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The Salton Sea Authority's Executive Director today praised an independent evaluation of the Authority's proposed Salton Sea restoration project that found several potential weaknesses in the original concept. The Authority has already revised its plan to address issues raised in this report.

"This report is part of the important technical work that the Authority has always understood would be needed to further refine our plan" said Ron Enzweiler, Salton Sea Authority Executive Director.

The report, written by Michael Cohen of the Pacific Institute and released on March 11, 2005, was prepared on behalf of the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Geological Survey Salton Sea Science Office.

The report contains findings from a scientific workshop held in November 2004 to evaluate the Authority's so-called "North Lake Plan" for restoring the Salton Sea. This plan, which is one of several options now being considered by the state's Resources Agency in its legislatively mandated study of ecosystem restoration alternatives for the Salton Sea, would split the existing sea into two parts, separated by a dike. The northern portion would be a 140 square mile permanent salt water lake. The southern portion would contain wetlands areas and brine pools, ringed by channels that would transport inflows from the New and Alamo Rivers to the lake in the northend.

"Since I took over as Executive Director in October 2004, the Authority has been conducting internal design reviews and soliciting public input to determine ways the conceptual 'North Lake Plan' could be modified to address community concerns as well as improve economic development and recreational opportunities," Enzweiler said.

"Our board already has approved a revised conceptual design that eliminates the shallow habitat areas in the southend that were identified as selenium traps. Instead of narrow channels, we plan to build a dike in 10-feet of water around the southend of the Sea. This feature will preserve the existing shoreline habitat areas and create a 30 square mile lake in Imperial County. We also have reduced the water inflow requirements to 700,000 acre feet per year by moving the mid-sea barrier further north. Thirdly, we're pilot testing the selenium removal process to show that it will be feasible to remove selenium before it can collect in the wetlands," Enzweiler said.

He added further refinements are in the works.

"We are especially focusing on the issue of fluctuating inflows as well as potential longer term reduction of inflows below 700,000 acre feet per year." he said.

"If inflows are reduced to below 650,000 acre feet per year at some point in the future on a long term basis, lake elevations could be maintained by constructing islands in the northern portion as a way to reduce evaporation losses," Enzweiler said. "These man made islands (similar to the dozens of man made islands in the San Francisco Bay-Delta) could be self-financing based on the development opportunities they would create," he added.

The Authority's executive director also noted that more work needs to take place regarding the potential of dust issues created by a receding shore line. This is an area the Resources Agency is focusing on in its study. The Authority expects to incorporate the air-quality mitigation measures that are recommended by the state in the Authority's plan.

The Authority's Technical Advisory Committee will discuss the science review panels' report at the committee's meeting on April 14, 2005. The committee is expected to make additional recommendations to the Authority's board regarding the issues raised in the science panel's report.