



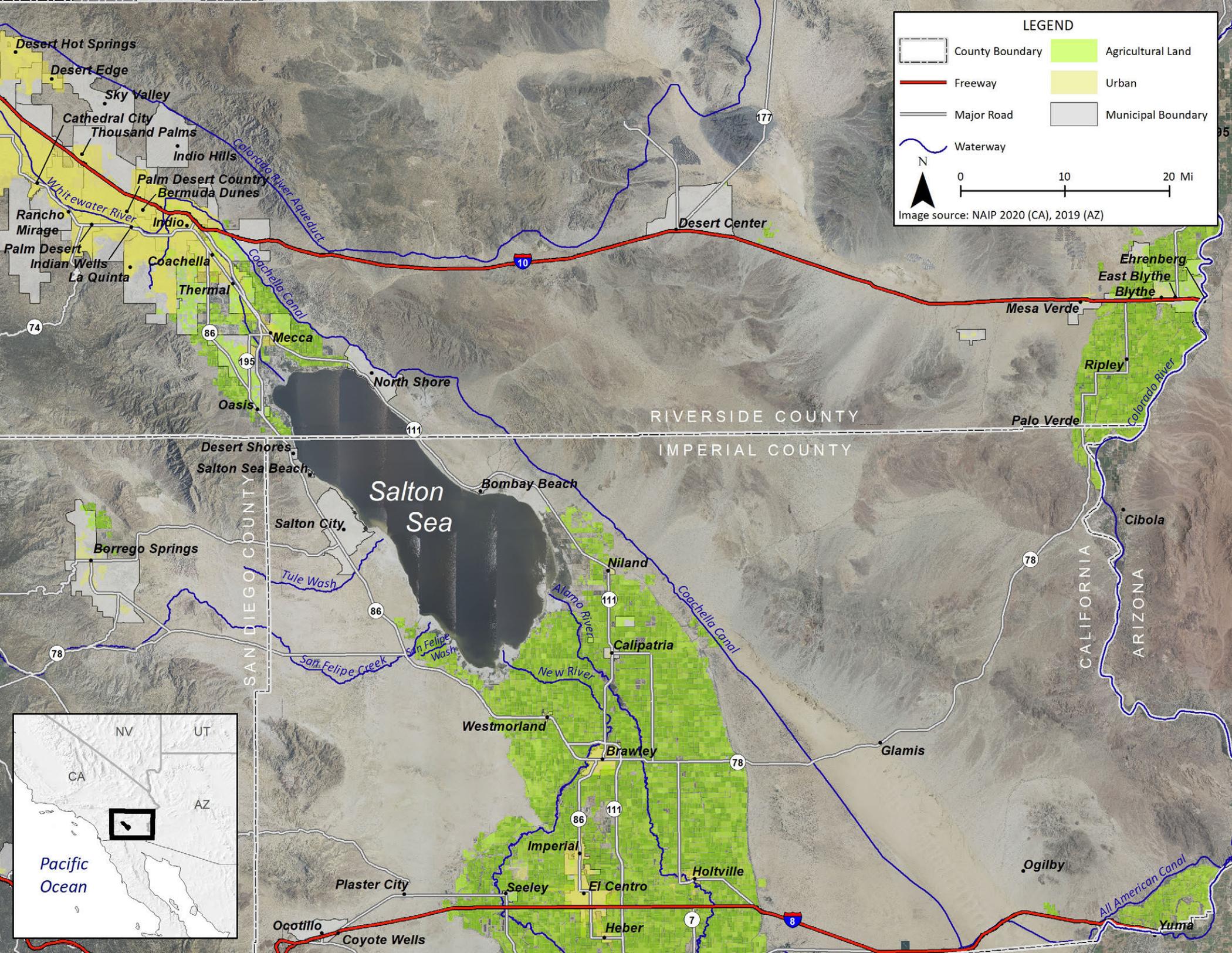
CALIFORNIA  
NATURAL  
RESOURCES  
AGENCY

# CALIFORNIA NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY

## Annual Report on the Salton Sea Program



March 2026



### LEGEND

	County Boundary		Agricultural Land
	Freeway		Urban
	Major Road		Municipal Boundary
	Waterway		

0 10 20 Mi

Image source: NAIP 2020 (CA), 2019 (AZ)





# CALIFORNIA NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY

## Annual Report on the Salton Sea Program

March 2026

*Prepared for:*



State Water Resources Control Board  
1001 I Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Prepared in compliance with Order WR 2017-0134

*Cover photo:*

A rare winter visitor, a juvenile Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*) observed at the Species Conservation Habitat Project. (Photo credit: Crystal Shore, CDFW)

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## Executive Summary

**2025 was a watershed year—literally and figuratively—for the State of California’s Salton Sea Program. After decades of research, dozens of project concepts, and hundreds of millions of dollars, the State began filling its first major habitat restoration project at the southwest end of the Salton Sea (Sea) with water this past March. This project—the Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) Project—is still in active construction and will cover approximately 9,500 acres at full buildout.**



Since filling the 3-square-mile “mega-ponds” with water at the SCH Project, thousands of birds spanning dozens of species have been observed nesting and foraging onsite—including American White Pelicans, Neotropic Cormorants, Gull-billed Terns, Brown Pelicans, Northern Shovelers, and Black-necked Stilts. Several species have nested, hatched, and raised chicks successfully. In addition to birds, fish have also been spotted at the SCH, including gizzard shad, tilapia, and the endangered desert pupfish. The thriving wildlife observed in just several months at the SCH is proof-positive that efforts to bring wildlife, plants, and cleaner water back to the Salton Sea on a massive scale are possible.

Celebrating this first phase of the SCH bringing wildlife back to the Sea is also prompting reflection from our team on the work it took to make this project a reality: dozens of staff worked for years on thousands of pages of analytical, permitting, and contracting documents. Over 75 construction workers—and counting—are working to move 8 million washing-machine-sized piles of dirt to create the complete network of mega ponds at the SCH that will span 15 square miles upon completion of the project. The SCH’s project cost of nearly half a billion dollars was made possible by the Newsom Administration’s unwavering commitment to funding the project at the State level and a partnership with the U.S. Bureau

of Reclamation (Reclamation) and Imperial Irrigation District (IID) to enable federal funding that expanded the project to its current footprint. This project would have never happened without the support and tireless efforts from elected representatives and staff at IID and Imperial County, who worked to secure agreements and provide on-the-ground information critical for successful project delivery. Additionally, the SCH could not have happened without community members across the Salton Sea who gave input throughout the project’s development, which was absolutely essential for ensuring the project was designed to maximize benefits to both people and wildlife.

As we look ahead to expanding our projects to the north, east, and west Salton Sea, our charge is clear: we need to do more, faster. The following significant actions from 2025 will bring us closer to that goal:

- The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA)’s proposal to fund the **Salton Sea Conservancy was approved** by the California State Legislature and signed by Governor Newsom in September 2025. The Conservancy’s focus on operating and maintaining completed State projects at the Salton Sea will enable our Salton Sea Program Team to continue building new projects that bring plants, water, and wildlife back to the Sea—as well as ensure that these projects provide habitat, dust suppression, and community benefits long into the future.

- The Legislature and Governor also **approved the Salton Sea Program’s Climate Bond funding proposal**, which will advance the North Lake Wetlands Project in the northern Salton Sea, the Bombay Beach Wetlands Enhancement Project along the eastern shoreline of the Sea, and the Kane Spring Project in the southern Salton Sea. These funds were made available to the Salton Sea Program in February 2026, and the program is currently working to bring contractors on board for each of these projects.
- In addition to the project funding secured above, **Governor Newsom also proposed \$30 million in his January 2026 budget proposal focused on advancing public access across these priority projects**—a priority consistently voiced from community members, including in the Salton Sea Program’s Community Needs Report. The Salton Sea Program team stands ready to work with partner organizations and community members to implement this funding if it is approved by the Legislature so that Salton Sea communities can see firsthand the positive changes happening at the Sea.
- After a series of discussions in 2025 between the Salton Sea Program and Salton Sea Authority (SSA) on how to best leverage our collective bandwidth, expertise, resources, and desire to implement a large-scale habitat restoration project in the North Salton Sea, we reached **an agreement in principle**

**with the SSA to build an expanded North Lake Wetlands Project that includes the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project area.** This expanded project will include a component implemented in the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project area in partnership with Salton Sea Authority that leverages the work advanced by SSA to-date. The Salton Sea Program and SSA continue to finalize details, terms, and next steps for this agreement, with a focus on securing a contractor to build the expanded project by the end of 2026.

