



Salton Sea Authority



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The Salton Sea State Recreation Area at one time was the second most popular state park in California. In 1961, 400,000 boats were launched into the Salton Sea from this state park.

Until the mid-1980's more people visited the Salton Sea area than Yosemite National Park. In the future, when its water quality is improved, the Sea's beaches may all be as popular as Mecca Beach, shown above in a 1998 photo.

(Photo courtesy of California State Parks, Salton Sea Sector.)

Economic Development and the Sea

The restoration process, in its commitment to maintaining the Salton Sea, seeks to revitalize industries at and around the Sea - agriculture, fisheries, tourism, real estate, and geothermal.



Agriculture

The Sea has longstanding and inextricable ties with agricultural community; it relies on inflow from irrigation runoff as its primary replenishment source, and the agriculture industry relies on the Sea as a repository for this runoff. The Sea together with agricultural fields provides the habitat which attracts vast numbers of birds. As an agricultural sump, the Sea has contributed to agriculture's economic success; in 1999, the Riverside and Imperial Counties produced over \$1.5 billion in agricultural goods.

Fisheries

The productive sports fisheries have long been an allure for anglers from all over the West. In 1989, the California Department of Fish and Game found the annual impact of the fishery on the local economy to be \$50 to \$65 million. The Salton Sea, which has been called one of the world's most productive fisheries, also holds the potential as a source for commercial fish harvesting. Research is underway to determine the feasibility of this endeavor which would contribute to the region's economy and at the same time reduce the fish overloads in the lake.



Tourism

Besides fishing, the tourism industry has offered boating, camping, use of personal watercraft, and picnicking for outdoor and water-based recreation seekers. The Salton Sea Recreation Area, on the northeastern shoreline, hosts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. Up until the mid-1980s, the Salton Sea State Park hosted more visitors annually than Yosemite. Unfortunately, unpleasant odors along with periodic bird and fish die offs sometimes greet visitors to the Sea and give misleading impressions that the water is unsafe. Some tourists also stay away because of the erroneous perception that the Sea is a repository of toxic wastes and pesticides. The Salton Sea Authority and its partners have been working hard to get the truth out about the Salton Sea and at the same time address the causes of fish die offs and the avian diseases that cause bird deaths. However, these and other perceptions have marred the reputation of the Sea and have taken a toll on the tourism industry.

The local community has also been working hard to get the word out that the Salton Sea--despite its problems--is still a beautiful place to visit. It is still a magnificent place to fish. And the opportunities for bird watching at the Sonny Bono Wildlife Refuge and other spots along the shore attract thousands of people annually. In fact, it is home for the Salton Sea International Bird Festival that annually brings hundreds of visitors to the shores.



Closely tied to tourism is the real estate industry of the Sea. Fluctuations in tourism and in the Sea's elevation levels have challenged the survival of many businesses. Residential and commercial lots stand empty or in disrepair. Motels, restaurants,

fishing tackle and supply stores, recreational vehicle parks, and like businesses have suffered the brunt of economic uncertainty. With a successful restoration effort, there is optimism that this facet of the area's economy can be rejuvenated.

Geothermal

The Salton Sea Known Geothermal Resource Area supports 15 geothermal plants south of the Sea, generating an aggregate of 268 million watts of electricity and employing over 600 people. The geothermal production wells tap into water reservoirs thousands of feet beneath the earth's surface, releasing superheated water, which drives turbines to generate electricity.



The Salton Sea Authority will address concerns about the Salton Sea area's economy, balancing the need to revive floundering industries with the need to preserve the Sea's ecology.

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