

# CHAPTER 8

## PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

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### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the initial stages of the Salton Sea Restoration Project, stakeholder outreach and education and agency participation have been a primary focus of efforts in the shaping of the project and in the development of alternatives for the EIS/EIR. Although salinity and surface water elevation problems at the Sea have been studied for many years, the initial planning process for the current set of alternatives began in 1996. The process has included numerous public and agency meetings. Meetings have been held to help identify potential alternatives, develop screening criteria, conduct screening analysis (with public and agency input) to eliminate some alternatives and focus on feasible alternatives, and give the public updates about which alternatives would be retained for analysis in the EIS/EIR.

### 8.2 LEAD AND COOPERATING AGENCIES

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the Salton Sea Authority (Authority) have entered into an agreement to coordinate and perform studies and investigations necessary to implement Public Law (PL) 105-372 and PL 105-575. Under this agreement, Reclamation and the Authority are jointly responsible for addressing environmental impacts and are the lead agencies for preparing the EIS/EIR. Reclamation is responsible for ensuring that the document comply with requirements established by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Authority is responsible for ensuring that the report comply with requirements established by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

As lead agencies, the Authority and Reclamation are responsible for establishing a liaison with the public and all federal, state, local, and tribal agencies that have jurisdiction by law or that have special expertise with respect to any environmental impact involved in a proposed action and for requesting their participation, as appropriate. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) has identified areas of jurisdiction, by law or special expertise, for all federal agencies. An agency may ask the lead agencies to designate it as a cooperating agency. The lead agencies meet periodically

with cooperating agencies to discuss issues and to study progress. Further discussion of the agency process is presented in section 8.4.

### 8.3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

#### 8.3.1 Opportunities for Public and Agency Involvement

Reclamation and the Authority have implemented a public involvement program that was design to ensure that information from the public is included and public concerns are fully addressed during the restoration effort. The overall goal of the program is to achieve consent among affected interests on a feasible solution to the problems facing the Salton Sea. The objectives of the public involvement effort include the following:

- Meet and document legal requirements for public involvement outlined in NEPA and CEQA;
- Develop public awareness and understanding about the Salton Sea Restoration Project to encourage public participate in the decision-making process;
- Provide adequate notice to interested parties about the development of a Salton Sea Restoration Project and about their opportunities to participate;
- Ensure affected local, regional, state, and federal elected and appointed officials are informed about the purpose and need for the Salton Sea Restoration Project and its progress;
- Achieve balanced decision-making that takes into account the issues important to affected interests;
- Reduce project costs by avoiding wasted effort on solutions that will not be acceptable to affected interests;
- Minimize litigation and disputes through informal negotiations; and
- Build general public understanding about the purpose and need for the project.

To date, participants representing the interests of agriculture, water districts, recreation, sport fishing, environmental organizations, businesses, and the general public have been asked to help define problems and to evaluate alternatives for solving the challenges confronting the Salton Sea area.

This public involvement has been solicited and engaged through multiple public outreach methods and activities including the following:

- Public workshops;
- Public meetings;
- Community presentations;
- Educational materials/direct mail;
- Media contacts;

- Legislative briefings;
- Project public information line/project website; and
- EIS/EIR scoping meetings.

Table 8.3-1 provides information relative to the public workshops and meetings that have been held to date on the Salton Sea Restoration Project. The public is encouraged to continue to provide input to the process by attending and participating in public workshops and by providing written comments on the draft EIS/EIR. Public involvement will continue throughout the course of completing the environmental document and implementing the project itself.

**Table 8.3-1  
Summary of Public Meetings**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting Purpose</b>
1998	
January 12	Salton Sea Symposium II, Rancho Mirage
July 15-17	Public Scoping Meetings
October 5-8	Public Alternative Screening Meetings (4)
November 2	Environmental Community Meeting, Tiburon
1999	
May 8	Congressional Task Force Hearing, Brawley
May 10	Environmental Community Meeting, Palm Desert
May 11	Alternatives Workshop, La Quinta
May 12	Alternatives Workshop, Salton City
May 12	Alternatives Workshop, Brawley
May 13	Alternatives Workshop, San Diego
May 13	Environmental Community, San Diego
November 3	Alternatives Workshop, Rancho Mirage
November 4	Alternatives Workshop, Salton City
November 4	Alternatives Workshop, El Centro
November 5	Environmental Community, Calipatria
November 8	Environmental Community, San Francisco
2000	
January 13-14	Salton Sea Symposium III, Desert Hot Springs

### 8.3.2 Major Public and Agency Issues and Concerns Identified During Scoping

The public scoping process has identified numerous public and agency questions and concerns. These are discussed in the Salton Sea Restoration EIS/EIR Scoping Report, published in January 1999, and posted on the Reclamation website. This document is incorporated by reference. The report includes a complete list of all comments received during the scoping period, both oral and written.