- The Salton Sea Program was successful in **securing over \$5 million grant from California’s Wildlife Conservation Board** for its Bombay Beach Wetlands Project in the east Salton Sea. This grant will support this jointly led project by the State and Audubon California to stabilize and enhance 577 acres of wetlands and create new public recreational opportunities across the project area.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) continued its work in 2025 to advance the **Imperial Streams and Salton Sea Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study (Feasibility Study)**. In 2025, the final set of long-range restoration alternatives was selected for further analysis, and significant progress was made in developing models needed to evaluate the performance and benefits of the restoration project alternatives. In 2026, the final set of restoration projects

will be evaluated based on effectiveness, completeness, cost efficiency, acceptability, time to achieve restoration benefits, permitting requirements, and operation and maintenance requirements.

- **Progress on vegetation enhancement projects** at the Clubhouse, Tule Wash, and West Bombay Beach sites continued. At the Tule Wash site, bales and planting have been developed at over 917 acres, and bales and stormwater spreading features have been implemented on an additional 310 acres in 2025. At the West Bombay Beach site, irrigation was installed and connected to a water supply. Key efforts in 2025 that are not reflected in the acreage chart include completion of design, land access, permitting, and initial construction in expansion project areas adjacent to the Salton Sea Program's existing Clubhouse and Tule Wash projects, setting the stage for hundreds of project acres to be completed in 2026, and thousands of additional acres to begin pre-development work in additional expansion areas near these projects.
- **Key land access milestones were achieved in 2025.** Reclamation signed their National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision document, which allows for the programmatic land access agreement to be finalized and used for future projects on Reclamation land, while IID and the Salton Sea Program team recorded an amendment to the SCH easement to include

**Great Blue Herons, Cattle Egrets and Neotropic Cormorants at the Salton Sea.**



the full expansion of the SCH Project and an additional easement for the Bombay Beach Wetlands Project. The Salton Sea Program Team also entered into additional access permits with IID to facilitate projects funded by the Climate Bond described above – including eight encroachment permits – and continues to work with other partners like Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Tribe on additional land access needs.

**Partnerships** played a critical role in advancing the program's progress on land access, water availability, and public engagement in 2025.

Salton Sea Program staff continued to work closely with community organizations and tribal governments, as well as local, state, and federal agencies. Program staff will continue working with partners to coordinate resources, develop projects, share data, improve community engagement, and streamline planning and approval processes.

In 2025, the Salton Sea Program forged a new partnership with the Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement (MESA) Program at Imperial Valley College (IVC) focused on enhancing regional workforce development by integrating hands-on learning with intentional career exploration on Salton Sea projects.

Families and community members gathered for a tour of the Species Conservation Habitat Project in celebration of Latino Heritage Month.



This collaboration is anticipated to expand in upcoming years with additional learning activities, mentorship opportunities, and potential internship or field-work pathways aligned with Salton Sea Program project delivery objectives and regional employment needs.

**Community engagement and transparency**

continued to play a central role in 2025. Since 2021, the Salton Sea Program has hosted over 120 tours—an average of one tour every two weeks for the past five years. In 2025, the State hosted a number of tours to promote, for the first time, the filled mega ponds at SCH with partners who were indispensable in bringing this project

to fruition, including an event with State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) members, IID, and Reclamation to initiate flooding of the mega ponds with water.

In addition to hosting community workshops in the north and south Salton Sea during the first half of 2025 to discuss the Program’s 2024 Annual Report, the Salton Sea Program also hosted three community workshops in late 2025 in Bombay Beach, Coachella, and Brawley to discuss project-specific developments in each region over the course of 2025. Additionally, the workshops in Brawley and Coachella were hosted in partnership with USACE to facilitate presentations

on USACE’s Feasibility Study and engage with community members on next steps. Additional community engagement in partnership with USACE will continue in 2026.

The Salton Sea Program’s Community Engagement Committee serves as the primary organizing entity for planning engagement activities and identifying the best outreach and involvement strategies for Salton Sea Program events. The Community Engagement Committee consists of representatives from Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), local leaders, tribal governments, and local, state, and federal agencies.

## Next Steps

With the continued collaboration and implementation from the partnerships and funding detailed above, the Salton Sea Program's 15,000 acres of habitat projects is firmly within reach, and dust suppression projects will be broadly expanded to track the most recently exposed areas of the Sea that could become emissive. Specifically, major project next steps in 2026 are as follows:

- **Construction on the SCH expansion ponds will continue.** Construction is expected to conclude in 2028 to expand the SCH footprint and bring an additional 7,500 acres online to the existing 2,000 acres, for a total of 9,500 acres of habitat projects.
- **The Bombay Beach Wetlands project will complete the design that includes recreational features,** and the Salton Sea Program team will continue to work with Audubon to advance the project and secure a contractor to begin construction.
- **With Climate Bond funding made available to the Salton Sea Program in 2026, the Kane Spring Project will be advanced via a Progressive Design Build (PDB) contractor to initiate design and construction.** The project envisions a multi-benefit habitat for shorebirds and pupfish on approximately 3,200 acres. The full project scope will be developed in 2026 in collaboration with IID and Reclamation, along with survey work and development of

procurement documents. The selection of a contractor is expected to take place in the third quarter of 2026.

- **The Salton Sea Program team will work with the SSA to advance the expanded North Lake Wetlands Project, inclusive of the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project area, to release a Request for Qualifications to prospective contractors.** The project is designed to protect and increase wetland habitat for fish and birds including habitat for protected species like the Yuma Ridgway's Rail, California Black Rail, and desert pupfish. The project will also suppress dust by stabilizing emergent wetlands and encouraging growth of plants across nearly 2,000 acres.
- **Construction and planting are expected to be completed for all existing vegetation enhancement sites on Reclamation land (Clubhouse, Tule Wash, and Bombay Beach).** Additionally, work is ongoing on IID land adjacent to the existing Tule Wash vegetation enhancement project site and is planned to be completed in 2026. The Salton Sea Program Team will take advantage of newly built access roads to these sites and the new groundwater wells for irrigation. Remaining parcels not already on well water will be transitioned at Clubhouse and Tule Wash.
- **The Desert Shores Channel Restoration Project, led by the Salton Sea Authority**

**and Imperial County, will continue through its design phase.** The geotechnical and groundwater information that was gathered in 2025 will be used to inform project design. Key next steps for this project include developing the land access strategy.

- **In 2026, the Salton Sea Program Team will use the recently completed federal permit streamlining actions (Environmental Assessment [EA] for the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan) to expedite projects planned for construction.**

The Salton Sea Program Team encourages the public to get involved in our planning and project implementation efforts, including by:

- Attending workshops and committee meetings—most meetings are open to the public and are accessible virtually. Updates on future meetings are provided through newsletters, flyers, and announcements via both traditional and social media.
- Communicating via email—we can be reached by email at [cnra-saltonsea@resources.ca.gov](mailto:cnra-saltonsea@resources.ca.gov).
- Receiving website updates and newsletters—information on current and future updates is provided on the Salton Sea Program website: <https://saltonsea.ca.gov/>. Interested individuals may also [sign up](#) to receive regular email updates about the Salton Sea Program.



# 1 Introduction and Purpose

The future of the Salton Sea (Sea) remains a priority for the Newsom Administration (Administration), with a continued focus on building projects that benefit local communities and wildlife. Given the ongoing drought in the Colorado River Basin, developing a pathway for future projects at the Salton Sea during this decade and beyond remains a critical issue. This work is driven by the Salton Sea Program (SSP) led by the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) in collaboration with the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). Together these agencies are known as the SSP Team. The SSP Team worked closely with local, state, tribal, and federal partners to advance projects in 2025. The relationships that have been developed and the project experience gained thus far will help accelerate project delivery in 2026 and beyond.



