**Salton Sea Management Program**

**Draft Community Engagement Plan**

*Last revised 3/12/20*

This document outlines a conceptual approach and a roadmap for engaging local communities in the planning and implementation of the Salton Sea Management Program. It describes the current context, high-level components of the engagement approach, proposed tracks and tactics, and near-term next steps.

**Current Context**

* The Newsom Administration is committed to addressing air quality and ecological threats at the Salton Sea. The sea’s ongoing decline and exposure of lakebed affect thousands of residents, many of whom suffer from serious respiratory issues.
* The California Natural Resources Agency is working with the Department of Water Resources and the Department of Fish and Wildlife to plan and implement projects as part of the Salton Sea Management Program’s Phase 1: 10-Year Plan prioritizing construction of dust suppression and habitat projects on exposed lakebed and areas expected to be exposed by 2028.
* Project delivery is behind schedule, and communities around the sea have expressed concern with the state’s lack of progress to date. Community members have expressed interest in being consulted on Salton Sea projects and providing input, such as requesting that projects include community amenities such as recreation, multi-benefit infrastructure and access to the sea. design. Residents have further expressed an interest in and commitment to being part of the decision-making process for determining community design parameters for Salton Sea projects.
* The state team completed the first project under the SSMP in January 2020, the 112-acre Bruchard Road Dust Suppression Project.
* In addition, the state team is finalizing a Dust Suppression Action Plan that prioritizes 8,200 acres of dust suppression projects on emissive lakebed at locations around the sea, including up to 3,800 acres identified for completion in 2020. The projects, to be constructed in phases in strategic locations along the perimeter of the sea, will target the most emissive sites to help control dust from exposed lakebed areas and limit Salton Sea-related impacts on air quality for communities such as Salton City, Bombay Beach and North Shore.
* In spring 2020, the state team will launch the public phase of the federally required environmental planning process for the SSMP. The process will complete permitting for the full 30,000 acres of projects identified in the SSMP’s Phase 1: 10-Year Plan. The first phase of this project will include several public scoping meetings.
* Construction is slated to begin in fall 2020 on the first major habitat project of the SSMP – the 3,770-acre Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) project at the southern end of the sea in the New River area. This project will suppress dust while creating a series of ponds with islands and areas of varying water depths to serve as fish and bird habitat. It is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2023.
* The state team also expects to begin developing a long-term plan for the sea in the first quarter of 2021.

**Engagement Purpose and Intended Outcome**

The state team seeks to work with local leaders, non-profit organizations and community members to build a long-term, respectful approach to engage with Salton Sea community members, listen to their ideas and concerns and incorporate local input into the state’s process and decisions where possible through a transparent engagement process.

The overarching intended outcome is to:

* Keep community members informed and actively engaged
* Establish clear expectations about the state’s process to plan and implement projects at the sea as well as clear and accessible pathways for communities to provide input
* Build consistency in the community engagement process, involving residents in project development and implementation to design projects that prioritize community benefits and help meet community needs while mitigating dust and creating habitat
* Create long-term community buy-in and stewardship for work at the Salton Sea

**Key Elements of Proposed Approach**

* Commit to meaningful and sustained community engagement effort
* Acknowledge deficiencies in state’s past community involvement and demonstrate long-term commitment to work together on issues important to the community
* Provide a roadmap for community engagement with clear feedback loops so community members can understand how their input is addressed
* Present information in clear and culturally appropriate formats, such as general FAQ brochures, Spanish language translations and graphics-rich materials, to ensure that residents have the context and tools they need to provide input
* Establish a consistent state presence at the sea and explore office / staff facilities that can meet both state and community needs
* Dedicate one or more state team members for outreach and engagement
* Utilize local venues or events for the community to engage with the state team at regularly scheduled intervals as capacity allows to demonstrate commitment to the engagement process. Meetings will be a times that are most accessible to community members
* Employ different and localized strategies tailored to the needs of different communities around the Salton Sea
* Prioritize opportunities to use local work force in project implementation
* Develop one or more pilot projects in partnership with community members that provide amenities to residents in the short term while larger projects are designed and potentially use participatory budgeting techniques
* Enlist the support of local non-governmental organizations to build community leadership by identifying and utilizing youth ambassadors to support community outreach and help advance community engagement opportunities
* Enlist the support of community groups to bring engagement opportunities to community members where they are (i.e., pop-up events, kiosks, etc.)
* Identify opportunities for community-identified projects to be incorporated into the SSMP.
* Create specific community advisory committees and engagement strategies for each major project during the concept stage
* Identify annual or per-project budget for community engagement
* Continue community engagement throughout design and construction of the SCH.

**Community Engagement Tracks**

The community engagement process is envisioned along three interrelated tracks, each with a main objective and specific tactics.

***Engagement Tracks***

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| **Track** | **Objective** | **Structure / Tactics** | **Role** |
| **Community Leadership**  **(Facilitated by state team with participation and support from local community groups and NGOs)** | Enlist leaders of local community groups and NGOs to help steer SSMP engagement efforts, reach community members through their communications channels, and increase community engagement in SSMP planning activities | * Use SSMP Engagement Committee as primary venue and develop updated charter for committee * Convene quarterly meetings in different communities around the sea to provide forum for updates * Engage leaders on topics / issues of concern * Identify needs for materials, collaterals, graphics, etc. * Develop and maintain schedule for community engagement meetings * Use newsletters, listservs and other channels maintained by groups to extend reach * Identify pilot project(s) * Enlist support of leaders to develop and implement youth ambassadors | * Ensure coordination and inclusion * Identify priority topics * Provide knowledge and insight into community needs * Help advise / shape broader community engagement effort * Develop strategies to address short-term and longer-term needs |
| **Local Experts Group**  **(Facilitated by local community groups and NGOs with logistical support from the state team)** | Provide expert local input, perspectives on solutions | * Experts on issues identified by community leaders (e.g., in areas of technical, socioeconomic, or public health) * Receive guidance from and report back to Engagement Committee * Provide forum for community members to get information and ask questions about priority topics | * Work with Engagement Committee on priority topics related to air quality, project design, workforce, recreation, etc. |
| **Ongoing Community Engagement**  **(Supported by state team as capacity allows and augmented by community groups and local NGOs through MOUs or other agreements)** | Familiarize community with SSMP and specific projects, and gather input on priorities, concerns and ideas to help shape specific projects to incorporate into the SSMP | * Takes place in a variety of locations and formats * Work with community groups * Create Community Advisory Groups for each major project * Establish feedback loop so residents can see how their input is being used * Develop mechanisms to provide regular updates to community members * Establish state presence / point of contact for community members * Consider and incorporate input from Engagement Committee and Local Experts Group when possible | * Community engagement on SSMP and specific projects to inform project design and implementation |

**Near-Term Next Steps in the Process**

1. Discuss revised draft SSMP Community Engagement Plan at Engagement Committee meeting on March 18 and gather additional input
2. Schedule quarterly meetings for Engagement Committee for remainder of 2020
3. Develop updated charter for Engagement Committee identifying roles and responsibilities
4. Continue to build out schedule for community engagement meetings
5. Develop strategy and MOUs or other agreements with community groups and NGOs to augment state team’s capacity to carry out community engagement
6. Identify pilot project(s) that can provide amenities to residents in the short term while larger projects are designed and potentially use participatory budgeting