Agency comments and concerns were tracked separately and included concerns similar to those of the public. Additional concerns included the following:

- Defining the scope of the project;
- Defining the No Action Alternative; and
- Listing international boundary issues and cultural and Native American issues.

All of these issues were incorporated into the scope of the EIS/EIR analysis and, where appropriate, are addressed within the individual resource sections of this document (see Section 1.7.1 for a list of the concerns identified during public scoping).

### **8.3.3 Distribution of EIS/EIR**

Following completion of the draft EIS/EIR, Reclamation and the Authority will distribute the document to a comprehensive list of elected officials, federal, state, regional, and local agencies, local Indian tribes, and interested organizations and individuals. In addition, the lead agencies will conduct public hearings at various locations in the project area to solicit public and agency input on the document. The availability of the document will be publicized in various media, including local and regional newspapers, the Federal Register, and the Reclamation website. All public comments on the draft EIS/EIR will be addressed in the final EIS/EIR.

## **8.4 AGENCY COORDINATION**

In addition to activities and programs to solicit public and stakeholder involvement, a number of subcommittees and teams have been formed to ensure the involvement of all interested and participating federal and state agencies in the process. Interagency teams are important in bringing the technical expertise of the agencies into the planning process and ensuring that the appropriate agency staff are reviewing and providing recommendations at each step of the process. In many ways, the agency involvement programs have interacted with and complemented public outreach efforts.

Public agencies participating in the process to date include the following:

- California Department of Water Resources;
- International Boundary Water Commission
  - US Section
  - Mexican Section;
- US Environmental Protection Agency;
- California EPA;
- US Army Corps of Engineers;
- US Geological Survey;
- US Fish and Wildlife Service;
- Torres Martinez Band of Cahuilla Indians;
- US Bureau of Land Management;
- US Bureau of Indian Affairs;
- California Regional Water Quality Control Board;
- Coachella Valley Water District;

- Imperial Irrigation District;
- Riverside County;
- Imperial County; and
- California Department of Fish and Game.

Throughout alternative development and analysis, meetings with these cooperating agencies were conducted to allow regular consideration of their issues and suggestions. In addition, the Fish and Wildlife Service was regularly consulted directly on issues and alternative features within their expertise. EPA and the Corps of Engineers were also consulted directly relative to Section 404 and water quality issues. The Torres Martinez Band of Cahuilla Indians were individually consulted throughout the process on use of lands within and near their reservation as well as on potential effect to cultural resources related to their historic uses of the area. Table 3.16-4 includes a list of tribal organizations contacted through the Native American consultation process. The BLM was specifically consulted in relation to the use of Federal lands for project purposes. Finally, a separate meeting with State regulatory agencies was held to assure their understanding of the process and proposed alternatives.

All these agencies, and others, were consulted throughout the process informally as specific information needs and questions were identified.

#### **8.5 RESEARCH MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

The Secretary of the Interior, with authorization through PL 105-372, established the Research Management Committee (RMC). The RMC consists of representatives of the following entities involved in the Salton Sea recovery effort: the Department of Interior, the state of California, the Salton Sea Authority, the Torres Martinez Band of Cahuilla Indians, and the California Water Resources Center. The RMC facilitates the pooling of financial resources for research activities and coordination of research on a time-sensitive basis. The RMC acts on recommendations made by the Salton Sea Science Subcommittee relative to funding science needs and supports the awarding of science projects evaluated by the subcommittee. RMC recommendations are forwarded to the Authority for funding.