The SSP Team is focused on the following five goals:

1. Implement projects identified in the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan (CNRA, DWR, and CDFW, 2017), and the National Environmental Policy Act Environmental Assessment (NEPA EA) that suppress dust from exposed lakebed for local communities and create habitat for fish and birds;
2. Work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Salton Sea Authority (SSA) to develop and complete the *Imperial Streams and Salton Sea Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study* (hereafter, Feasibility Study) to identify actions for long-term restoration of the Sea;
3. Continue to strengthen partnerships with the federal government, local governments and non-profits, tribal governments, and

## Report Goals

This report highlights project planning and implementation activities during 2025 to meet the requirements of State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134. The primary focus is on work completed in 2025 and specific plans for projects from 2026 to 2028, the growing capacity of the Salton Sea Program Team to meet future goals, and ongoing engagement with regional partners and local communities. This report also includes an update on the funding status of the program.

communities to deliver projects and institutionalize community engagement within and across SSP projects;

4. Continue to add capacity and expertise to the SSP Team to enable the State of California (State) to deliver projects on an expanded scale; and
5. Staff the newly approved Salton Sea Conservancy Board. Begin hiring and

developing the Conservancy’s team to transition Operations and Maintenance (O&M).

### 1.1 Updates for State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134

**Table 1** provides an overview of the reporting requirements defined in the State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134 (Order). This 2026 Annual Report on the SSP

goes beyond the requirements in the Order and provides an update on the extensive range of management, planning, permitting, and construction activities intended to support the delivery of future SSP milestones. The Order also requires an update on environmental conditions at the Sea. This information is summarized in Appendix A of the report.

**Table 1. Activities Identified in State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134**

Item	Reporting Requirement	SSP Activity
(i)	Completed projects and milestones achieved in the prior year.	<p>The following are key accomplishments in 2025:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) Project expanded from an approximately 4,850-acre project in 2024 with the 750-acre East Pond 1 Expansion to an approximately 9,500-acre project in 2025. The ponds east of the New River were filled and operating in 2025, providing over 2,000 acres of dust suppression and pond habitat.</li> <li>• At Clubhouse, project design, initial biological surveys, and aquatic resource delineation (ARD) reconnaissance was completed on 200 acres of Imperial Irrigation District (IID)-owned parcels. Irrigation at Clubhouse A and B was transitioned to well water after the construction of new SSP wells.</li> <li>• At Tule Wash, 917 acres were completed and 310 acres have interim dust suppression. Transition of irrigation to well water was completed in 2025 at Tule Wash Parcels A, B, C, D, and G.</li> <li>• At West Bombay Beach, the irrigation system was installed and connected to a water supply. Planting and seeding concluded in 2025.</li> <li>• To align with the vegetation enhancement goals of the Tule Wash site, the SSP mechanically removed salt cedar to promote the growth and expansion of existing native vegetation into wetland areas. A total of 0.34 acres of salt cedar were mechanically removed and wetlands enhanced under the oversight of cultural and biological resources monitors.</li> <li>• For the Kane Spring Project, the following activities were conducted: conceptual design, draft land and water access agreements, and surveys (land, biological and cultural).</li> <li>• For the North Lake Wetlands Project, the following activities were completed: conceptual design, temporary site access secured, environmental and cultural surveys initiated, water supply analysis, and monthly coordination with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Tribe.</li> </ul>

**Table 1. Activities Identified in State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134 (Contd.)**

Item	Reporting Requirement	SSP Activity
(i)	Completed projects and milestones achieved in the prior year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the Bombay Beach Wetlands Project, the 65% design package was completed. An additional 65% design package for recreation features was initiated. Permit applications were submitted in early 2026. Additionally, the SSP Team and Audubon have been working to prioritize public access and recreation.</li> <li>• Twelve monitoring wells and five production wells were completed at the Clubhouse and Tule Wash sites in 2025.</li> <li>• The SSP Team has completed the design of an air quality data <a href="#">website</a>, which includes real-time data and archived data focused around SSP projects. The real-time data website displays parameters measured continuously across the 21-station air quality monitoring network around the Salton Sea.</li> <li>• Development of the third Monitoring Implementation Plan (MIP) Annual Working Plan for 2026 occurred.</li> </ul>
(ii)	Amount of acreage of completed work that provides dust suppression and habitat creation, broken down by habitat type.	<p><b>Vegetation Enhancement Projects:</b> 107 acres completed on the Tule Wash and West Bombay Beach Project sites.</p> <p><b>Interim Dust Suppression Projects:</b> 310 acres of interim dust suppression implemented at the Tule Wash site.</p> <p><b>Habitat Projects:</b> 1,830 additional acres of aquatic habitat created in East Pond and East Pond 1, providing shallow-, mid-, and deep-water habitat for fish and birds.</p> <p>A total of 2,177 acres of habitat and 1,409 acres of dust suppression through vegetation enhancement projects have been completed to date.</p>
(iii)	Upcoming projects to be completed and milestones to be achieved prior to the next annual progress report.	<p>The following are key activities planned in 2026</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue Feasibility Study public outreach and meetings and finalize the hydrologic and hydraulic (H&amp;H) model, selection of hydrology scenarios, and the evaluation of the final array of alternatives. A recommended plan, or preferred restoration alternative, may also be selected.</li> <li>• Continue construction of the SCH Center and West Expansions Ponds.</li> <li>• Complete final design and specifications and contract for construction of the Bombay Beach Wetland Enhancement Project, in partnership with Audubon California. Remove invasive plants, finalize design, and implement the 130-acre Imperial Wildlife Area Wister (IWA) Unit Marsh Bird Habitat Restoration Project.</li> <li>• Pursue a Progressive Design Build (PDB) project delivery method for Kane Spring Project implementation, with a target date for bid advertisement in mid-2026.</li> <li>• Advertise Request for Qualifications/Proposals for the North Lake Wetlands Project in late 2026.</li> <li>• Finalize agreement with SSA to construct an expanded North Lake Wetlands Project that includes the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project area.</li> <li>• Coordinate with SSA and Imperial County to advance the Desert Shores Channel Restoration Project.</li> </ul>

**Table 1. Activities Identified in State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134 (Contd.)**

Item	Reporting Requirement	SSP Activity
(iii)	Upcoming projects to be completed and milestones to be achieved prior to the next annual progress report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release the Salton Sea Hub Site to the public in 2026. Following the public release, quarterly updates to the Hub Site will include additional information and features.</li> <li>• Begin construction at Clubhouse D and E vegetation enhancement parcels and initiate construction. Transition Clubhouse C to well water.</li> <li>• Complete two more production wells and six monitoring wells at Tule Wash and Clubhouse.</li> <li>• Complete 473 acres of vegetation enhancement at Tule Wash.</li> <li>• Initiate land access and permitting for expansion areas of existing dust suppression projects at Tule Wash and Clubhouse planning areas, which could advance up to 2,000 acres.</li> <li>• Assess partnership opportunities with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Watershed Planning Process for the development of upcoming projects.</li> <li>• Finish the 2026 MIP annual workplan and begin development of the MIP annual workplan for 2027.</li> <li>• Develop operations and maintenance (O&amp;M) plans in collaboration with the Salton Sea Conservancy for projects nearing completion.</li> <li>• Assist in the planning and staffing of Salton Sea Conservancy meetings in 2026.</li> </ul>
(iv)	Status of financial resources and permits that have not been secured for future projects.	<p><b>Financial resources:</b> Proposition 4 (Climate Bond) authorizes \$160 million for Salton Sea restoration and management projects, which will support the creation of nearly 3,500 acres of habitat restoration projects. Proposition 4 also included up to \$10 million to establish the Salton Sea Conservancy, which will support the long-term operation and maintenance of the State’s restoration projects. Proposition 4 funding will advance priority projects around the Sea, including the North Lake Wetlands Project, the Bombay Beach Wetlands Enhancement Project, and the Kane Spring Project. After being approved by the Legislature and signed by the Governor in September 2025, this funding was made available to the State’s Salton Sea Program in February 2026. Additionally, in 2025, the Wildlife Conservation Board awarded the SSP a Proposition 50 grant of \$5,231,066 to support construction of the Bombay Beach Wetlands Enhancement Project.</p> <p>In January 2026, Governor Newsom also proposed an additional \$30 million to enhance and expand the above priority State Salton Sea projects, with a primary focus on advancing new public access opportunities. If approved, this funding would address a key priority outlined by Salton Sea communities and articulated in the Salton Sea Community Needs Report: improving public access to the Salton Sea and Salton Sea projects.</p> <p><b>Permits:</b> The SSP successfully navigated the Letter of Permission (LOP) Procedures to permit the SCH Center and West Ponds Expansion and held multiple meetings with the federal cooperating agencies to notify of upcoming permitting processes. Both the LOP and the NEPA EA provided a streamlined process for coordination between multiple federal agencies for permits and land access needs.</p>

