



Salton Sea Authority



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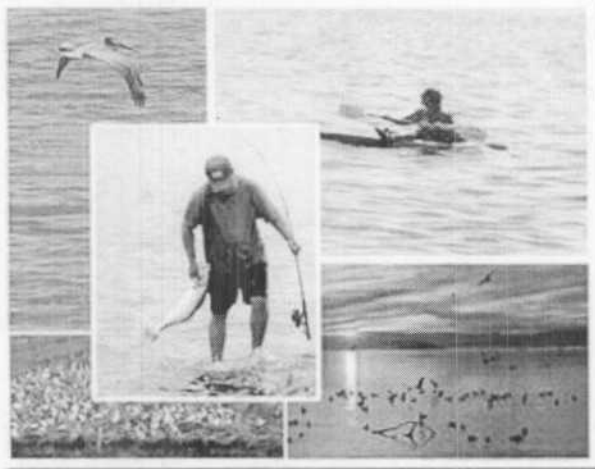
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The Allure of the Sea: Abundance of Life



One of the attractions of the Sea is the abundance of life, manifested in the hundreds of species of birds that reside in, or visit, this important wetland habitat. The Sea teems with fish. That is why some scientists have called the Salton Sea "California's crown jewel of avian biodiversity" and perhaps the most productive fishery in the world.

This abundance of wildlife is particularly critical given the decline of wetlands. Over 90 percent of the wetlands of California have been lost. As California's wetlands decline, the importance of the Sea



as a habitat for inland wetland species increases. The Sea's habitats support up to 40 percent of the entire US population of the threatened Yuma clapper rail, 80 to 90 percent of the American white pelican, and 90 percent of the eared grebe.

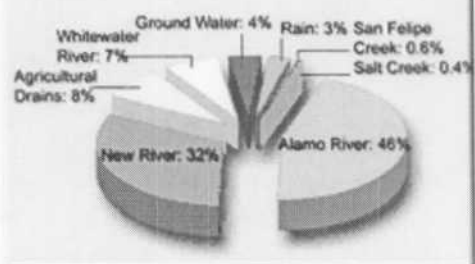
Besides the opportunity for bird watching and for fishing, the Salton Sea and its immediate vicinity offer recreational opportunities including boating, camping, off-roading, hiking, use of personal watercraft and photography. One of the attractions, the Salton Sea State Recreation Area, has 1,400 campsites in five campgrounds, hundreds of picnic sites, trails, playgrounds, boat ramps and a visitors' center.

The Sea's Vital Statistics:

The Salton Sea, located in the southeastern corner of California, is actually a lake which occupies a desert basin known as the Salton Sink. This body of water covers a surface area of 376 square miles, making it larger than Lake Tahoe and Mono Lake. In fact, the Salton Sea is the largest lake in California. The Sea's current elevation is about 227 feet below mean sea level, its maximum depth reaches 51 feet and its total volume is about 7.5 million acre-feet.

The Salton Sea has a unique make-up. By virtue of its location in the Colorado Desert ecosystem, an area with average annual precipitation of less than 3 inches per year, the Sea receives minimal inflow from rain.

Sources of Inflow to the Salton Sea



As an agricultural drainage reservoir, the Salton Sea serves an important purpose for the productive agricultural valleys that adjoin it. As an agricultural sump, the Sea consists primarily of commercial agricultural drainage. In fact, 90 percent of the entire inflow to the Sea is agricultural runoff from the Imperial, Coachella, and Mexicali Valleys.

This inflow carries nutrients, such as phosphates and nitrates, which support the rich and abundant life in the Sea. The inflow also carries an abundance of salt (and,

thus, the Sea's name). Currently, the salinity level of the Salton Sea is 44 parts per thousand (ppt), compared to 280 ppt for Utah's Great Salt Lake, about 210 ppt for Israel's Dead Sea, 87 ppt for Mono Lake and 35 ppt for the Pacific Ocean.

The Sea's Challenges

The very things that make this lake so unique and such a rich source of abundant life are placing the Sea's existence at risk. The nutrients that provide such an abundant source of food for fish are at levels that alter the available oxygen in the water. Its salt content, which causes water vessels to be more buoyant, and thus the fastest lake in the nation to boat upon, is compromising the reproductive ability of fish and, thus, their survival. Without fish, the hundreds of species of birds that rely on fish for food, and the economic status of the Sea as a productive fishery, would be threatened.

Its unique feature of being a closed basin renders it vulnerable to increases or reductions in inflows, which can dramatically change its elevation. With increases in inflows, reservation land, seaside dwellings and marinas, boat facilities and agricultural fields are susceptible to flooding. The impact of reduction of inflows would be an altered shoreline and a reduced surface area.

Restoration on the Horizon

The Salton Sea Authority has recognized the Sea's challenges and has begun the restoration process, to not only sustain the Sea, but also revitalize it as an environmental and economic wellspring. The Salton Sea Authority, along with the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Reclamation, has begun efforts to maintain the Sea as an agricultural drainage reservoir, restore the wildlife resources and habitats, stimulate recreational use, and provide an environment for economic development.

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