



CALIFORNIA
NATURAL
RESOURCES
AGENCY



State of California Salton Sea Management Program

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT PLAN



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Overview

The Salton Sea Management Program (SSMP) has developed this plan in collaboration with the Community Engagement Committee to outline the approach and roadmap for outreach and engagement with frontline communities around the Salton Sea and the broader Coachella and Imperial Valley region. Public input and participation are critical to ensuring that community values and perspectives are considered throughout and beyond the implementation of the SSMP.

This Community Outreach and Engagement Plan (The Plan) involves engaging the community effectively to not only inform and solicit meaningful input on SSMP projects but to foster a sense of stewardship in the restoration of the Salton Sea ecosystem. The Plan acknowledges the State's past deficiencies and recognizes the historical wrongs committed against tribes and the environmental injustices of the communities around the Sea. The SSMP is committed to early, often, and meaningful consultation with all California Native American tribes with ancestral ties to the Salton Sea and embraces the Engagement Committee's charge to incorporate Environmental Justice (EJ) principles into its outreach and engagement efforts. The result is a plan that demonstrates transparency, recognizes the demographics and unique challenges faced in the EJ community, and is sensitive to the language and geographic needs of the communities around the Sea.

The Plan also describes the current context and Sea conditions along with the engagement plan goals, objectives, strategies, tactics, metrics for measured success and effectiveness, and next steps. The Plan will be continually updated to ensure a proactive, inclusive, and transparent engagement process.

Current Context and Sea Conditions

The State of California is committed to addressing air quality and ecological threats at the Salton Sea. Flows into the Salton Sea have declined in recent years, and the result is a shrinking, increasingly saline lake. The Sea has been shrinking, partially due to water transfers out of Imperial Valley that reduce inflows to the Sea. Drought and changes to Colorado River water availability exacerbate this trend. Although it continues to provide a vital stop along the Pacific Flyway for migratory birds, the water has become increasingly saline. As the Sea shrinks, it exposes the lakebed that has the potential to release dust, contributing to worsening air quality in a region already struggling with poor air quality.

The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) is working with the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) 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 aquatic habitat projects on 29,800 acres of emissive exposed lakebed and areas expected to be exposed by 2028, as stipulated by the State Water Resources Control Board [Order WR 2017- 0134 \(Water Board Order\)](#).

Communities around the Sea have expressed interest in timely progress toward project delivery. Community members have also 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. 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.

Tribal Consultation

The SSMP is committed to early, often and meaningful consultation with all California Native American tribes with ancestral ties to the Salton Sea area with the goal of collaborative problem-solving on the many issues the region faces. The SSMP team will continue to consult with tribes and, when possible, seek to have in-person consultations with tribes. The SSMP will also continue to pursue new and existing avenues to include tribal governments and tribal expertise in the restoration of the Sea and protection of tribal access to natural resources, cultural resources, and tribal cultural resources at the Sea.

The SSMP works through state tribal liaisons at CNRA, CDFW and DWR to engage with tribes in the region. Additionally, a Deputy Secretary for Tribal Affairs has joined the Resources Agency in recent years to support and expand the participation and inclusion of tribal governments and communities, including the work undertaken by the SSMP.

There are approximately 25 tribes in the region who have expressed interest in the Salton Sea. Early, often, and meaningful tribal consultation is a core principle at the State. The SSMP invites tribal representatives to serve and participate in the various committees used to inform the Program on restoration and engagement at the Salton Sea.

Project Implementation

As part of the SSMP's [Phase 1: 10-Year Plan](#), multiple projects, including partner-led projects, are being implemented around the Salton Sea to meet its commitments to implement 29,800 acres of restoration projects at the Sea. Each of these projects is at different stages of progress and are currently moving forward towards meeting the set acreage goal.

To learn more about current status and progress on SSMP projects visit the [SSMP Project tracker](#) or view the [SSMP Annual Report](#).

Environmental Planning

The SSMP Team continues to work with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the federal cooperating agencies to complete the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan (CNRA, DWR, and CDFW, 2017). The resulting EA and permitting process will provide a framework for coordinating with all participating federal agencies and a streamlined approach for funding, land access, and permits to carry out the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan.