#### **8.6 SCIENCE SUBCOMMITTEE**

The Salton Sea Science Subcommittee (SSC) was established to serve as an independent and objective advisory body to provide scientific evaluations and recommendations to the RMC. The SSC is administratively responsible to the RMC. The charter for the RMC and SSC is provided on Reclamation's website at [www.lc.usbr.gov](http://www.lc.usbr.gov). The compositions for the RMC and SSC are shown in tables 8.6-1 and 8.6-2.

The primary purpose for this science component is to provide a sound scientific foundation on which to base management judgments on various alternatives to achieve project goals. To arrive at this point, the following tasks were accomplished:

- Gathering, synthesizing, and evaluating existing scientific information relative to the Salton Sea ecosystem;

- Identifying priority data gaps and facilitating investigations for obtaining that data;
- Completing focused scientific evaluations of potential environmental impacts from proposed project alternatives and management actions; and
- Developing a strategic science plan to guide the long-term integration of science within the project.

**8.6.1 Data Gathering, Synthesis, and Evaluation**

There is a general perception that the Salton Sea has been “studied to death.” Therefore, past and ongoing studies initially were evaluated to determine the extent and quality of information that would be useful for project evaluations. The University of Redlands is an important cooperator and collaborator in this effort. The university established an independent Salton Sea Database Program that interfaces with the science and management components of the project. The database program provides a centralized system for storing data and for processing, sharing, and distributing scientific information. The database program also has geographic information system (GIS) capabilities for mapping and evaluations. Synthesis documents were prepared for existing information by various subject matter experts, SSC subgroups, and others to address project information needs (Table 8.6-3). A wide array of documents were deposited within the University of Redlands Salton Sea Database Program for access by project managers and scientists. The database is a comprehensive collection of literature and GIS data specific to the Sea and available through the university’s website, <http://cem.uor.edu/>.

**8.6.2 Identification of Priority Data Gaps**

Evaluation of existing information disclosed that much of the information was dated and of limited use because of changes taking place within the Salton Sea

**Table 8.6-1  
Composition of the Salton Sea Research Management Committee**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Level of Appointee</b>
Salton Sea Authority	Executive Director
State of California	Office of the Secretary
US Department of the Interior	Office of the Secretary
Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian Tribe	Tribal Chairperson
State of California University Community	Director, University of California Center for Water and Wildlife Resources

**Table 8.6-2  
Composition of the Salton Sea Science Subcommittee<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Organization Type</b>	<b>Representatives</b>
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Federal Agencies	US Geological Survey US Army Corps of Engineers Los Alamos National Laboratory US Environmental Protection Agency Bureau of Reclamation Bureau of Land Management US Department of Agriculture US Fish and Wildlife Service
Independent Nations	Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian Tribe
California State Agencies	Department of Fish and Game Environmental Protection Agency Department of Water Resources
Regional Agency	Salton Sea Authority
California Local Government	Riverside County Imperial County
California Water Districts	Imperial Irrigation District Coachella Valley Water District
California University Community	San Diego State University University of Redlands University of California Imperial Valley College
Environmental Groups	California Audubon Society
Mexico/United States	International Boundary and Water Commission

<sup>1</sup>Chaired by an Executive Director who does not represent any organization but the Science Subcommittee; all organizations are limited to one representative, except for the International Boundary and Water Commission, which has a representative from Mexico and from the United States.

**Table 8.6-3**  
**Issue-specific Reconnaissance Investigations and Synthesis Documents**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>Synthesis Documents Followed by Reconnaissance Investigations</b>	
The Avifauna of the Salton Sea: A Synthesis	Point Reyes Bird Observatory
Fish and Fisheries of the Salton Sea	Institute of Marine Science, University of Southern Mississippi
Chemical and Physical Analyses of the Salton Sea	Bureau of Reclamation
A Synthesis of Our Knowledge of the Biological Limnology of the Salton Sea	Center for Inland Waters and Department of Biology, San Diego State University
A Survey of Algal Toxins in the Salton Sea	Scripps Institute of Oceanography
Reconnaissance of Microbial (Bacterial and Viral) Pathogens in the Salton Sea	US Geological Survey, National Wildlife Health Center
Synthesis Document of Current Information on the Sediment, Physical Characteristics, and Contaminants at the Salton Sea, Riverside and Imperial Counties, California	Levine-Fricke Recon