**Table 1. Activities Identified in State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134 (Contd.)**

Item	Reporting Requirement	SSP Activity
(v)	Any anticipated departures from the dates and acreages identified in Condition 24 of the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) Order.	Completed acreage has been lower than the SWRCB annual and cumulative targets for 2019-2025, although additional project acres are planned to be initiated in 2026.
(vi)	Progress toward development of the Long-Range Plan (LRP) described in Condition 26.	The public draft of the LRP was released by the SSP Team in December 2022 in compliance with Condition 26. The appendices, including Air Quality Modeling, were released in February 2023. After the conclusion of a 45-day comment period on March 17, 2023, the SSP compiled and reviewed the comments and released the Final LRP in April 2024 (CNRA, 2024a). Concepts recommended for further evaluation in the LRP were moved forward into the Feasibility Study for further analysis as part of the study's planning framework.
(vii)	Should an annual milestone shortfall exceed 20% of a year's annual obligation, the report will also include a plan that will cure the deficiency within 12 months.	The State's vision for future project delivery to meet the annual obligations is described throughout this report and is summarized in Chapter 6.

## 1.2 Report Organization

This report focuses on activities and progress made at the Salton Sea in 2025. Activities undertaken in past years are summarized in previous annual reports, posted on the Salton Sea website [here](#).

This report follows the same outline as previous annual reports. Chapter 2 provides project delivery updates, including summarizing land access status and project status for both SSP and

non-SSP projects. Chapter 3 describes updates on partnerships across the region to facilitate the development of projects, including federal, state, and local agencies, tribal governments, and other Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs). Chapter 4 presents community engagement information. Chapter 5 describes planning activities at various levels, such as program planning, environmental planning, and funding to support the future implementation of the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan projects. Chapter 6 describes the near-term next

steps for 2026 to 2028 and project delivery and planning for meeting the longer-term targets of the State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134. Chapter 7 contains the references. Appendix A contains a summary of data describing existing environmental conditions at the Sea, including inflows, water elevation, and salinity, and a summary of recent bird and fish surveys. Appendix B provides a detailed breakdown of the funding available and sources for the SSP.



## 2 Salton Sea Program Project Delivery

Since CNRA's last report to the State Water Board in March 2025, the SSP Team (1) continues to work actively to expand land access agreements with different landowners to meet project targets for future years and (2) has moved forward on a variety of aquatic habitat, wetland, dust suppression, and vegetation projects. These projects include work on the Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) project expansions, plans to protect and expand emergent wetland habitat, and active construction on dust suppression projects at sites in areas distant from surface water sources. Field surveys or design work that will set the stage for additional construction over the next several years have been carried out at several other projects, such as the North Lake Wetlands Project, the Bombay Beach Wetland Enhancement Project, and the Kane Spring Project. An overview of all active SSP projects in progress is provided in this chapter as well as a section on non-SSP projects.



### 2.1 SSP Project Updates

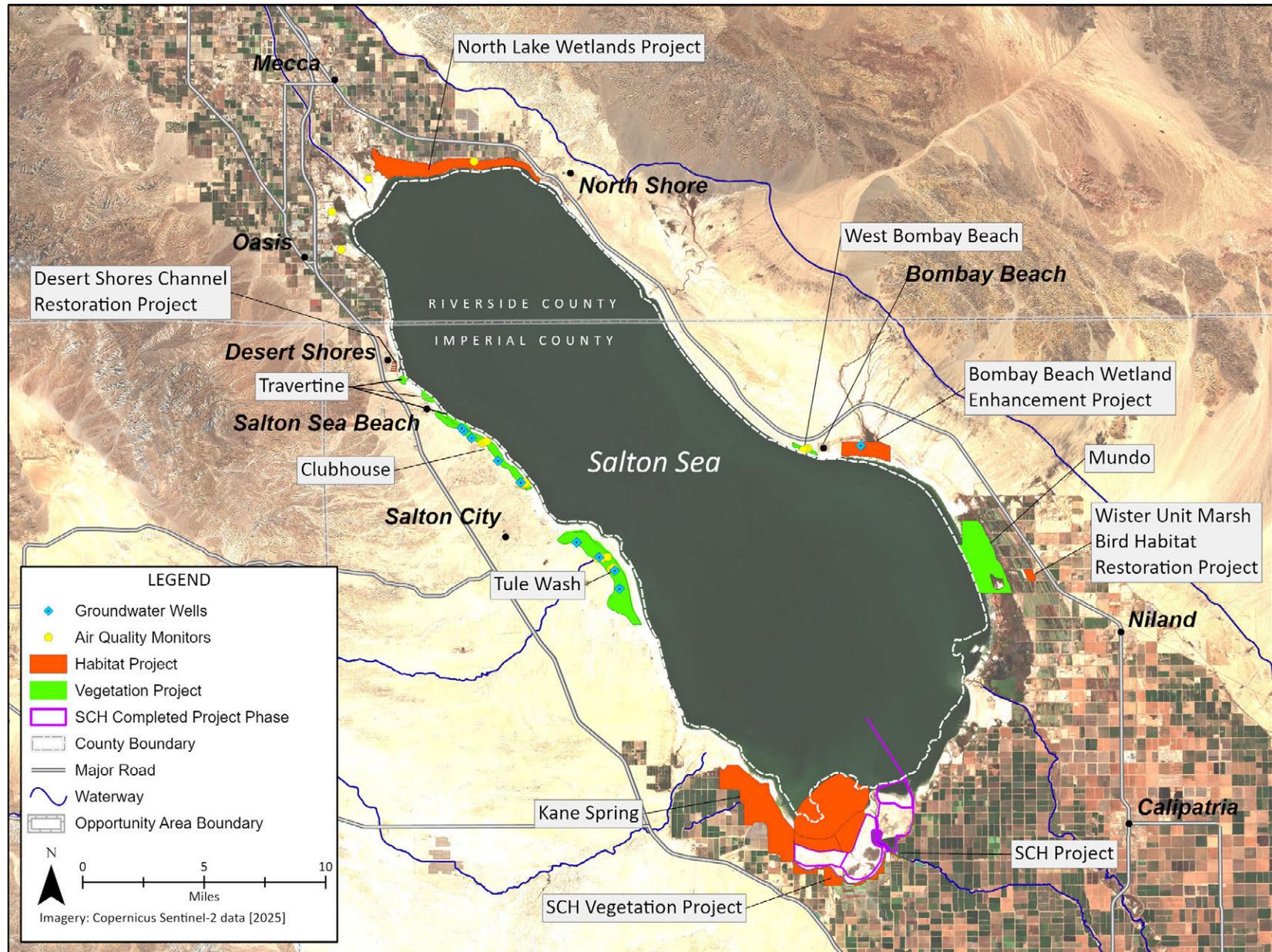
Projects in progress at the Salton Sea are shown in **Figure 1**, illustrating the wide range of activities currently undertaken by the SSP Team and its partners to implement projects at the Sea and its surrounding communities. The SSP Team has undertaken active public outreach to identify these projects for development at the Sea.

