

Salton Sea UPDATE

ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROGRAM

THE RESOURCES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME

MAY 2006



Restoration Plan Update

In 2003 the California Legislature passed the Salton Sea Restoration Act which states that "it is the intent of the Legislature that the State of California undertake the restoration of the Salton Sea ecosystem and the permanent protection of the wildlife dependent on that ecosystem." As directed by the Act, the California Secretary for Resources, Mike Chrisman, is preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Project—the restoration of the Salton Sea ecosystem. The PEIR will include the Ecosystem Restoration Study (ERS) as an appendix. These reports are to be submitted to the Legislature by the end of 2006.

The State is evaluating 8 action alternatives in the Draft PEIR. This Restoration Plan Update provides an overview of the final range of alternatives and an update on the inflow and air quality assumptions used in the Draft PEIR.

The State conducted numerous public meetings in the Salton Sea watershed to gather input on the alternatives. Your input is very valuable to the Project. The public will have opportunities to provide comments on

the Draft PEIR in June 2006. Secretary Chrisman and the Salton Sea Advisory Committee are continually briefed on the comments, concerns and suggestions provided by the public.

New Alternatives

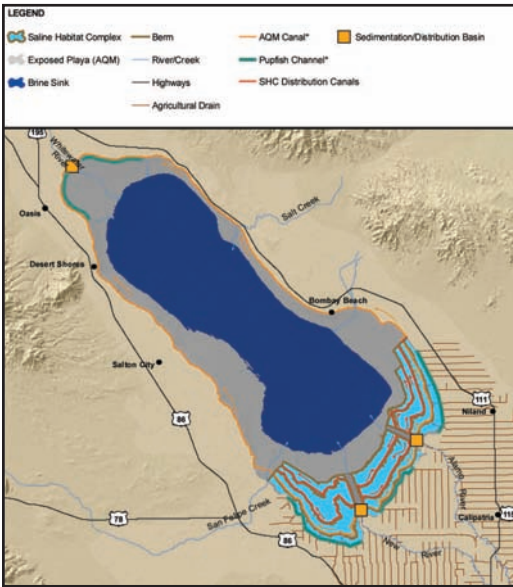
During many of the public outreach meetings that have been conducted over the past year, the State received numerous requests for the Salton Sea Authority's Combined North and South Lake Plan and the Imperial Group's Concentric Lakes Plan to be included in the suite of alternatives being investigated by the State. In January, the Advisory Committee recommended that the State consider both plans as part of its alternative evaluation.

Secretary Chrisman requested that the Salton Sea Authority and the Imperial Group provide the State with information on their alternatives for analysis in the Draft PEIR. The State is working closely with the Salton Sea Authority and the Imperial Group to obtain the necessary information for a complete and thorough evaluation.

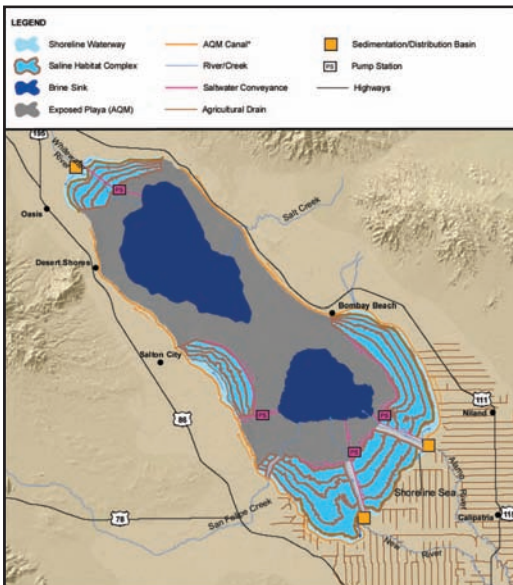
Overview of Final Range of Alternatives

A brief description of the final range of alternatives is provided below. In general, the action alternatives have been numbered from least complex (Alternative 1) to most complex (Alternative 8). This numbering system will be used in the Draft PEIR to simplify and facilitate the discussion, and is in no way intended to imply preference, priority or relative ranking of alternatives.

