DRAFT

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: _____
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From: Salton Sea Authority
46-209 Oasis Street, Second Floor
Indio, CA 92210

Introduction

This Notice of Preparation for an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) is prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EIR/EIS will address the potential environmental consequences of alternative solutions for improving conditions of the Salton Sea (Sea).

The Salton Sea Authority (Authority) is participating as a joint lead with the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) in the preparation of the document. As required by Section 15082 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (State CEQA Guidelines), the Authority is submitting this notice of preparation NOP) to responsible agencies, other key agencies, private organizations, and individuals. The Authority will act as the lead State agency for the project.

Project Description

The purpose of the project is to identify a plan that improves the human environment and ecological conditions of the Sea. Based on past studies, various alternatives to control salinity in the Sea have been investigated. These alternatives include diked impoundments, pump-out, a combination of impoundment and pump-out alternatives, and salt removal from inflow to the Sea. Other options may surface during the scoping process. The EIR/EIS will also analyze the No Action alternative. Opportunities to address other environmental issues facing the Sea, including issues related to wildlife resources, will be investigated and considered for implementation as we increase our understanding of the Sea's ecology.

The objectives of this effort are to evaluate alternatives to (1) maintain the Sea as a reservoir of agricultural drainage, (2) provide a safe, productive environment for resident and migratory birds and endangered species, (3) restore recreational uses, (4) maintain a viable sport fishery, and (5) identify opportunities for economic development.

Section 1101 of the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act of 1992 (Public Law 102-575), directs the Secretary of the Interior to "conduct a research project for the development of a method or combination of methods to reduce and control salinity, provide endangered species habitat, enhance fisheries, and protect human recreational values . . . in the area of the Salton Sea . . ." Reclamation has the lead for this research and has entered into an agreement with the Authority to jointly study problems associated with the Sea.

The Authority is a public agency formed under the provisions of Articles I and II, Chapter 5, Division 7, Title 1 of the Government Code of the State of California for the purpose of "directing and coordinating actions relating to

improvement of water quality and stabilization of water elevation and to enhance recreational and economic development potential of the Sea and other beneficial uses, recognizing the importance of the Sea for the continuation of the dynamic agricultural economy of Imperial and Riverside Counties."

The Sea is located in the southern desert of California in Riverside and Imperial Counties. The closest cities include Palm Springs, Indio, and Brawley (Figure 1). The Alamo and New rivers flow into the Sea from the south and the White River flows into the Sea from the north. The area is agricultural in nature, although the Sea offers opportunity for recreation and temporary residence of winter visitors.

The Sea is a hypersaline lake located in a closed basin. With a surface elevation of approximately 226 feet below sea level, it is the largest body of water within California. The Sea was initially formed in 1905-1907 by flooding on the Colorado River which breached an irrigation control structure allowing virtually the full flow of river water into the Salton Basin. The Sea's current existence is primarily due to agricultural drainage from the Imperial, Coachella, and Mexicali Valleys; smaller volumes of municipal effluent and storm water runoff also flow to the Sea.

The Sea is home to a highly eutrophic ecosystem and a highly productive sport fishery. The Sea, and wetlands along its shoreline, are a critical part of the Pacific flyway providing seasonal and migratory habitat to millions of birds of varying species. Several endangered species, including the desert pupfish and the Yuma clapper rail, inhabit the Sea and/or adjacent habitats.

The Sea ecosystem is under stress. Increasing salinity, currently about 43 parts per thousand, is threatening the reproductive ability of some parts of the biota, particularly the sportfish species. Other potential issues include high nutrient loading, heavy metals, DDT residues, and discharges of agricultural chemicals to irrigation drains leading to the Sea.

Following is a preliminary list of issues associated with the project. Other issues may be identified during the internal and public scoping process. Until a firm proposal and alternatives with specific actions and locations are developed, it is difficult to predict specific impacts.

- **Biological Resources.** The five endangered species known to use the Salton Sea ecosystem are: brown pelican, Yuma clapper rail, desert pupfish, peregrine falcon, and bald eagle. Of prime concern will be the improvement of the Sea's ecology. Overall impacts on biological resources are expected to be positive.

- **Hydrology and Water Quality.** Another high priority of the project is to improve the hydrologic conditions and water quality of the Sea. The project may alter onsite water resources, including waters of the United States (as defined in 40 CFR 230.3(s)), under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) jurisdiction. Under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, the Corps is responsible for issuing a permit if a project may result in the placement of material into water of the United States. Overall, impacts should be beneficial.

• **Cultural Resources.** The project could disturb or affect archaeological resources, traditional cultural properties, Indian sacred sites, and Indian Trust Assets.

• **Socioeconomics.** The project is likely to have overall beneficial effects on the socioeconomics of the project area. Improving economic development opportunities at the Sea will However, some local areas may be adversely impacted.

• **Air Quality.** The project could have adverse impacts on air quality during construction activities, however, the project should remedy problems such as foul odors from decaying matter.

• **Hazards.** The project may involve the disturbance or use of hazardous materials.

• **Recreation.** Increasing recreational opportunities will be a high priority. Overall, recreational opportunities should be improved at the Sea.

• **Aesthetics.** Project facilities may adversely affect a scenic vista or be visually intrusive to the surrounding area in general.

• **Traffic/Circulation.** The project could increase traffic and local roadways during construction activities.

• **Agricultural and Other Land Uses.** Current agricultural resources or operations and land uses may be impacted. The Sea will remain a repository for agricultural runoff.

• **International Impacts.** The project may have impacts on Mexico.

Related Project Documentation

It is anticipated that the EIR/EIS process will make full use (including incorporation by reference, as appropriate, pursuant to CEQA and NEPA) of the following project documents, copies of which are available for inspection at the Authority and Reclamation:

Fish and Wildlife Service; *Saving the Salton Sea, A Research Needs Assessment*; October 1997.

Bureau of Reclamation, Salton Sea Authority, California Department of Water Resources; *Salton Sea Alternative Evaluation Report*; September 1997 (still in draft).

Bureau of Reclamation, *Salton Sea 1995 Hydrographic GPS Survey*, revised May 1997

Department of the Interior and The Resource Agency of California, *Salton Sea Project, California, Federal-State Reconnaissance Report*, October 1969

Department of the Interior and The Resource Agency of California, *Salton Sea Project, California, Federal-State Feasibility Report*, April 1974

Johnson, John A.; *The Salton Sea: Past History, Future Prospects*; Proceedings of Effects of Human-Induced Changes on Hydrologic Systems, American Water Resources Association 1994 Annual Summer Symposium; June 1994.

Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, *Agricultural Drainage Desalting Feasibility Study*, July 1997.

Public and Agency Scoping

Public and agency scoping meetings will be held on the issues and alternatives for improving conditions at the Sea on the dates and at the locations listed ~~below:~~

Date: 7/15
Time: 5-8 PM
Place: Vet f w Hall West Shores, 50 Desert Shores Dr.

Date: 7/16 5-
Time: 5-8 PM
Place: IID Office Bd Rm

7/17
10-1300
Centro B. of Sups Chambers

Responses to Notice

Responses to this notice must be received no later than ~~XXX~~ September, 1998. The Authority requests that you identify a contact person in your organization in the body of your response. Your responses to this Notice of Preparation should be addressed to:

Mr. Tom Kirk, Executive Director
Salton Sea Authority
46-209 Oasis Street, Second Floor
Indio, CA 92210
Tel: (760)863-7942

June 18, 1998

Signature: _____
Tom Kirk
Title: Executive Director

Figure 1

Salton Sea Project Area Map