#### 2.1.1 Species Conservation Habitat and Expansion Project

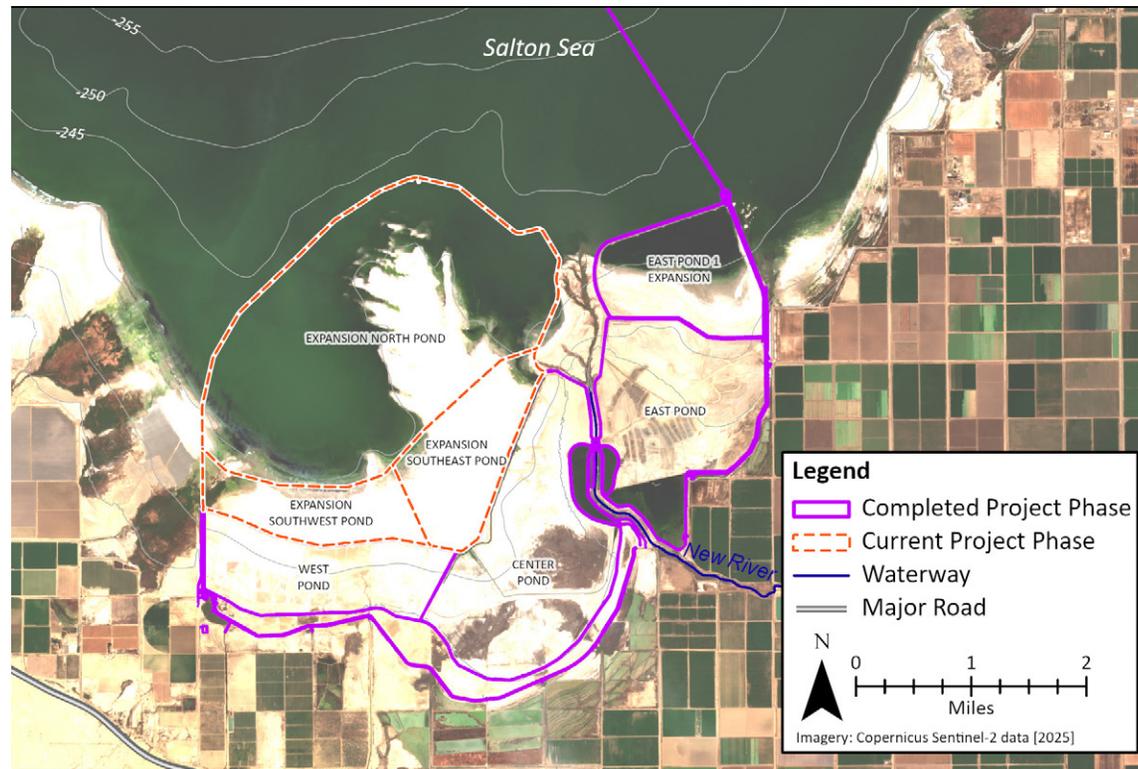
Implementation of the SCH Project, via a design-build contract, was initiated in 2021. The SCH Project will restore approximately 9,500 acres of shallow- and deep-water habitat lost as a result of the Salton Sea's increasing salinity and receding shoreline. It is the SSP's first large-scale project, and when completed it will create a network of ponds and wetlands to provide important fish and bird habitat while suppressing dust emissions to protect regional air quality as the Salton Sea continues to recede (**Figure 2**).

The SCH Project was the first of many projects the SSP Team implemented as part of the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan. It was chosen as the first large-scale project in part because water-balance models show that as the Sea recedes the southern end of the Sea will experience some of the earliest lakebed

**Figure 1.** Projects in progress and potential future projects under consideration at the Salton Sea. The Opportunity Area boundary indicates the portion of the Sea covered by the NEPA EA for the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan.



**Figure 2. SCH and Expansion Project location with pond boundaries.**



exposure given its shallow bathymetry. For this reason, the expansion of the SCH was prioritized for federal funding to address near-term impacts of recently adopted conservations.

Previously envisioned as a 4,100-acre project funded primarily through the State’s bond funds at a cost of approximately \$200 million, the State secured commitments from the federal government in 2023, 2024, and 2025, totaling \$245 million in additional funding, which will allow the SCH Project to more than double in size.

In April 2025, water began flowing into the East Pond. In May 2025, the filling of the first expansion pond, the East Pond 1 Expansion, began. In conjunction with the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) Salton Sea workshop, the SSP hosted a tour in May 2025 with partners (Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians, Imperial Irrigation District [IID], U.S. Bureau of Reclamation [Reclamation], CNRA, DWR, Kiewit, and Montgomery Watson Harza Constructors [MWH]) to commemorate the first major flooding of aquatic habitat at the Salton Sea. Together,

these ponds provide over 2,000 acres of habitat restoration, a little over three square miles. With the East Pond 1 Expansion, the project footprint has now expanded to cover nearly 5,000 acres at the south end of the Sea. Further expansion on the Center and West Ponds will add an additional 4,500 acres to the project, raising the total SCH footprint to approximately 9,500 acres.

In 2025, the SSP Team worked with the Design-Build entity to progress the design of the next phase of an approximately 4,500-acre expansion of the Center and West Ponds. On October 6, 2025, construction began on the SCH Expansion Center and West Ponds. As of December 23, 2025, approximately 17,000 linear feet of berm had been constructed. Work on the SCH Expansion Center and West Ponds will continue through 2027 with an expect begin fill date of early 2028.

In 2025, a working group with representatives from CDFW, DWR, CNRA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe, and Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians continued meeting to design interpretive panels that include biological, cultural, and archeological information. Interpretive panels will be placed at the SCH Visitor Observation Area.

During 2025, CDFW began survey activities to determine what wildlife species are using the ponds that are filled:

- Nesting bird surveys in East Pond

- General fish surveys at East Pond and East Pond 1
- Environmental DNA monitoring at East Sedimentation Basin, East Pond, and East Pond 1

Thousands of birds and dozens of species were observed onsite and many nested and foraged in East Pond in 2025. Some of the species using the site included American White Pelicans, Neotropical Cormorants, Gull-billed Terns, Brown Pelicans, Northern Shovelers, and Black-necked Stilts. Several species nested, hatched, and raised chicks onsite successfully. This is partially thanks to the abundant forage fish available at East Pond. Fish species observed during CDFW surveys included desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*), gizzard shad (*Dorosoma cepedianum*), and tilapia (*Tilapia spp./Oreochromis spp.*). Environmental DNA samples are in the process of being analyzed, and will provide information on phytoplankton, zooplankton, and fish inhabiting East Pond and East Pond 1. CDFW staff are also planning to add additional fish to East Pond to ensure sufficient forage fish are available for nesting birds. Further information is included in Appendix A.

### 2.1.2 Vegetation Enhancement Projects as Part of the Dust Suppression Action Plan

The SSP Team released the Dust Suppression Action Plan (DSAP) in July 2020 to prioritize SSP projects that reduce dust emissions and restore habitat at the Sea (CNRA, 2020). The DSAP

identified up to 9,800 acres of exposed or soon-to-be exposed lakebed for project planning, described potential dust suppression concepts, and outlined the pathway from concept to on-the-ground implementation. The DSAP was shaped by input from local communities, stakeholders, and regulatory agencies.

Three locations with large areas of Reclamation owned land were selected for initial project work: Clubhouse, Tule Wash, and West Bombay Beach (**Figure 1**). Two of these sites, Clubhouse and Tule Wash, are located near the community of Salton City and were identified in the DSAP as high-priority areas due to their emissions potential and proximity to residents. The Clubhouse project area covers 607 acres, which includes 399 acres owned by Reclamation and 208 acres owned by IID. The Tule Wash project area covers 1,390 acres, which includes 1,217 acres owned by Reclamation and 173 acres owned by IID. Both project areas have planned expansions in later project phases. The West Bombay Beach project area was selected for similar reasons, including its emissions potential and proximity to the community of Bombay Beach. The site covers 93 acres owned by Reclamation and is adjacent to the community. Collectively, these three project areas total 2,090 acres.

After evaluating site-specific opportunities and constraints, vegetation enhancement was selected as the preferred approach. Once established, vegetation stabilizes the ground surface, which

reduces dust emissions and creates conditions that support additional plant germination and growth. Over time, these vegetation stands provide a natural and sustainable solution to dust emissions from the exposed lakebed.

Current work at the Clubhouse, Tule Wash, and West Bombay Beach sites includes both immediate interim dust suppression measures and longer-term vegetation enhancement. Grass bales and furrows are implemented first to quickly reduce dust emissions from exposed lakebed. After these measures are in place, drip irrigation is installed and the sites are seeded and planted with native species. As vegetation establishes, it creates a durable ground cover that stabilizes the soil surface and reduces windblown dust in accordance with Imperial County Air Pollution Control District (ICAPCD) surface stabilization standards. In 2025, groundwater well installation remained a key priority to ensure a reliable local water supply to support vegetation growth.