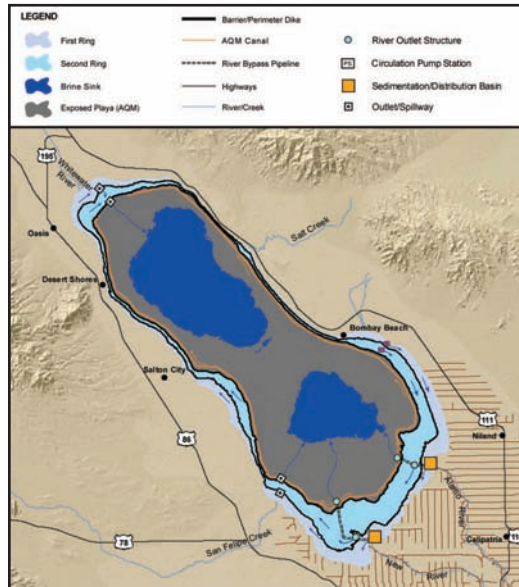
Alternative 1, Saline Habitat Complex I: This Alternative would provide saline habitat primarily in the southern portion of the Salton Sea. This Saline Habitat Complex area would provide shallow water habitat for a variety of birds and some fish species, such as tilapia.



Alternative 2, Saline Habitat Complex II: This Alternative is similar to Alternative 1, but would provide more Saline Habitat Complex areas. Under Alternative 2, the Saline Habitat Complex would be located in the southern, northern and western portions of the Sea. These areas would provide a functionally equivalent area to replace the eventual loss of shallow water and shoreline habitat as the Salton Sea recedes.

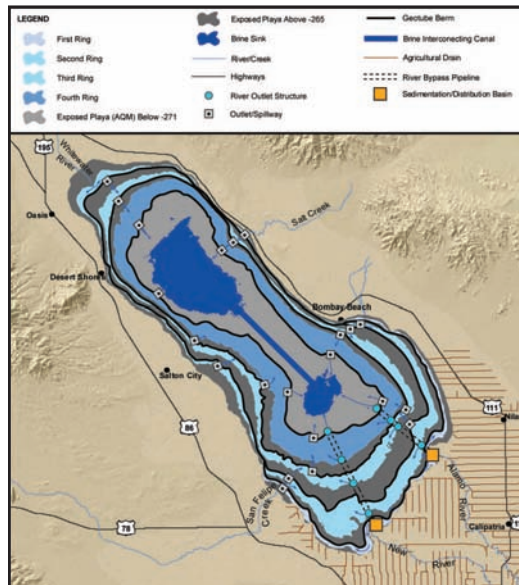


Alternative 3, Concentric Rings: The Concentric Rings Alternative would preserve the Salton Sea's existing shoreline habitat by constructing two concentric water bodies. The outer waterbody, or first ring, would be a brackish waterbody ranging from 0 to 10 feet deep that would preserve the existing shoreline habitat and provide connectivity for the

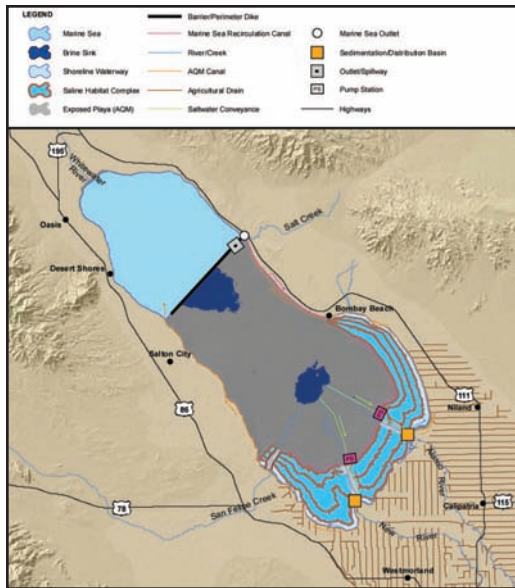


desert pupfish. The inner ring, or second ring, would be a marine waterbody with a maximum depth of 10 feet that would provide additional shoreline habitat. Both rings would be created by constructing rock-filled dikes or levees (Perimeter Dikes).