SSMP Long-Range Plan (LRP)

The SSMP prepared a SSMP [Long-Range Plan](#) in coordination with the Long-Range Plan committee to comply with the Water Board Order. The LRP was developed with support and input from tribal leadership, community-based organizations, local, state, and federal agencies, and other interested parties. The LRP identifies concepts for long-term restoration of the Sea as a second phase to the SSMP's Phase 1: 10-Year Plan.

The Salton Sea Long-Range Plan (LRP) was finalized in March 2024 and is now being utilized as the baseline for the Imperial Streams and Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study (Feasibility Study) being led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in partnership with the State and the Salton Sea Authority (SSA). This final plan, as well as the comments submitted on the Draft LRP, will be considered by the USACE as part of their Feasibility Study. The planning process for civil works projects used by USACE includes the following steps: identifying problems and opportunities; inventorying and forecasting conditions; formulating alternative plans; evaluating alternative plans; comparing alternative plans; and finally recommending a plan for adoption.

Community Needs Report

Developed with support from multiple partners including tribal leaders, CBOs, local agencies, community members, and others, the SSMP has presented the [SSMP and Community Needs Report](#). The Report, after a 2-year development, identifies and recognizes eight principal types of community needs related to the Salton Sea and its shoreline communities:

1. Community engagement, capacity building, and coordination
2. Early, often, and meaningful tribal consultation
3. Equitable outdoor access and recreation at the Sea
4. Public health
5. Inclusive and sustainable workforce development
6. Expanded transportation access
7. Climate action
8. Broadband access for all communities

The Report summarizes a description of each of the needs identified and outlines the current status of the SSMP's activities related to the eight needs, and also describes the opportunities the SSMP has to prioritize and incorporate these needs into future projects and processes.

Accompanying the release of the SSMP report was the [Salton Sea Community Needs and Recommended Actions Report](#) by Better World Group Advisors. This commissioned document reflects the broader feedback of community members and Tribes in public comment letters, interviews, and work group sessions as a part of CNRA and Better World Group's public engagement effort. This report identified community needs and recommended actions that extend beyond the scope of the SSMP and can be taken by federal, state, and local government agencies, business organizations, philanthropic groups, community-based groups, and nonprofit organizations.

Outreach and Engagement Plan (Plan)

Plan Goal

The SSMP team seeks to work with local leaders, community members, and other interested parties to build and nurture a long-term and respectful approach to engage with Salton Sea communities. The SSMP is receptive to ideas and concerns from community members and is committed to incorporating local input where possible, being transparent when this is not the case, and engaging in effective dialogue to address potential concerns. The SSMP aims to achieve this through a meaningful and sustained community outreach and engagement effort.

Objectives in Meeting the Plan Goal

The following objectives support this Outreach and Engagement Plan goal:

- **Raise Public Awareness:** Increase general awareness across communities in the Salton Sea region and keep community members informed about the challenges facing the Sea and efforts being taken by the SSMP to protect human health and restore the ecosystem. Measure outreach outcomes to quantify the effectiveness of SSMP outreach efforts.
- **Transparency & Information Dissemination:** Promote transparency through timely and easy-to-understand information with regular SSMP communications and community meetings to keep communities informed and to minimize misinformation.
- **Encourage Civic Involvement:** Collaborate and partner up with community and local interested parties for the planning and implementation of SSMP projects. Community members are invited and encouraged to engage and participate during opportunities for public participation. Increasing community involvement will create stronger relationships with Salton Sea Communities.
- **Gain Community Support:** Create long-term community buy-in and stewardship for the SSMP's revitalization efforts of the Salton Sea. Build trust and credibility for the work led by the SSMP.
- **Emphasize Environmental Justice:** Integrate Environmental Justice considerations into the development, adoption, and implementation of the SSMP outreach and engagement efforts. Adhere to the EJ principals outlined in the Community [Engagement Committee charter](#) to prioritize and proactively communicate early and often with tribal and frontline communities.

