

# Gannett News Service

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## Restoration plan for Salton Sea still possible, but may not be memorial to Bono

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WASHINGTON

Legislation calling on the federal government to come up with a restoration plan for the Salton Sea is still possible even though Congress leaves in a week -- but it may not be a memorial to Sonny Bono, Rep. Mary Bono said Friday.

Members of the Salton Sea Congressional Task Force continued to try to hammer out a compromise with Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., who has opposed a House-passed restoration bill because it contains an authorization to spend \$ 350 million for construction.

The compromise bill would probably authorize federal agencies to conduct a feasibility study and pick the best solution within the next 18 months. But no money would be authorized for construction until Congress holds hearings on whether to pay for the plan and where to find the money, House and Senate staff members said.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., still believes it is possible to get more than that and is working with Sen. John Chafee, R-R.I., the chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, on winning approval of legislation that would lead more directly to implementation of a recovery plan, said spokesman David Sandretti.

Much of the funding for the feasibility study is already included in a final 1998-99 spend-

ing plan for the Environmental Protection Agency which will be considered in the House and Senate next week. The bill, which contains \$ 13.4 million for Salton Sea studies, is likely to pass and be signed by President Clinton, said Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Calif., the co-chairman of the appropriations conference committee that approved the spending bill.

Lewis and Bono, R-Palm Springs, said they feel they have made some progress toward approval of a recovery plan for the sea, but both were disappointed that the Senate would not go along with requiring the plan to move forward.

"I have asked that Sonny's name be taken off the bill, because the last thing Sonny would have wanted to see is his name tacked onto yet another study," Bono said. "I believe we will come back in the next Congress and get a bill that will do something, and that's the one that will have Sonny's name."

Before his death in a skiing accident last January, Sonny Bono had made the Salton Sea recovery plan one of his top priorities in Congress. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., vowed to pass the restoration bill as a tribute to Bono. Mary Bono was made chairwoman of the Salton Sea task force when she won a special election to finish her husband's term.

The House passed legislation July 30 that requires the Department of Interior to select a recovery plan within 18 months and authorizes \$ 380 million for studies and construction. It renames the wildlife preserve along the sea the Sonny Bono Memorial Salton Sea National Wildlife Preserve.

Lewis said Friday he is frustrated that the legislation has been stalled in the Senate ever since, and criticized Boxer and Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., for not making it more of a priority.

"It was very apparent that we got little help from the senators -- the environmental community that supports Barbara Boxer never thought helping the Salton Sea was worth it," Lewis said.

Sandretti countered that Boxer has won over all the Senate Democrats and convinced the Clinton administration to back the House plan -- and will work with Chafee "until the final day to get this passed."

The spending bill approved by the appropriations conference committee late Thursday would provide \$ 8.5 million to the Salton Sea Authority for feasibility and design studies, \$ 3 million to the Imperial Valley Irrigation District for pollution cleanup efforts on the New and Alamo Rivers, and \$ 1.9 million to the **University of Redlands** to continue developing a plan to restore the sea.