In recent years, precipitation during planting seasons has affected site conditions by limiting access beyond established roads. Wet field conditions following rain events can significantly affect construction activities, particularly during the winter months when cooler temperatures and shorter days slow soil drying. In addition to local rainfall, storm events upstream of the project sites can also affect conditions when stormwater flows onto project areas. Saturated soils limit equipment access, reduce trafficability within

sites, and increase the risk of vehicles becoming stuck or damaging the lakebed surface. These conditions delay installation of irrigation systems, planting, and other construction activities. To address these challenges, the SSP Team has adapted the design of stormwater spreading features to better manage incoming flows and reduce prolonged wet conditions.

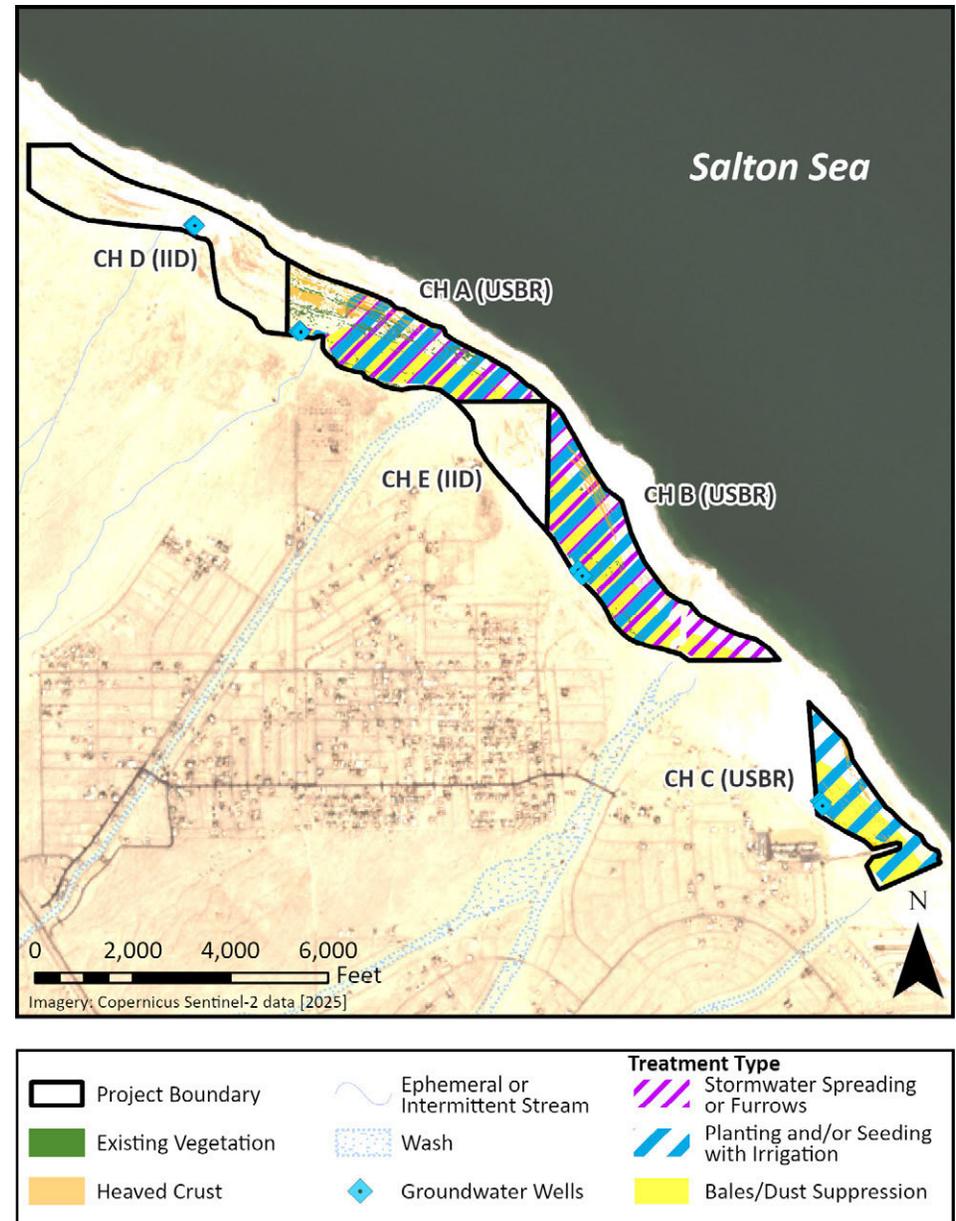
While precipitation can temporarily flush salt from surface soils and support plant growth, dissolved salts later move upward through wet soils and form salt crusts on the soil surface as water evaporates. These salt crusts can damage plants by pulling moisture from seeds and young plant tissues, a process often referred to as salt burn. This can interfere with seed germination and reduce the survival of young plants, particularly during the first wind event after the salt crust formation. In response, an adaptive management approach is being used to adjust planting methods, irrigation timing, and site treatments to address changing soil conditions. The SSP Team continues to navigate these challenges while completing planting and irrigation across the project acreage.

Work completed at vegetation enhancement projects in 2025 is described below, with information from prior years included for context and to present a full picture of project conditions.

### Clubhouse

- New work on IID-owned Parcels D & E at the Clubhouse project area began in 2025 (**Figure 3**). Together, these project sites cover 208 acres (Clubhouse D, 144 acres; Clubhouse E, 64 acres). Completed work included project design, initial biological surveys, and aquatic resource delineation (ARD) reconnaissance. Construction is anticipated to begin in 2026.
- In 2025, irrigation at Clubhouse A and B was transitioned to well water, and irrigation at Clubhouse C is planned to transition to well water in 2026. As vegetation has become more established, irrigation water use at the Clubhouse sites has been reduced

**Figure 3. Layout of the vegetation enhancement project at the Clubhouse (CH) site, as implemented at the end of 2025.**



**Figure 4.** Site features and activities at the Clubhouse site. a) Drilling of final wells at Clubhouse. b) Installation of three Arizona crossings on the Clubhouse A access road to improve site access. c) Vegetation ready to be planted at Clubhouse B. d) Maturing vegetation at Clubhouse B.



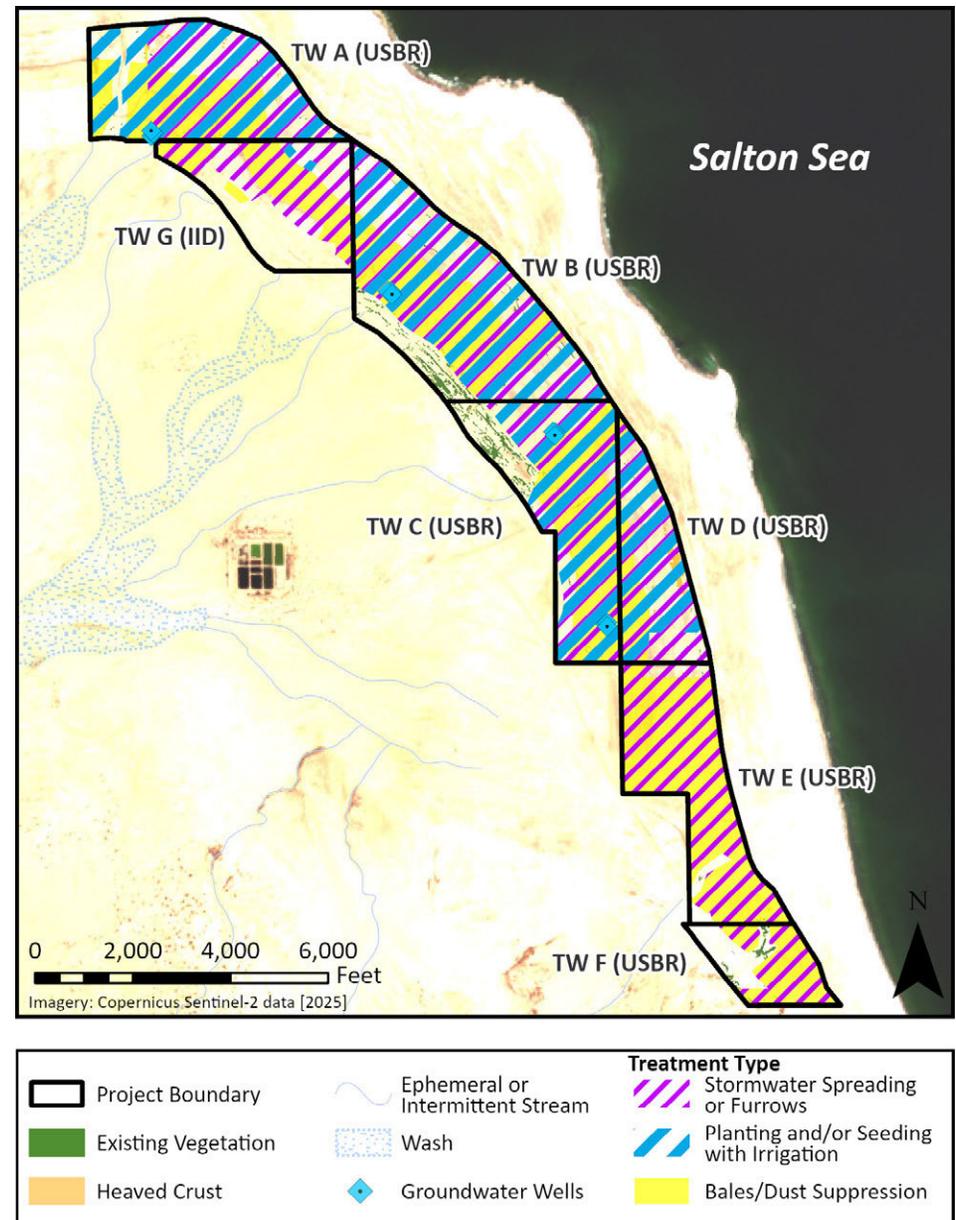
compared to the first two years of project operation. **Figure 4** shows current site conditions and new plant growth at these formerly barren sites.