- **Be Equitable & Inclusive:** Ensure SSMP materials and meetings are accessible and provide equal opportunities for community engagement that allows for meaningful public participation and input.

Target Audiences

Primary Audience

The primary audience for this Plan is the community members of Imperial County and the Eastern Coachella Valley in Riverside County, including frontline communities of the Salton Sea Region and unincorporated areas. This community includes tribal and environmental justice communities.

Below are some demographic and socioeconomic information about the primary audience:

- Ethnicities: Predominantly Latino (52% in Riverside County; 86% in Imperial County) followed by white (31% in Riverside County; 9% in Imperial County)
- Languages: Predominantly Bilingual (English and Spanish), Purépecha
 - Limited English-speaking households
- Unemployment: High unemployment, particularly in Imperial County (19.6% as of October 2024) compared to the state average (5.4%).

Additional information and characteristics:

- Housing instability and affordability challenges
- Desert rural region
- Border region
- Broadband connectivity challenges
- Reached traditionally (Spanish radio, newspapers, flyers, etc.)
- Exposed to multiple sources of pollution, poor air quality and health hazards

Additionally, the Salton Sea Management Program Commissioned a report (“Community Needs and Recommended Actions Report”) which expands on issues relevant to the primary audience.

Secondary Audience

The secondary target audience is comprised of different regional, state, and federal agencies, elected officials, and other interested parties. The SSMP is committed to ensuring that there is clear messaging and accurate information being shared with the pertinent agencies and key staff to keep them and their stakeholders informed as well as to enhance collaboration on project planning and delivery.

The list of identified sectors, agencies, and organizations include:

- Neighboring communities in the Coachella and Imperial Valleys
- County Supervisors (Imperial and Riverside)

- Regional City Officials
- Water Districts (Imperial Irrigation District, Coachella Valley Water District, San Diego Water Authority) (Staff, Managers, Board)
- Salton Sea Authority (Staff, Managers, Board)
- Other interested parties, groups, and key local leaders including, but not limited to, the following groups:
 - Environmental Justice groups
 - Community-based organizations
 - Non-governmental organizations
 - Economic development organizations and affiliated interests
 - Recreational and tourism interests
 - Energy industry interests
 - Other industries, such as agriculture, construction, retail, food services, and healthcare, education, academia and researchers
- Local, State, and Federal agencies with oversight, regulatory or permitting responsibilities
- Regional State legislators and legislators on key committees, as well as their staff
- Regional US House of Representatives members, US Senators and members of relevant legislative committees, as well as their staff and key committee members

Strategies for Effective Engagement

The strategies below are intended to provide the SSMP team with a focused set of guidelines that will help achieve the Goal and Objectives stated above. These strategies will drive the tactical components of the Plan that will inform the public of this process and help to build broad acceptance of the Plan. These strategies have been recommended to the SSMP over the years by the Community Engagement Committee, community-based organizations, and the public.

The public information and outreach effort strategies are as follows:

- Ensure that information provided by the SSMP is effective in reaching impacted communities in a way that resonates with them. Provide translated materials and interpretation at meetings, incorporate plain language, and utilize visually engaging graphics and formats that are appealing to the reader.
- Develop a suite of informational materials that contain comprehensive and digestible information about the Salton Sea, its challenges, and actions taken by the SSMP including planning efforts and projects.
- Establish a consistent state presence at the Sea and where possible provide office / staff facilities that can meet both state and community needs. Utilize community

liaisons to maintain ongoing relationships to ensure effective communication throughout the engagement process.