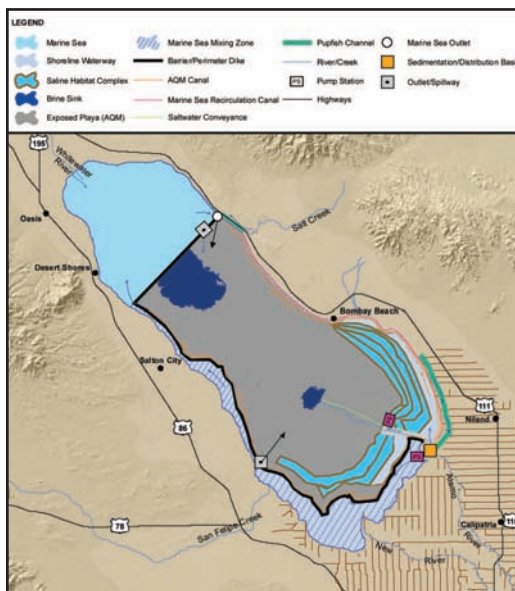
Alternative 4, Concentric Lakes: The Concentric Lakes Alternative was proposed by the Imperial Group. This alternative is similar to Alternative 3, but would include multiple lakes forming multiple waterbodies. Water depths in the lakes would be lower, and the berms that form the lakes would be constructed using geotubes - geotextile tubes that would be filled with sediments, and covered by soils from the Sea bed.



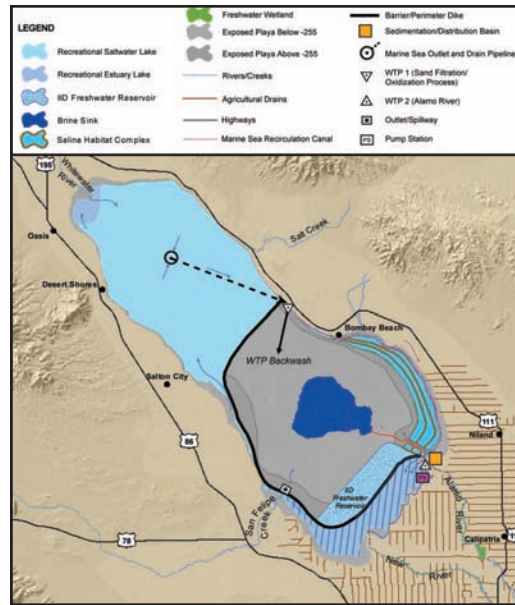
Alternative 5, North Sea: The North Sea Alternative would provide a deep, marine, open-water habitat in the northern portion of the Salton Sea and Saline Habitat Complex in the southern portion of the Salton Sea. A Shoreline Waterway would also be created in the southern portion, adjacent to the Saline Habitat Complex area, to provide habitat and connectivity for the desert pupfish and a mixing/distribution channel for water supplies to different areas of the restored Salton Sea.



Alternative 6, North Sea Combined: The North Sea Combined Alternative would provide a deep, marine waterbody in the northern portion of the Salton Sea. The marine sea would extend along the entire western shore of the existing Salton Sea. A Shoreline Waterway would be located on the southern end of the Salton Sea. This alternative includes a smaller Saline Habitat Complex area in the southern portion of the Salton Sea.