- Air quality and salt flux monitoring at the Clubhouse C site shows a more than 95 percent reduction in saltation (a proxy for dust emissions), over three years of data collection (two transects with a total of six stations).

### Tule Wash

- On Reclamation-owned Tule Wash Parcels A through F, 913 acres have been completed. Additionally, bales and stormwater spreading features have been implemented on Parcels E and F, providing an interim dust suppression benefit (**Figure 5**). A portion of Parcel D and all of Parcels E and F will be seeded as the irrigation system comes online. **Figure 6** shows site features and recent conditions and activities at Tule Wash.
- In 2025, work began at IID-owned Tule Wash G. Four acres were completed at Tule Wash G in 2025. Rainstorms delayed construction schedules, and the remaining 169 acres at Tule Wash G will be completed in 2026.
- Wetland restoration was completed at Tule Wash F in 2025 via removal of non-native salt cedar/tamarisk present in a palustrine wetland. It was noted that surface water appeared in holes where the tamarisk was removed.
- Drilling of 16 wells (four production, twelve monitoring) was conducted throughout the year at Tule Wash. Transition of irrigation to well water was completed in 2025 at Tule Wash Parcels A, B, C, D, and G.
- In 2025, air quality continued to be monitored along two transects at a total of five stations.

**Figure 5.** Layout of the vegetation enhancement project at the Tule Wash (TW) site, as implemented at the end of 2025.



**Figure 6.** Site features and activities at the Tule Wash site. a) Removal of invasive tamarisk plants from wetland area in Tule Wash F. b) Vegetation at Tule Wash B. c) Well drilling at Tule Wash. d) Maturing big saltbush (*Atriplex lentiformis*) at Tule Wash B.



## West Bombay Beach

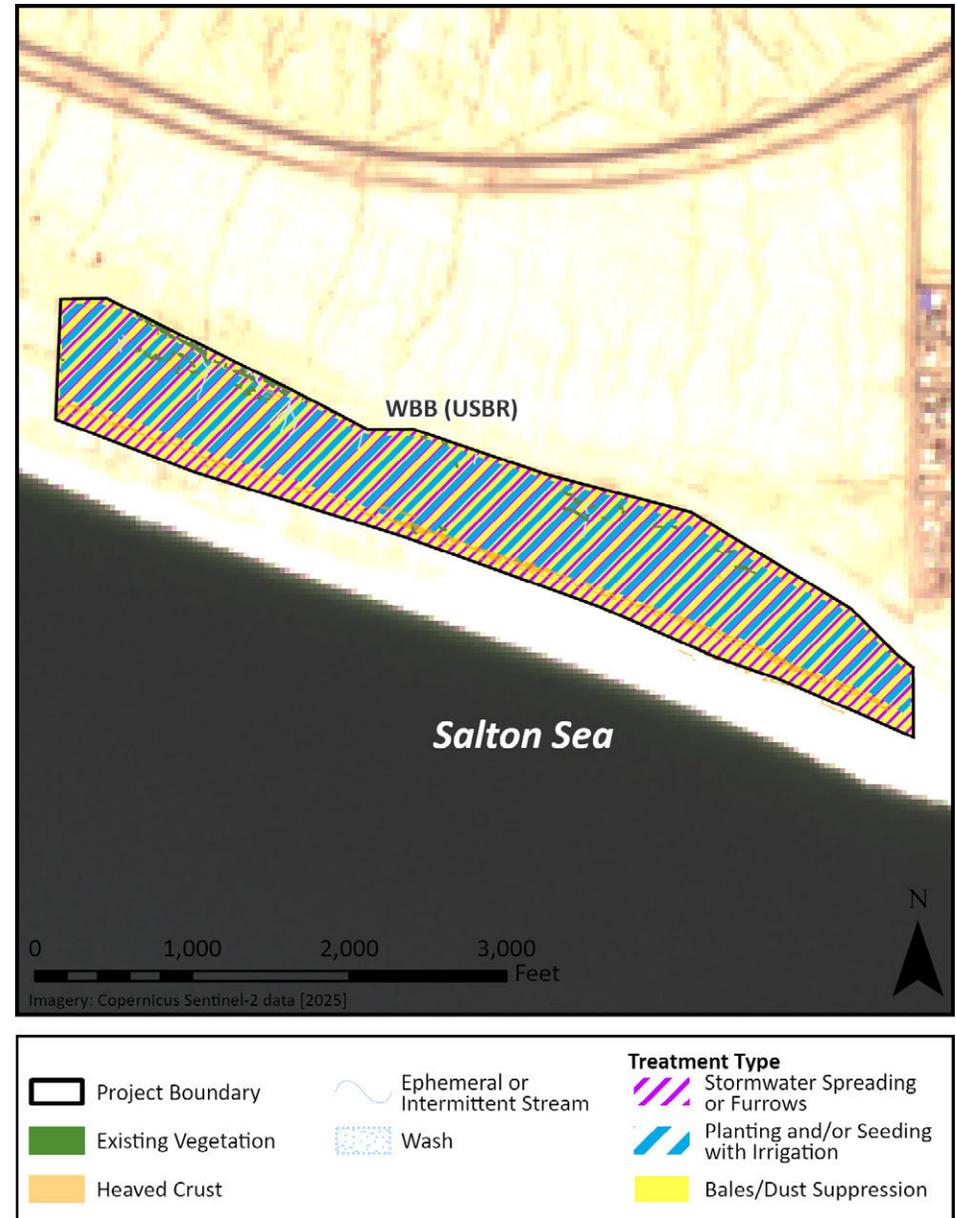
- In 2025, irrigation was installed and connected to a water supply. An exploratory borehole was developed for groundwater supply in 2023, but no water was found to a depth of 800 feet. Thus, additional water sources were necessary for long-term development at this site.
- Air quality monitoring has continued since an air quality monitoring transect (three stations) was deployed at the site in 2023.
- In 2025, drip irrigation, seeding, and planting were completed (**Figure 7**). Recent activities and conditions at West Bombay Beach are shown on **Figure 8**.

The permits associated with the sites require monitoring, and these will be documented each year as follows:

- Air quality monitoring using the sensor network currently deployed at all dust suppression sites (five transects of three stations, and one with two stations) and four additional sites on the North Lake to understand potential emissions from this region. A total of 21 air quality stations are currently operational, and the SSP Team now shares the data online (see Section 4.5 below).
- Water quality impact reporting for the site is part of the Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP).
- Monitoring of vegetation growth and achievement of a stabilized surface, including status of invasive species, to be documented through ground and aerial observations.

