

Objectives

Provide for the continued use of the Salton Sea as a drainage repository by proposing no actions that would preclude the current or future use of agricultural drains with terminal outfalls to the Sea.

- Maintain the level of the Sea below -230 m.s.l.
- If the Sea recedes, prevent sediments from causing air quality problems that may affect agriculture.
- Reduce salinity content to reduce salt intrusion into the Lower Coachella Valley aquifer.

Goal 2: *“provide a safe, productive environment at the Sea for resident and migratory birds and endangered species,”*

A number of avian and at least one fish species currently inhabiting the Salton Sea for all or part of each year are considered critical to the maintenance of a healthy ecosystem at the Sea. These species of importance to the ecosystem at the Salton Sea include threatened and endangered species (including both avian and fish species), Federal species of management concern and trust species of migratory birds. Additionally, there are various shorebirds, marsh birds, gulls, terns, and passerines that contribute to the biodiversity currently present at the Sea and within the watershed.

Objectives

Several management objectives can be identified which will enhance wildlife habitat values at the Sea and provide secondary benefits for other species that sometimes visit the watershed. By concentrating on objectives designed to enhance habitat values for the threatened and endangered species, other species should also benefit. For example, maintenance of open water habitat may be targeting the more than 1 million eared grebe population found at the Sea during winter months. However, the small number of common loons that utilize the Sea during migration along the Pacific flyway will also benefit from enhanced open water habitat.

Objectives to enhance habitat values and representative significant species that could benefit include:

Objective

Enhanced fresh water marsh habitat

Species

Yuma clapper rail
Least and American bitterns
Black rail
White-faced ibis
Snow and Ross' geese
Northern pintail
Black tern

Maintenance of open water habitat (fresh and salt)

California brown pelican
American white pelican
Canvasback
Ruddy ducks
Eared grebe

Protect/provide islands for roosting and nesting

California brown pelican

	American white pelican Gull-billed tern Black skimmers
Maintenance of foraging habitat	White-faced ibis Ruddy ducks Snow and Ross' geese Gull-billed tern Black tern
Enhanced shoreline pools, creeks	Desert pupfish Western snowy plovers
Stabilization of elevation	Desert pupfish Western snowy plovers
Reduce salinity levels to at least 35-49 ppt and Eliminate selenium advisory	All

Goal 3: “restore recreational uses at the Sea,”

Historic recreational use at the Salton Sea was high and varied, with visitors camping, picnicking and participating in numerous water sports such as boat racing, water skiing, and swimming. Availability of a variety of different recreational experiences in proximity to each other likely encouraged visitors to the region. But with increasing surface water elevation (leading to flooding of some popular camping facilities along the shoreline), decreasing water quality and the increasing public perceptions of potential health risks at the Sea, visitation and particularly, water body contact recreational uses decreased. Today, the Sea is popular for bird watching and provides more limited camping and fishing opportunities, but it does not offer the same variety of experiences it once did.

One of the five goals of the Salton Sea Restoration Project is to restore recreational use at the Sea through enhancing recreational resources. Addressing the salinity levels and stabilizing the surface elevation of the Sea are important steps in restoring the potential for expanded recreational opportunities. Campgrounds lost through rising water levels may be reclaimed if surface elevations stabilize at a level lower than current measurements. Boat docks and moorings similarly incapacitated could also be reclaimed to service visitors seeking boating facilities.

Factors considered important in attracting recreational visitors to an area include the number, accessibility, and quality of facilities available, variety of opportunities available, uniqueness of the experience, availability of overnight accommodations serving different economic levels, and relative distance to other locations with similar offerings. An examination of these factors from a historical context and how they relate to the Salton Sea recreational experience of today will provide targets for enhancement activities. Target goals for visitor use-days should be determined, based on reasonable assumptions of potential future use. Visitor surveys may provide further guidance for improvements.

Objectives

Provide conditions, habitat, water quality, elevation and access that encourage a wide range of recreational activities, including but not limited to camping, picnicking, swimming, boating, fishing, bird watching, ecotourism, and hunting.

- Stabilize the Sea's elevation between -230 and -235 m.s.l.
- Eliminate/reduce noxious odors.
- Reduce salinity levels to at least 35 to 40 parts per thousand.
- Maintain or increase the amount of hunting and bird watching habitat.

