

Steven Medd / The Press-Enterprise

A potential way of desalting the Salton Sea is demonstrated Wednesday on the shore of the sea by Slimline Manufacturing, whose Turbo-mist evaporator sucks up the briny water and sprays it into the air. The water evaporates and the salt falls to the ground.

Desalting device shown off

May be used in Salton Sea plan

By Jennifer Bowles
The Press-Enterprise

On a Salton Sea shore littered with bird and fish carcasses, a machine sucked up salt-laden water and sprayed it as a fine mist Wednesday to demonstrate a possible answer to the lake's environmental problems.

As the mist evaporates, salt falls to earth.

The snow-blower-like machine is one of two evaporation systems being considered

to reduce the salinity of the lake, now about one-fourth saltier than the Pacific Ocean.

"It looks promising," said Tom Kirk, executive director of the Salton Sea Authority. "The test has been very encouraging."

A small group from water districts, the Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla tribe, and state and federal agencies involved in the rescue effort witnessed the first test of what is hoped to be a promising solution.

It was also the first day of hearings to let

the public comment on the multimillion dollar plan to rescue the sea, as announced in January by Interior Deputy Secretary David Hayes. It followed an 18-month scientific study of the sea that straddles Riverside and Imperial counties.

At the day's first hearing, in La Quinta, five people questioned the plan that offers not one but five similar solutions. Suggestions included building an aquatic park on the south shore with a jungle cruise, water sports facilities and a camping ground.

A second hearing was held Wednesday night in Palm Desert and two meetings

Please see **DEVICE, B-6**

DEVICE

Continued from B-1
were scheduled for today closer to the sea.

Comments from the hearings will be included in the final environmental impact report due out in the summer. That report will narrow the five proposed solutions down to one.

The lake has become a major stopover for birds migrating on the Pacific Flyway because most of the wetlands where they would have nested have been destroyed by development.

As the demonstration occurred, eared grebes floated on the sea, ducking underwater occasionally for some food. The small birds were the victim of a 1992 die-off in which 150,000 perished. The cause is still unknown, said Milt Friend, lead scientist on the rescue effort.

Other birds, including the endangered California brown pelican, and fish also have died at the lake in large numbers.

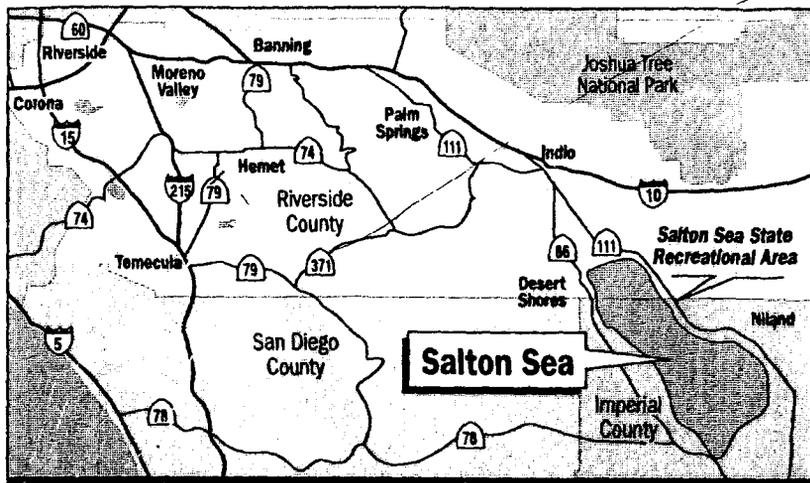
The sea is so salty because it is fed mostly by fertilizer-tainted water used on crops and it has no natural outlet.

It was created by an engineering mistake on an irrigation ditch nearly 100 years ago that allowed the Colorado River to run into a natural sink, creating the 35-mile-by-15-mile lake.

Of the five solutions proposed, four call for an evaporation system that would include a network of ground-based, snow-blower-like machines or towers, some as tall as 130 feet.

They would be planted on the east side of the lake near Bombay Beach or on the west side at the former Salton Sea Navy Test Base, where the demonstration took place.

Kirk and William Steele of the



The Press-Enterprise

Bureau of Reclamation, the lead federal agency in the sea rescue, will go to South Africa next week to see how the other evaporation system, a series of towers, is working at a mine site.

Whichever system is chosen, it will leave behind piles of salt that will be dumped at a landfill. Potential ways to sell the salt commercially "don't look real good," Kirk said.

A pilot project of either system will be up and running within this year, Kirk said.

Like the towers, the machine demonstrated Wednesday, the Turbo-mist, also is typically used at mine sites.

The demonstration was held partly to study how the misted saltwater drifts in the wind, but only a gentle wind blew Wednesday.

"You don't want the salt falling back on fields or back into the Salton Sea," Kirk said.

The machine was mounted on a tractor by the sea. It sprayed the water up in the air from a large tube outfitted with a ring of nozzles. The mist fell over a small section of the lake dotted with seven poles holding tin pans. The leftover salt in

the pans will help determine how much water is evaporating, leaving behind the salt.

Tests the day before showed the water was evaporating up to 92 percent, meaning the salt can be extracted from the sea at a rate of about 22 tons per day per machine, said Kim Blagborne, president of Slimline Manufacturing Ltd. Each year, 5 million tons of salt come into the sea.

The Salton Sea rescue plan could use up to 1,500 of the machines that cost roughly \$17,500 each.

Two more public meetings will be held today at 1 p.m. in Brawley at the Brawley Chamber of Commerce, 204 S. Imperial Ave., and at 6 p.m. in Desert Shores at the Veterans of Foreign Wars West Shore Post 3251, 50 Desert Shores Drive.

Comments on the draft environmental impact report should be mailed by April 25 to: Tom Kirk, Salton Sea Authority, 78-401 Highway 111, Suite T, La Quinta, CA 92253-2066 or to Bill Steele, Bureau of Reclamation, P.O. Box 61470, Boulder City, NV 89006-1470.

E-mail comments also can be sent to Kirk at tkirk@salton-sea.dst.ca.us or Steele at wjsteele@lc.usbr.gov.