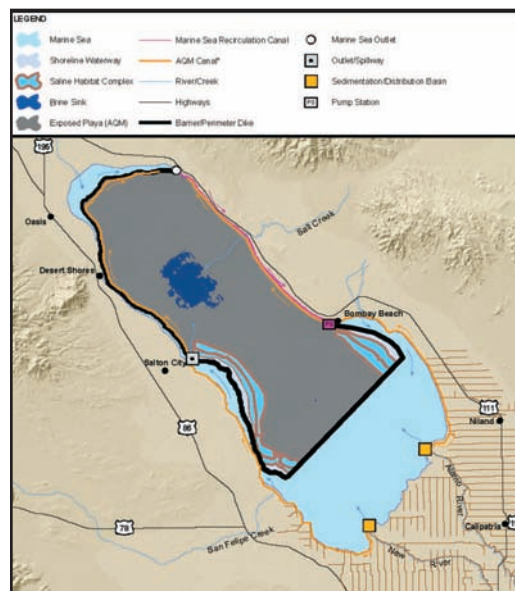


Alternative 7, Combined North and South Lakes: The Combined North and South Lakes Alternative is the Salton Sea Authority's preferred alternative. The marine waterbody would extend along the entire western shore of the Salton Sea and to the confluence of the Alamo River on the south side. The marine waterbody would provide habitat and connectivity for the desert pupfish. This alternative includes a Saline Habitat Complex area in the south-eastern portion of the Salton Sea. This alternative also includes water treatment



components, a storage reservoir for the Imperial Irrigation District, and upstream wetlands along the New and Alamo rivers that are not included in the other alternatives. This alternative relies on creation of a salt crust for Air Quality Management.

Alternative 8, South Sea Combined: The South Sea Combined Alternative would provide a deep, marine waterbody in the southern portion of the Salton Sea. The marine waterbody would extend to Bombay Beach on the east side of the Salton Sea, along the entire western shore of the Salton Sea, and to near North Shore

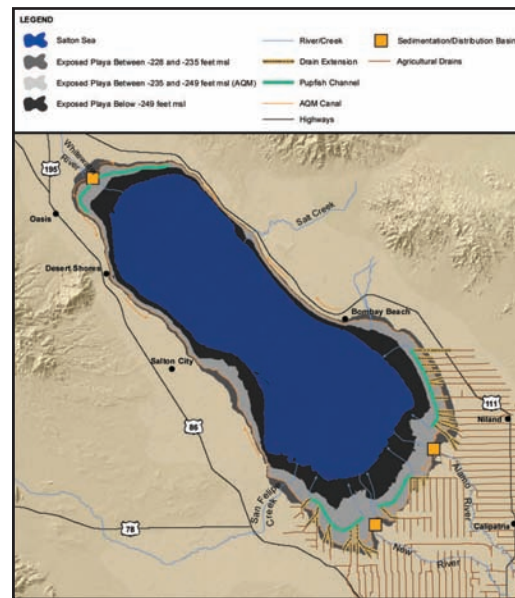


on the northern end of the Sea. The marine waterbody would provide habitat and connectivity for the desert pupfish. This alternative also includes smaller Saline Habitat Complex areas along the eastern and western portions of the Sea.

No Action Alternatives: The No Action Alternative provides the basis for the evaluation of the impacts of the other proposed configurations. While it is termed “No Action”, this alternative includes mitigation for desert pupfish and air quality impacts, and the facilities needed to implement these mitigation actions as required by the Quantification Settlement Agreement.

The No Action Alternative conditions will be described for a range of inflows: California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and

Variability Conditions. The CEQA Conditions represent projects that have been identified as reasonable and certain in accordance with the requirements of the CEQA. The Variability Conditions also include other potential future water management actions that may affect inflows to the Salton Sea but that are not fully defined. The Variability Conditions are considered using a statistical analysis approach that represents an inflow scenario that would reduce risks for the Project related to future reductions in inflows.



Inflows Update

The Inflows/Modeling Work Group, a subgroup of the Advisory Committee, has met several times since May of 2005 to discuss historical and future inflows to the Salton Sea. As part of this effort, three inflow scenarios have been developed—historical conditions (1950 to 2002), No Action Alternative-CEQA Conditions, and No Action Alternative-Variability Conditions.

Historical condition inflows are the measured and estimated inflows based upon the period from 1950 to 2002. Average annual inflows over this 52-year period were estimated to be about 1.3 million acre-feet per year.