- Continue to dedicate staff time for outreach and engagement in activities such as: presentations, project tours, participate at tabling events, and connect with diverse community groups and residents.
- Develop a specific outreach and promotion plan for each SSMP outreach and engagement effort or meeting. Depending on the type of meeting, targeted communities, the time of the year, topics to be covered, and other circumstances, an outreach and promotion plan might be different from one to the other. Tailor each plan to best fit the needs of the serving community and effectively deliver the information. Identify materials needed such as meeting flyers, presentations, poster boards, agenda, press release, and other promotional materials that need to be developed.
- Design agendas that identify and provide clarity on the goals and objectives of each community meeting to purposefully engage the public. Regularly provide an overview of the SSMP and allow time for public comment and Q&A at all community meetings.
- Incorporate multiple methods or opportunities to provide comments and feedback, when possible. Methods and tools that could be utilized during meetings could include, comment cards, online Q&A or chat functions, verbal comments, breakout groups, or online and in person polling.
- Make use of existing tools and platforms to help promote meetings, such as: SSMP Update e-Newsletter, SSMP Website, and the SSMP Community Engagement Committee.
- Schedule meetings at times that are most accessible to community members.
- Provide a minimum of two weeks' notice, when possible, for any public meeting. Using the outreach and promotion plan that is consistent with SSMP noticing methodology.
- 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.
- Notify the nearby communities about any project coming to the area and explain what is expected. Notifications can be made by using flyers, community presentations, presenting at existing meetings (e.g. City Council meetings), notify identified community leaders.
- Solicit and incorporate input from community and engagement committee members into community presentations.
- Partner with local nonprofits, environmental groups, and community-based organizations (CBO's) to amplify outreach efforts and collaborate with the SSMP Community Engagement Committee.

- Develop surveys and feedback forms to gather opinions, suggestions, and concerns from the public regarding Salton Sea restoration efforts.
- Encourage audience participation through polls, quizzes, and open-ended questions.
- Make publicly available an appendix or summary with the comments collected during community meetings.
- Develop clear feedback loops throughout the engagement process so community members can understand how their input is ultimately incorporated within the project design and implementation, as well as for the development of plans and reports.

SSMP Engagement Platforms & Opportunities

Engagement Committee Meetings

Working meetings are facilitated by committee co-chairs with participation and support from the SSMP team and its committee members.

Purpose:

An advisory committee to the State of California’s SSMP. The Committee will advise and assist the State in engaging local communities and other interested parties to inform and solicit meaningful input regarding health, air quality, environmental, and social aspects of SSMP projects.

Comprised of representatives from tribal, State and local agencies, environmental groups, non-profits, academia, and community leaders to help steer SSMP engagement efforts, reach community members through their communications channels, and increase community engagement in SSMP planning activities. The committee ensures coordination and inclusion of priority topics for discussion during public meetings.

Structure and Tactics:

- SSMP Engagement Committee serves as a hub and primary venue to plan engagement activities.
- Convene quarterly online meetings or in-person, as needed.
- Identify needs for materials, collaterals, graphics, etc., and ensure they are disseminated in advance of engagement opportunities.
- Convene working group meetings for committee members to collaborate closely with the State in the planning and execution of engagement activities.
- Follow the [Engagement Committee Charter](#).

SSMP Community Meetings and Workshops

Informational community meetings to disseminate SSMP information and gather meaningful input. Led by SSMP team with support from outreach partners and contractors.

Purpose:

Provide regular updates and provide opportunities for community members to engage in SSMP projects and processes. Organize workshops and regular community meetings in communities near the Salton Sea to inform residents about the environmental, ecological, and social significance of the Sea and discuss current and future SSMP projects, gather input, and address concerns.

Structure and Tactics:

- Hold regular quarterly meetings, or as needed, in various locations around the Salton Sea region at community-oriented venues. This approach ensures consistent engagement with the community while accommodating additional informational meetings led by other organizations or entities. Host meetings in different communities around the Sea to provide forum for updates, collaborative planning in the different communities around the Salton Sea
- Develop meeting formats in coordination with Outreach Working Group and SSMP Engagement Committee. Incorporate partner feedback and recommendations to conduct productive community meetings.
- Develop outreach and promotion materials to invite and encourage community participation.
- Host workshops that integrate creative activities such as storytelling, art-making, dot mapping, live polling, and other activities that can help to better engage with participants to assure a productive meeting and that their time is invaluable and appreciated.
- Establish feedback loops so residents can see how their input is being used.
- Develop mechanisms to provide regular updates and follow up to community members.
- Establish state presence / point of contact for community members.

