



News Release – For Immediate Release

Do Nothing: most costly option for Salton Sea

A report released by an environmental think tank yesterday calculates, for the first time, the costs of a “Do Nothing” approach at the Salton Sea. The report estimates a staggering \$29 billion to \$70 billion negative impact to the region in the absence of any large scale revitalization or air quality mitigation project at the Sea.

“The report, produced by Michael Cohen of the Pacific Institute, underscores what local leaders have known for a long time,” observes Jim Hanks, Salton Sea Authority Chairman of the Board. “The option of doing nothing to improve the condition of the Salton Sea is the opposite of cost neutral –in fact it is the most costly of all choices.

The Salton Sea Authority (SSA), a joint powers authority created to coordinate comprehensive restoration of the Sea, is comprised of Riverside and Imperial Counties, Torres Martinez Native American tribe, Imperial Irrigation District and the Coachella Valley Water District.

The Salton Sea is a national wildlife treasure, home to over 400 species of migrating waterfowl that use the Sea as a critical resting habitat on the Pacific Flyway. The Sea is shrinking due to drought and federally sanctioned contracts that transfer water from the Salton Sea region to the coast. Water transfers are scheduled to accelerate the decline of the Sea in 2017 when nearly a third of the water now flowing to the Sea will bypass the region in a massive transfer to the San Diego area.

As a result, Cohen’s report estimates that in the next 15 years, the amount of water flowing into the Sea will decrease by about 40%, its surface area will drop by 20 feet and its volume will decrease by more than 60%. In addition, salinity will triple and more than 100 square miles of lake bottom will be exposed, severely worsening air quality for the region.

The Pacific Institute report estimates that the costs of inaction over 30 years would result in adverse impacts to public health, property values, agricultural production, recreational revenue and the region’s habitat for birds and wildlife. The report concludes that the costs of inaction greatly exceed the costs of action (the most expensive restoration plan recommended by the State approached \$9 Billion).

“Nowhere in America are there greater combined risks to the environment, human health and the economy than at the Salton Sea,” observes Roger Shintaku, General Manager of the SSA. “The good news is, enormous new resources in renewable energy are emerging along with a strong working relationship with federal and state leaders committed to creating a stable, healthy environment at the Sea.”

Salton Sea Authority members are working tirelessly to develop vast renewable energy resources at the Sea that can reinforce the ecosystem restoration efforts spearheaded by the Army Corps.

For the first time in Sea history, federal funds are now approved to allow the Army Corps of Engineers to begin restoring the Salton Sea. \$200,000 in the Army Civil

Works work plan for FY 2015 is designated to work specifically with the Salton Sea Authority and the state of California to devise a blueprint outlining the first steps in the process of restoring the Salton Sea.

President Obama reinforced the new era in federal funding for the Salton Sea recently by signing the new Water Resources Reform and Development Act (H.R. 3080). The WRRDA contains language that sets priorities for the Army Corps of Engineers to solidify its role in restoration activities at the Sea.

Meanwhile, the Resources Agency of the State of California is working with the SSA to evaluate the production capacity and market value of the renewable energy portfolio around the Sea. Salton Sea Authority agencies have endorsed the concept of a Salton Sea Restoration and Renewable Energy Initiative that would tap local resources to begin curbing negative impacts of Sea decline.

Earlier this year the Authority signed a \$2 Million contract with the Resources Agency to do a Funding and Feasibility Action Plan, with the goal of developing a comprehensive action plan by early 2016. The Water Bond approved by the legislature for submission to the voters in November includes up to \$475 Million for ecosystem restoration and mitigation at the Sea.

On the local front, the Salton Sea Authority launched an exploratory committee to form an Infrastructure Finance District that may provide additional financial tools for local public-private partnerships.

“Nowhere in America are there greater combined risks to the environment, human health and the economy than at the Salton Sea,” asserts Roger Shintaku, SSA General Manager. “The good news is, enormous new resources in renewable energy are emerging along with a strong working relationship with federal and state leaders committed to creating a stable, healthy environment at the Sea.”