Two future inflows conditions—the No Action Alternative-CEQA Conditions and No Action Alternative-Variability Conditions—provide a range of estimates of what may occur in the future. The No Action Alternative-CEQA Conditions is the anticipated future inflows with changes due to reasonably foreseeable actions and approved projects, such as the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA), the Mexicali wastewater treatment and power plants and the Coachella Valley Water Management Plan. The No Action Alternative-Variability Conditions inflows takes into consideration some uncertainty in future water management actions, such as increased water use and reuse in the Imperial, Coachella, and Mexicali valleys, and improved on-farm water use efficiency, that may affect inflows to the Salton Sea. Inflows under these two future scenarios are summarized in the following table.

	Average Annual Inflows over entire Study Period (2003 to 2077)	Average Annual Inflows over Estimated Project Operational Period (2018 to 2077)
No Action Alternative – CEQA Conditions	965,000 AFY	922,000 AFY
No Action Alternative – Variability Conditions	795,000 AFY	717,000 AFY

Inflows are in acre-feet per year (AFY). Project operational period is the time for which Project facilities are anticipated to be constructed and operational.

The State, as part of its programmatic-level evaluation of alternatives, is being conservative in the inflow analysis because future inflows are a critical component in the design and success of the Restoration Project. If future inflows are less than what the State has designed for, some Project objectives, such as salinity and elevation targets, may not be achievable. However, if future inflows are greater than what the State has designed for, then it is likely that all Project objectives can be achieved and additional water may be available for expanded habitat objectives.

Air Quality Assumptions

Under all alternatives, the Salton Sea will recede and some of the area that is currently under water will be exposed. Over time, these areas may contribute to increased dust emissions from disturbance and wind erosion.

Because these areas will become exposed in the future, it is difficult to predict the locations and extent of any increased dust emissions at this time. However, a variety of dust control measures have been developed in the event that increased dust emissions occur from exposed areas. This "tool box" of measures includes options that require water, such as water-efficient vegetation, and options that require minimal or no water, such as salt crust, gravel cover, and chemical stabilizers. The Salton Sea is expected to recede slowly over time, so these measures can be tested to determine which is the most effective for the unique conditions at the Salton Sea.

Preventing or minimizing future air quality problems from exposed areas is an important Project component. Based upon input from air quality experts and the Air Quality Work Group, the Salton Sea Advisory Committee recommended that all of the alternatives, except Alternative 7, allocate some inflow water to meet future air quality management needs using water-efficient vegetation. Alternative 7 provides for air quality management using salt crust, and this alternative does not require that inflow water be allocated for air quality management. Under Alternative 4, inflow water allocated for air quality management is less than under the other alternatives because this alternative provides for air quality management by the establishment of self-sustaining native vegetation cover. It is anticipated that inflow water would be allocated to this vegetation for a few years until the vegetation becomes established.

Salton Sea Advisory Committee

The Salton Sea Restoration Act established the Advisory Committee to provide balanced representation of interests in the Salton Sea. There are 32 Committee members and 18 Committee meetings have been held since 2004. At the March 2006 meeting, the Committee was updated on Project status, air quality management assumptions for the Draft PEIR, and progress in analyzing the Salton Sea Authority and Imperial Group's alternatives. The Advisory Committee also was briefed on phasing and construction assumptions and "early-start" phasing options that are being developed to ensure adequate habitat areas exist during construction.

Visit www.saltonseawater.ca.gov/calendar/ for more information on upcoming meetings.

Next Steps and Future Meetings

The Draft PEIR is expected to be released in June 2006. The Draft PEIR will identify and analyze potential environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the final range of alternatives. The Draft PEIR will include an appendix (Ecosystem Restoration Study) that will present detailed descriptions of the final range of alternatives, habitat values for each alternative, potential methods for constructing each alternative, and cost estimates for each alternative.

Copies of the Draft PEIR will be made available at specific locations throughout the Salton Sea watershed. The State will conduct a series of public meetings to coincide with the release of the documents. The State also will conduct a series of formal public hearings to receive comments on the Draft PEIR. These hearings will take place in the Salton Sea watershed and other locations around the state. Please look for upcoming meeting notices. Your input is important to us, and we invite and encourage your participation in this process.

Salton Sea

ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROGRAM

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