

# Restoration plan offered

By DARA AKIKO WILLIAMS  
The Associated Press

**DESERT HOT SPRINGS** — The Salton Sea's rich ecosystem will die unless 9 million tons of salt is pulled from the lake each year, a process that could cost up to \$9.5 million annually for at least 30 years, an Interior Department official said Thursday.

Deputy Interior Secretary David Hayes said reducing the sea's salinity is part of an overall plan to restore and develop California's biggest lake.

"We need to save the Salton Sea and we need to do it now," said Hayes, who spoke on the first of the two-day Salton Sea Symposium. "To let the sea die, in our view, is not an option."

A draft environmental impact report outlining the best methods of restoring the sea's health was discussed by politicians, environmentalists and scientists. The document will be used by Hayes and others when seeking restoration funds from Congress this session.

The Salton Sea was created by mistake in 1905 after the Colorado River burst through a canal and flooded the area. The lake is below sea level and is 35 miles long, 17 miles wide and 40 feet deep.

The sea sucked salt out of the desert over the years, making it 25 percent saltier than the Pacific Ocean. Farm irrigation runoff and pollution from the



Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-El Cajon, left, discusses issues regarding the Salton Sea with Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Riverside, and Rep. Mary Bono, R-Palm Springs, Thursday at the Salton Sea Symposium held in Desert Hot Springs.

Alamo and New rivers are also blamed for a growing number of fish and bird deaths, which have reached into the thousands.

Still, the sea sustains one of the nation's most productive fisheries and is an important stop for migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway.

Hayes said California has lost 95 percent of its natural wetlands to development. He said that makes saving the sea as important as preserving the Florida everglades or the Alaskan wilderness.

The Interior Department, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Salton Sea Authority have spent 18 months preparing the

EIR draft as other experts developed scientific studies. The results of those studies will be presented today.

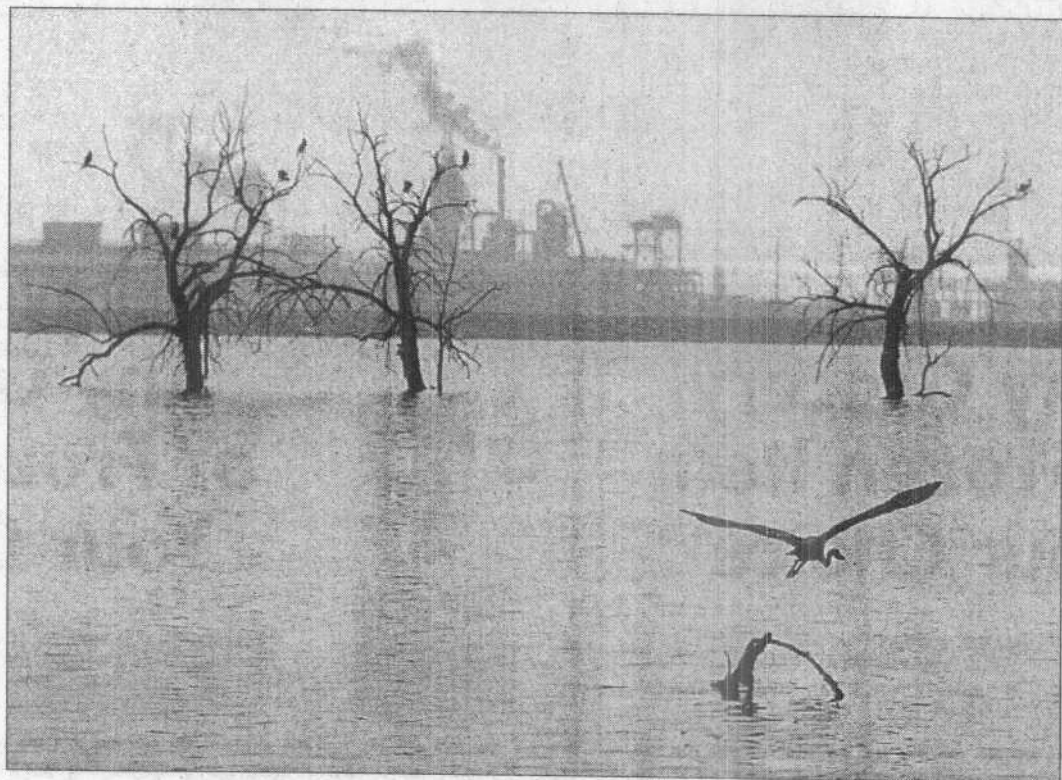
The draft EIR offers five alternatives. They include damming sections of the lake to create evaporation ponds; building evaporation towers that would pull water from the sea and spray mist into collection basins; or a combination of the ponds and towers.

The annual costs range from \$1.6 million for the ponds to \$9.5 million for the towers. A combination of both would cost \$7.1 million.

The authority hopes to receive approval to start testing the systems this summer.

# Expert: Salton Sea could die

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AP WIREPHOTOS

A common egret flies by the Salton Sea in the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex. In the background is the Elmore electrical plant. State and federal authorities, along with sea researchers, are meeting in Desert Hot Springs to discuss the best ways to restore the health of California's largest lake.