Presentations and Community Events

Presentations, updates, and informational booths at non-SSMP organized meetings or events.

Purpose:

Extend the reach of the SSMP program by going to established venues and events to share information, provide updates, answer questions, solicit specific input, and encourage community members to engage in the program.

Structure and Tactics:

- Identify the opportunities (meetings and events) that reach our primary and secondary audiences and what resources are required to participate (cost, staff time, etc.).
- Develop engaging presentations and informational material.
- Evaluate effectiveness of the opportunity and if successful consider maintaining regular participation.
- Collaborate with partner agencies and others to share information and resources.

Annual Salton Sea Workshop by State Water Resources Control Board

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) holds a public workshop each year at one of their regularly scheduled Board Meetings to receive annual updates on the SSMP and to solicit public input.

Purpose:

This workshop is for informational purposes and the State Water Board does not take formal action at the workshop. The workshop is a valuable opportunity for the SSMP to present its annual report and progress made at the Sea in the previous year.

Structure and Tactics:

- Preparation of a comprehensive annual report on the status of SSMP.
- After the release of the report, the SSMP holds a community meeting to provide an in-depth overview of the annual report and to help answer questions and prepare the public for the State Water Board workshop.
- The State Water Board workshop typically consists of presentations led by the SSMP and presentations from partnering agencies.
- The SSMP team collaborates closely with the State Water Board staff to cross promote the meeting.
- Bilingual presentations and Spanish interpretation is provided.

Media Relations

Maintain communications with local media on updates at the Sea through press releases, interviews, and editorial board meetings.

Purpose:

To proactively communicate the State's key messages, ensure that the SSMP stays relevant, and to make sure that media outlets have current project information. The SSMP also wishes to establish relationships with local media to help respond to inquiries and developing stories.

Structure and Tactics:

- Maintain positive relationships with the news media by providing easy access to public information and honoring deadlines.
- Regularly update the press list to include local media outlets and reporters that have recently covered the Salton Sea.
- Issue news releases in English and Spanish for SSMP updates and workshops/events to raise public awareness about engagement opportunities.
- Provide project photos and graphics to media with short captions describing what is depicted.
- Conduct interviews, media briefings. Offer to brief reporters, in addition to providing written information and tours.
- Plan news conferences, photo opportunities and media availabilities to encourage coverage of SSMP updates, projects, and events.
- Ensure that SSMP staff and consultants are aware of media protocols and are well coordinated and aware on how to handle media inquiries.

SSMP Update e-Newsletter and SSMP Website

The [SSMP e-Newsletter](#) serves as an immediate online tool to help promote and communicate clear messages via email for local communities and other stakeholders interested in knowing more about the Salton Sea and the SSMP.

Purpose:

This strategy helps the SSMP connect via email with interested parties, including community members, to promote the Program's progress, success, and opportunities for public participation. The constant and regular use of this strategy will help keep the Program stay active and consistent to the reader's perspective.

The SSMP website (www.saltontsea.ca.gov) is an online tool that provides all the information related to the SSMP. The website also includes a project tracker with updated project information and relevant documentation about the efforts towards the ecological restoration of the Salton Sea. The website offers a general description of the Program, projects, calendar of events and activities, career opportunities, and contact information. The website is also intended to contribute to the credibility and trust for the ongoing implementation of projects at the Salton Sea.

Structure and Tactics:

- Provide a monthly edition of the SSMP e-Newsletter

- Incorporate project updates, engagement opportunities, educational information, historical information, career opportunities, provide a good understanding of SSMP charge and ongoing work.
- Keep a well-designed and up-to-date website that is accessible with appropriate navigation.
- Analyze visitor data to inform future website improvements.

SSMP Project Tracker

In March 2024, the SSMP team developed an online Project Tracker to provide a comprehensive platform for the public to get updated information on SSMP Projects in a single location. Integrated into the site at www.saltonseas.ca.gov, this tool tracks current progress on SSMP 10-Year Plan projects. Projects are viewable and sortable by project phases, activity type, and category.