Goal 4: *"maintain a viable sport fishery at the Sea,"*

The Salton Sea achieved past fame for its thriving sport fishing opportunities. The California Department of Fish and Game set the stage for the industry by stocking the Sea with game fish including the orange-mouth corvina. The African tilapia, another target of anglers at the Sea that found its way into the ecosystem through an accidental fish farm release in the 1960s, has flourished and today can be found in abundant numbers. Other species historically added to the reputation of the Salton Sea as a destination for sport fishers.

Objectives

- Eliminate the fish health (selenium) advisory, through improving conditions at the Sea or through risk assessment.
- Provide conditions that encourage a robust Orange Mouth Corvina population.
- Provide an ecosystem that limits massive fish kills and reduces fish disease.

Goal 5: *"identify opportunities for economic development around the Sea"*

Stabilization of surface elevation is considered critical to providing opportunities for shoreline development. Equally important is decreasing salinity. These two actions are the focus of specific design criteria for alternative solutions currently under consideration. This will play a significant role in providing increased opportunities for development around the Sea. In addition, the Salton Sea Restoration Project will, through achievement of the other four goals, provide a healthy environment or stage on which economic development can be expected to naturally increase. For example, a regular schedule for harvesting fish carcasses collected on the shoreline would help improve the visual and olfactory aesthetics of the area and should encourage future development. Efforts aimed at educating the public regarding the unique ecosystem of the Sea associated with wildlife habitat enhancement (including the 'smell' associated with organic nutrients) could assist in attracting visitors, including potential investors to the Sea.

Other actions that would make the region more attractive to economic development may largely come from the recreational sector, with increased recreational activity generating the need for new facilities. Development-friendly local planning offices may also choose to assist economic development through streamlining permitting processes or through specially designated economic development zones.

Objectives

- Stabilize the Sea's elevation between -230 and -235 mean sea level.
- Eliminate/reduce noxious odors.
- Provide a healthy ecosystem, including wetlands habitat (see Goal 2 objectives).
- Reduce the Sea's salinity to at least ocean levels, 35-40 parts per thousand.
- Protect/enhance commercial development opportunities along the northern shores.
- Protect/enhance existing recreational opportunities (see Goal 3 and 4 objectives).

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Introduction

The Salton Sea Reclamation Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-372) directs the Secretary of Interior to 'complete all studies . . . of various options that permit the continued use of the Salton Sea as a reservoir for irrigation drainage and: (i) reduce and stabilize the overall salinity of the Salton Sea; (ii) stabilize the surface elevation of the Salton Sea; (iii) reclaim, in the long term, healthy fish and wildlife resources and their habitats; and (iv) enhance the potential for recreational uses and economic developments of the Salton Sea.'

Development of such a restoration project requires compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) through the development of an environmental impact statement/report. The Salton Sea Authority and the Bureau of Reclamation, working jointly with stakeholders and members of the public, developed five goal statements that comply with the direction contained in PL 105-372 and provide guidance for the preparation of the EIS/EIR. The five goals of the Salton Sea Restoration Project are to:

- 1) maintain the Sea as a reservoir of agricultural drainage,
- 2) provide a safe, productive environment at the Sea for resident and migratory birds and endangered species,
- 3) restore recreational uses at the Sea,
- 4) maintain a viable sport fishery at the Sea, and
- 5) identify opportunities for economic development around the Sea.

In order to develop a long-term monitoring program that will determine the effectiveness of any actions designed and implemented to achieve these goals, further refinement or better definition of each goal is necessary. The following discussion expands on each goal and identifies a series of objectives. In many cases, objectives overlap and result in mutual benefits. This information is designed to provide the Science Subcommittee Tiger Team with more detailed information on the five project goals, for use during development of a framework for a long-term monitoring program.

Goal 1: *"maintain the Sea as a reservoir of agricultural drainage"*

The continued use of the Salton Sea as a repository for agricultural drainage is a fundamental component of the Salton Sea Restoration Project. It is a goal defined by the joint lead agencies for the NEPA/CEQA effort, a basic assumption contained within Public Law 105-372, and the Sea's defined purpose under state and federal law.

Considering the factors which might affect the future volume of drainage water destined for the Sea, such as potential future on-farm conservation measures, out of basin water transfers, etc., it is possible that the volume of drainage received at the Sea may decrease in the future. However, the goal is to ensure that the Sea be maintained as a drainage reservoir for whatever level of inflow may be available through the agricultural drainage system. Stabilization of elevation is also important to ongoing operations of the drains because increases in elevation will adversely impact the effectiveness of the drainage system.