

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC WORKSHOP**  
**SALTON SEA MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**  
**Draft Salton Sea Management Program Phase 1: 10-Year Plan Project**  
**Description**

Improving air quality and creating habitat at the Salton Sea are key priorities for Governor Gavin Newsom and the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA). The Sea's continuing decline in elevation and resulting exposure of lakebed negatively impact surrounding communities and reduce remaining habitat for fish and wildlife. The CNRA, the California Department of Water Resources, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (together, the SSMP Team) are focused on implementing dust suppression and habitat projects to improve conditions around the Sea.

This notice serves to inform all interested parties that the SSMP Team is holding public workshops and providing an opportunity to comment on projects that are being proposed as part of the Draft Salton Sea (Sea) Management Program Phase I: 10-Year Plan Project Description (SSMP Project) located in Riverside and Imperial Counties, California. The purpose of the proposed SSMP Project is to implement habitat restoration and dust suppression projects around the perimeter of the Salton Sea to reduce the effects of declining inflows to the Sea. Fish and wildlife habitat at the Salton Sea is being lost due to increasing salinity and the declining sea elevation. In addition, the exposed lakebed poses dust threats to regional air quality.

Implementation of the SSMP Project is subject to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), however prior to initiating the NEPA process, the SSMP team is circulating the draft SSMP Project Description for public review and comment. After the workshops, the SSMP Team will consider and address public comments, and develop a revised draft Project Description and a range of alternatives that will be analyzed in a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with NEPA.

There will be an additional opportunity to provide comments on the entire draft EA during the NEPA public review process, which will be initiated following a permit application submittal to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The USACE will be the federal lead agency under NEPA.

### **SSMP Project Overview**

The proposed SSMP Project is being developed to identify opportunity areas and proposed projects to respond to ecological and air quality threats to the Salton Sea and surrounding areas. Ecosystem threats are primarily from the loss of fish populations that support piscivorous (fish-eating) birds and potential loss of rare, threatened, and endangered species, including the desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*). Air quality threats are due to fine particulate matter that becomes airborne by wind moving over areas of exposed lakebed. The SSMP Project's goals are to:

- (1) Develop a range of aquatic habitats that will support fish and wildlife species dependent on the Salton Sea,

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- (2) Develop dust suppression projects to reduce threats to air quality, and
- (3) Develop and refine information needed to successfully manage the proposed SSMP Projects through an adaptive management process.

The proposed SSMP Project would implement 29,800 acres of habitat and dust suppression projects on areas of lakebed that have been, or will be, exposed at the Salton Sea by 2028. At least 50% of the 29,800 acres would be restored aquatic habitat projects that would convert exposed lakebed areas to aquatic habitat suitable for fish and wildlife. While all of the aquatic habitat projects would suppress dust, their primary function is to provide habitat for fish and wildlife. Dust suppression projects may also have habitat benefits by establishing vegetation or creating freshwater wetlands on exposed areas. To the extent practical, the proposed SSMP Project would strive to provide multiple benefit projects that combine dust suppression with habitat restoration.

Construction of aquatic habitat restoration projects would begin in areas of exposed lakebed near water sources and would move downslope as the Sea recedes, and as more lakebed becomes exposed over time. Construction of habitat and dust suppression projects in areas that will eventually become exposed lakebed, but are currently under water, would begin when portions of those areas are dry enough to allow equipment access.

Cumulatively, aquatic habitat projects would provide habitat for fish, including desert pupfish, a variety of bird species, and invertebrates. Restoration of aquatic habitat around the Sea would be designed to provide environmental conditions to support robust fish populations that, in turn, would provide forage for piscivorous birds. Some of the projects would also provide habitat and connectivity for desert pupfish. Aquatic habitat projects being proposed include the North Lake Demonstration Project, the North Lake Project, the New River Expansion, and the Alamo River Project.

The salinity in proposed aquatic habitat restoration projects may range from freshwater or brackish water, which are managed at salinity levels less than 20 parts per thousand (ppt), to saline pond habitats with a target salinity of 20 to 40 ppt that would support fish species not able to survive in an increasingly saline Sea. The development of these habitat types, ranging from mudflats and shallow water to deep-water habitat, as well as permanent vegetated wetlands, would also provide dust suppression in those areas.

Aquatic habitat ponds would have different water depths to provide fish refugia and accommodate shoreline habitat in the project location. Desert pupfish habitat would be designed into projects where connectivity and habitat benefits could be achieved.

Dust suppression projects are intended to reduce the emission of airborne particulates from exposed lakebed areas. Water-reliant dust suppression projects include vegetation establishment, shallow water habitat, shallow flooding, and stormwater spreading. Waterless dust suppression techniques depend on soil types and include the following: temporary surface roughening, soil stabilizer application, sand fencing, engineered roughening, gravel or other cover, and enhancing soil crusts. These techniques may require initial application of water, but generally are not dependent on periodic surface water application. The specific methods to be used will depend on characteristics such as soil properties, wind speeds, local topography, and water availability.

Water-reliant dust suppression projects would also provide habitat restoration benefits through creation of freshwater wetlands and vegetation establishment. Some of these projects would be dust

suppression and restoration projects because they would create wetlands and vegetated uplands that would provide habitat for birds and other species.

One pilot project is currently proposed, the Desert Shores Channel Restoration Project. The project proposes to provide habitat and emission reduction benefits by refilling channels located between residences on the Salton Sea shoreline in the disadvantaged community of Desert Shores.

Some public use activities would be available to the extent they are compatible with the purpose and need of the proposed SSMP Project, and with the management of the dust suppression areas and fish and wildlife habitat ponds. Public use may include activities such as picnicking, hiking, birdwatching, non-powered watercraft use, and hunting.

### **Virtual Public Workshops**

The SSMP Team will be conducting three virtual public workshops via Zoom accessible online and by phone, with instructions available on the SSMP website [www.salttonsea.ca.gov](http://www.salttonsea.ca.gov). Spanish translation will be available at all three workshops. The following are the dates and times for the upcoming workshops:

Tuesday, September 22, 2020 from 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.;

Wednesday, September 23, 2020 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.; and

Thursday, September 24, 2020 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

### **Written Comments**

Additionally, written public comments will be accepted on the SSMP Project through September 30, 2020 and can be submitted via email at [cnra-salttonsea@resources.ca.gov](mailto:cnra-salttonsea@resources.ca.gov).

The draft Project Description is available for public review and comment online at [www.salttonsea.ca.gov](http://www.salttonsea.ca.gov).

Should you have any questions or would like additional information about this project, please contact us via email at [cnra-salttonsea@resources.ca.gov](mailto:cnra-salttonsea@resources.ca.gov).