**Synthesis Documents**

The Potential Impact of Rising Salinity on the Salton Sea Ecosystem	Coachella Valley Water District
The Salton Sea: A Brief History and Biology <sup>1</sup>	Coachella Valley Water District
Avian Disease at the Salton Sea <sup>1</sup>	Milt Friend, Science Subcommittee
Literature Synthesis Bibliographic Reports	University of Redlands Database Program

<sup>1</sup> Draft documents provided for management use but not completed as final at this time.

ecosystem. Also, there have been no studies of the Sea as a whole, and the fragmented investigations that have been done do not provide sufficient data to meet some information needs. It was concluded from these evaluations that the immediate science priority was to describe the current state of the sea through a series of integrated reconnaissance studies to provide “real time” information for use in the NEPA/CEQA evaluations (Table 8.6-3). The next levels of need were determined to be an evaluation of the ecological factors resulting in major bird die-offs (Table 8.6-4), followed by evaluations of important system processes within the Sea. This information can be reviewed on the University of Redlands website (<http://cem.uor.edu/>). The SSC evaluated the data gaps in such a way that would satisfy the schedule requirements of NEPA/CEQA, while establishing the foundation for scientific input to long-term decisions and actions for restoring the Sea.

**Table 8.6-4  
Bird Mortality Investigation Awards**

<b>Area of Investigation</b>	<b>Awarded To</b>
Ecology and Management of Avian Botulism at the Salton Sea	US Geological Survey – BRD – National Wildlife Health Center
Tilapia Food Habits	The University of Southern Mississippi
Identification and Ecology of Disease-Causing Agents for Eared Grebes at the Salton Sea	US Geological Survey – BRD – National Wildlife Health Center
Identification of Natural Toxins at the Salton Sea	University of California at San Diego Scripps Institute of Oceanography
Investigations of the Cause of Eared-Grebe Mortality at the Salton Sea – Algal Blooms and Biotoxins	Wright State University

Science investigations are competitively awarded by the Salton Sea Authority. Requests for proposals to address specific needs are developed by the SSC, are broadly advertised, and are available on Reclamation’s website ([www.lc.usbr.gov](http://www.lc.usbr.gov)). Proposals received are evaluated initially by the SSC for relevance and general scientific merit. Proposals deemed to be of value are then submitted for external peer review by subject matter experts. Peer review is the dominant factor regarding which proposals are selected for funding. Successful proposals have originated from the private sector, university community, and government agencies.



Findings from these studies provide important information of direct relevance for evaluations of proposed management actions. Findings often differ from popular perceptions and conventional wisdom about the Sea based on earlier investigations and more fragmented scientific efforts.

**8.6.3 Focused Scientific Evaluations for Potential Environmental Impacts**

The SSC independently evaluates proposed management actions, including the No-Action Alternative. These evaluations are restricted to the potential biological impacts, both positive and negative, likely to occur as a result of the actions being considered. Subject matter experts are invited to SSC meetings to assist with evaluations. Evaluations are restricted to actions being considered by management, as it is not an SSC role to propose actions. Findings are nonjudgmental regarding acceptance or rejection of proposed actions; instead, they focus on highlighting probable environmental outcomes associated with the proposed actions. Those outcomes are considered by the project co-lead agencies in making decisions on alternatives being considered. Evaluations are provided orally in some instances and as formal reports of the SSC in other instances.

**8.6.4 Strategic Science Plan**

It is recognized that restoration of the Salton Sea requires a long-term effort, that science needs for the immediate NEPA/CEQA evaluations differ somewhat from the long-term needs, and that a phased approach is needed for the science effort. A Strategic Science Plan (SSP) to guide the long-term integration of science within the project is described as a common action in Section 2.6.8 and is discussed further in a companion document to this NEPA/CEQA evaluation. The SSP builds upon the foundation provided by the SSC process and provides a blueprint for the science process, functions, and administrative structure, which are needed to sustain a long-term science component of the adaptive management approach.

**8.7 SALTON SEA RESTORATION WORKGROUPS AND ADVISORY TEAMS**

In addition to the agencies and committees discussed above, several Salton Sea restoration workgroups and advisory teams have been established to assist in the restoration project effort. These groups include the Economic Development Task Force, formed by the Authority to investigate economic opportunities associated with restoration of the Sea, and the Alternatives Enhancement Subgroup, formed to address project goals and objectives.