Purpose:

An online platform to provide succinct, accurate, updated information on SSMP Projects. The SSMP Project tracker provides consolidated information about SSMP projects in a single location with options to download information, fact sheets, and pictures.

Structure and tactics:

- The Explore Projects and Project Info sections display information on the activities, outcomes, and different SSMP metrics important to the Salton Sea Region.
- The Results Section has a Progress Dashboard that provides a snapshot of the accomplishments and advancements being made to improve conditions at the Salton Sea and displays information on the current progress towards meeting the requirements in Water Board Order.
- The Project Tracker will be updated throughout the year with project photos, status, and important information.
- Acreage totals will be updated twice a year. We are expecting to have an update at the beginning of the year and again in July to align with annual acreage reporting.

Meeting Recordings and Educational Videos

Zoom meetings, webinars, project videos, PSA's and others to inform and educate the public.

Purpose:

Recordings provide a record of informational sessions and community feedback that enable the public an additional opportunity to access and engage in the SSMP.

Educational videos and PSA's can be an effective medium to disseminate information and sometimes complex concepts in a memorable and comprehensive way.

Structure and Tactic:

- Post all meeting recordings on the SSMP website and CNRA YouTube channel.
- Create educational videos that expand on project details and showcase current projects and planning efforts. This could include a combination of short and long videos geared towards different mediums such as webinars, online, social media, traditional broadcast (PSA's), and streaming.

Proposed Metrics for Measured Success and Effectiveness

Outcome Measures

The best way to measure the effectiveness of SSMP communication and engagement efforts is by measuring the overall success of the program's top priorities.

- Are people engaging in opportunities to share feedback?
- Are people able to access, comprehend, and utilize the communication materials/content provided?
- Are engagement opportunities and events meeting their participation goals?

Output Measures

In addition to monitoring outcomes, additional measures can be used to track communication outputs to help identify what are the most effective channels of communication. These include:

- Number and frequency of public events, public meeting attendance and comments received. Track frequent and new participants.
- Diversity of participants – analyzing the perspectives represented during public participation, considering perspectives that may not be represented, and developing strategies to reach these audiences and encourage their participation.
- Follow up actions and resolutions: monitoring how effectively community feedback is addressed, incorporated or resolved in planning or project implementation.
- Forging new partnerships and collaborations
- Frequently check in with participants and partners to establish feedback loops on what is and is not working.
- Survey results and responses – collect, analyze, and be responsive to qualitative data on community perceptions
- Participation on partner led activities such as events, social media, blogs, etc.
- Media/News coverage
- Website analytics

- Increase subscribers to the SSMP e-Newsletter (1,880 subscribers, November 2024)

Next Steps

- 1) Continue to develop annual projected schedules outlining Engagement Committee meetings, public community meeting dates, and outreach period. Schedule can be incorporated into SSMP Annual Report and SSMP website.
- 2) Increase staff capacity to fulfill engagement functions identified in this plan along with other potential opportunities to increase engagement such as the addition of SSMP social media channels and use other tools such as text messaging.
- 3) SSMP will seek collaboration with communities through different project phases. Such as planning, design, and implementation. Seeking feedback and input from community residents to shape aspects of the project.
- 4) Create specific community advisory committees and project specific outreach plans for each major project during the concept stage and through its implementation.
- 5) Identify annual or per-project budget for community engagement.
- 6) Identify additional community leaders and interest groups that help connect with hard-to-reach communities.
- 7) Co-host events, share resources, and leverage existing networks to reach a broader audience.
- 8) Enlist the support of local non-governmental organizations and community groups to build community leadership by identifying and utilizing youth ambassadors to support community outreach and help advance community engagement opportunities and bring engagement opportunities to community members where they are (i.e., pop-up events, kiosks, etc.).
- 9) Seek engagement with broad media to help promote projects and progress made at the Sea.
- 10) The Outreach and Engagement Plan will be updated frequently or as needed, to continue to expand and adapt as progress is achieved through the SSMP to restore the Salton Sea.