mullet Island:** This island is an extremely important nesting and loafing site for a variety of species including gull-billed and caspian terns, black skimmers, double-crested cormorants and CA brown pelicans. Brown pelican nests have recently been identified on the island increasing it's importance for the Salton Sea ecosystem.
- 3. Wister State Waterfowl Management Area:** The State Fish and Game wetland and upland area, including intensively managed ponds and fields for migratory bird species and nesting areas, as well as habitat for endangered species. This includes the bay areas to the West of Davis road, which are important areas for both waterfowl and shorebirds.
- 4. Obsidian Butte:** This area is used as a major roosting and feeding site for CA brown pelicans and cormorants. Small islands off the Butte are traditional nesting sites for gull-billed terns and black skimmers. Dead trees in the area have provided rookeries for egrets and herons.
- 5. Alamo River Delta Area:** A major feeding and roosting site for migratory bird species. Also an important rookery for herons, egrets and cormorants. California brown pelicans have successfully nested here. This was the first documented nesting of brown pelicans at the Salton Sea as well as

the first inland nesting brown pelicans in the United States. Clark's and Western grebes nest in cattails at the mouth of the river. Yuma clapper rails use the area for nesting and feeding. This area includes 'Morton Bay' which is a traditional nesting site for gull-billed terns and black skimmers and is also used by pelicans and waterfowl for feeding and loafing.

6. **New River Delta:** A major feeding and roosting site for migratory bird species. Like the Alamo, it serves as an important rookery area for herons, egrets of all species as well as double-crested cormorants. Yuma clapper rails have traditionally used the marsh habitat for nesting and feeding.

7. **Poe Road Bay:** This area is a traditional site for heron, egret and cormorant rookeries. Snowy plovers use the shoreline for feeding.

8. **San Felipe Creek Area:** This is a unique feature of the Salton Sea, a natural fresh water inlet, creating important marsh habitat for clapper rails and other migratory bird species. The San Felipe Creek is one of the most important sites for the endangered desert pupfish in the area. Snowy plovers use the shoreline and have been known to nest in the area.

9. **Salton Sea Navy Test Base Shoreline To Salton City:** Important roosting sites for CA brown pelican, white pelicans and waterbirds. Nesting sites for great-blue herons. Feeding and nesting areas for western snowy plovers.

10. **81st Ave Immediate Shoreline:** This is a traditional rookery for herons and egrets.

11. **North End/Whiteriver Delta:** This area includes from 76th Ave on the west side to the area south of Johnson road. This area is extremely important for colonial nesting waterbirds (herons, egrets, gull-billed terns, black-skimmers, double-crested cormorants). The largest concentration of nesting great blue herons, great and snowy egrets at the Salton Sea currently occurs at this end. Western and Clark's grebes nest in cattails at the Whiteriver mouth. The area is also used heavily by migratory waterfowl, particularly white pelicans and shorebirds.

12. **Salt Creek:** A unique fresh water inlet to the Sea creating a natural fresh water marsh. This area is used by desert pupfish as well as Yuma clapper rails for breeding.

13. **North Bombay Beach Shoreline:** A series of dead trees along the shoreline are traditional rookeries for great blue heron.

14. **South Bombay Beach Marsh:** An extensive fresh water marsh located just south of Bombay Beach. Used by large numbers of Yuma clapper rails for nesting. Also used heavily by waterfowl and other marsh birds for nesting and feeding.

Sensitive/Endangered/Threatened Species That Use Salton Sea and Associated Marshes:

California Brown Pelicans	(E)(SE)
Yuma Clapper Rail	(E)(ST)
Desert Pupfish	(E)(SE)
Peregrine Falcon	(E)
Bald Eagle	(T)(SE)
Aleutian Canada Goose	(T)
Black Rail	(SMC)(ST)
White-faced Ibis	(SMC)
Western Snowy Plover	(T);(SMC)
American Bittern	(SMC)
Least Bittern	(SMC)
Black Tern	(SMC)
Bewick's Wren	(SMC)
Loggerhead Shrike	(SMC)

E = ***Federally Endangered***

T = ***Federally Threatened***

SMC = ***Federal Species Of Management Concern***

ST = ***State Threatened***

SE = ***State Endangered***

POSITION OF INTERESTED PARTIES:

Interested parties include: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, CA Department of Fish and Game, CA Department of Parks and Recreation, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management, Torres-Martinez Desert Indians, Imperial Irrigation District, Coachella Valley Irrigation District, agriculture parties in Imperial and Coachella Valleys and private land owners.

All parties would like to see the condition of the Salton Sea improved. Agencies involved with public use want to bring back the sport fishery and increase recreational opportunities. Irrigation Districts and agriculture would still like to use the Salton Sea as a repository for agricultural run-off. Private land owners would like to see stabilized water levels and improved conditions of the ecosystem health. Dept. of Fish and Game would like to see improved environmental conditions for fish and wildlife.

FISH AND WILDLIFE PERSPECTIVE:

The Service believes that the problems associated with the Salton Sea will continue to cause widespread wildlife mortalities without any action. Migratory birds and endangered species are currently at risk from damaging population reductions resulting from mortalities at the Salton Sea. Some action must be taken to prevent future wildlife mortalities and improve the health of the