Further work is envisioned to expand upon the Clubhouse and Tule Wash project sites in the upcoming years. These parcels are downslope from the existing developed parcels and have become exposed as the Sea has receded in recent years. Construction at these sites can benefit from facilities developed for the existing project areas. Work planned for 2026 includes obtaining land access, site surveys, and beginning environmental permitting.

**Figure 7.** Layout of the vegetation enhancement project at the West Bombay Beach (WBB) site, as implemented at the end of 2025.



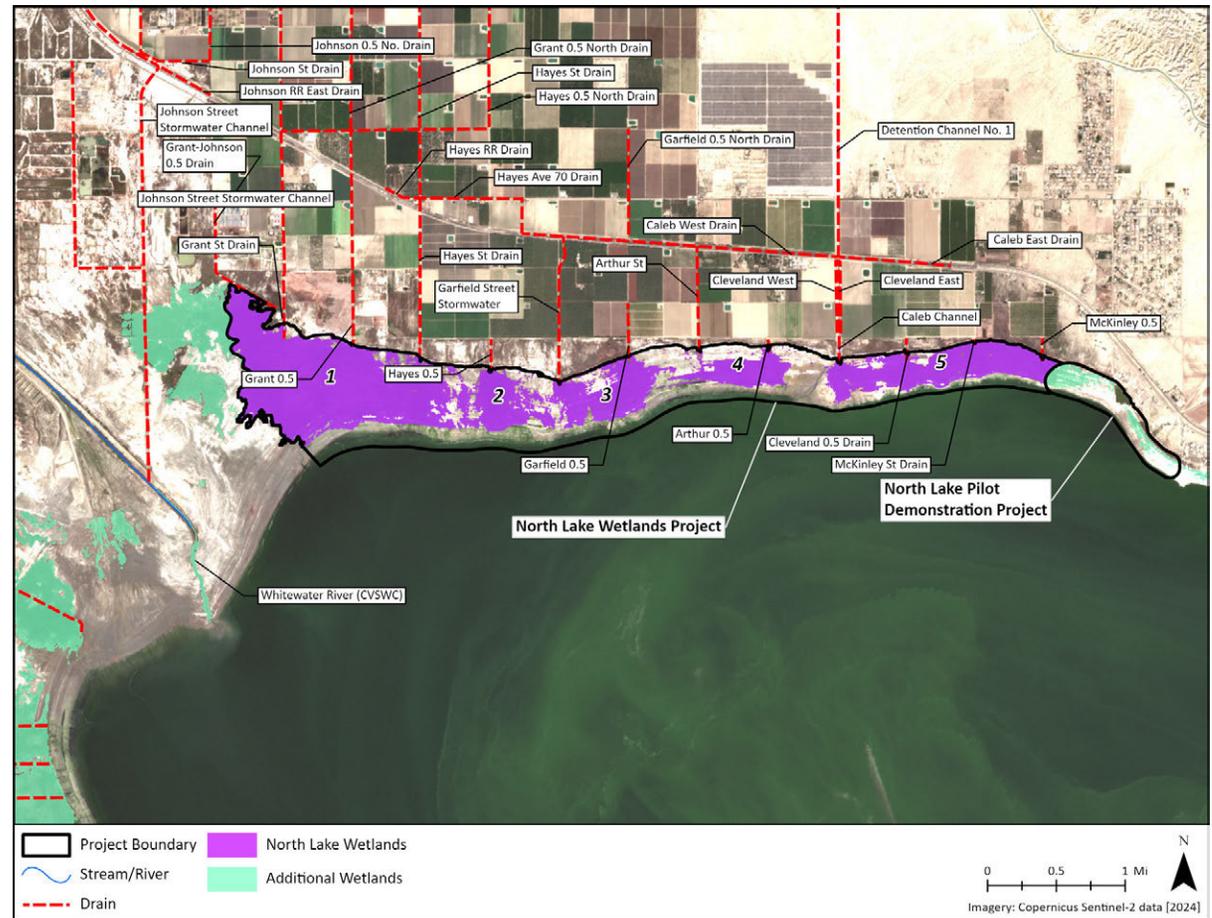
**Figure 8.** Site features and recent activities at the West Bombay Beach site. a) Installation of drip irrigation system piping. b) Using horizontal directional drilling to install irrigation mains. c) Germination of seed into young seedlings on drip irrigation alignments. d) Growth of vegetation planted on drip irrigation alignments.



### 2.1.3 North Lake Wetlands Project and Path Forward for North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project

During 2025, the SSP Team continued work on the North Lake Wetlands Project conceptual design and secured Proposition 4 funding that will be used to finish the design and construction. The conceptual design focuses on maintaining existing wetlands, including habitat for Yuma Ridgway's Rail and California Black Rail, at either their current size and condition or equivalent value. The project's design objective is to stabilize emergent wetlands and use excess agricultural drain water (above consumptive use of the wetlands) on adjacent areas of the exposed lakebed. This water will be used to create compatible and water efficient dust control and habitat over a significantly larger area and may include the creation of ponds for additional habitat area. In 2026, additional site assessments will be performed, and DWR anticipates it will release a Request for Qualifications/Proposals to secure a contractor during the latter part of the year. **Figure 9** presents the 1,966-acre North Lake Wetlands project boundary. Additionally, the SSP Team has worked closely with SSA on the development of the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project and have reached an agreement in principle to leverage the existing planning, permitting, and design work for the adjacent North Lake Wetlands project to implement an expanded North Lake Wetlands project that includes the North Lake Pilot Demonstration project area.

Figure 9. Area covered with wetland habitat at the North Lake Wetlands Project.



Next steps in developing this project include the following tasks:

- Conduct additional survey and data collection including Biological Reconnaissance and Habitat Assessment, Aquatic Resources Delineation updates, wetland assessment using the California Rapid Assessment Method, water quality analyses, and cultural resources surveys.
- Conduct workshops to establish the following: performance criteria, design parameters, and success metrics.
- Award contract and begin design process.

- Continue collaboration with tribes and local partners in the Salton Sea region, including finalizing terms for incorporating the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project area.

#### **2.1.4 Bombay Beach Wetland Enhancement Project**

The SSP Team has been coordinating with Audubon California to advance the first phase of the Bombay Beach Wetland Enhancement Project, which aims to stabilize, preserve, and enhance an existing emergent wetland on over 577 acres adjacent to the community of Bombay Beach. As the Sea’s elevation has declined, water from a confluence of surface water flow and groundwater discharges has created wetlands along the exposed lakebed providing habitat for waterbirds, including shorebirds and secretive marshbirds, and endangered desert pupfish. However, under natural conditions, these habitats tend to drain and dry out. Tamarisk, a non-native shrub, has invaded the upslope areas, consuming large amounts of the available water and degrading the habitat quality. An opportunity exists to stabilize and enhance these existing habitat areas and to divert and disperse water for additional aquatic and wetland habitat creation. The project is included in the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan EA for NEPA coverage.

In December 2022, the Audubon project became the first SSP project to receive a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) statutory exemption for restoration projects. The

exemption for CDFW’s concurrence is posted on the CDFW website as provided by Public Resources Code section 21080.56.

This project is an example of a partnership project, with Audubon and the SSP Team working together to finalize project design and secure funding for implementation. In late 2024, a decision was made to transition project leadership from Audubon to the SSP. The SSP is now responsible for finalizing the design and permitting in coordination with Audubon. In Spring 2025, the SSP received a \$5.2 million grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board to continue with implementation. In Summer 2025, the SSP performed supplemental environmental surveys (i.e., a desert pupfish habitat assessment and cultural and biological resource surveys) in new and previously unsurveyed project areas to further support the design and permitting needs.

Audubon is working with the SSP and landowners to evaluate opportunities to integrate public access components into the project, using existing maintenance and monitoring roads to provide pedestrian access. Audubon, the State, IID, and Reclamation have been meeting to understand what the community would like to see through Audubon’s outreach and how it can best fit into the project.

In October 2025, the SSP together with partners at IID, California State Parks, and Audubon California hosted an open-house community meeting in Bombay Beach to share information

about ongoing restoration and vegetation projects, including the Bombay Beach Wetland Enhancement Project.

The 65 percent design package was completed in May 2025. Pre-application permitting consultations with regulatory agencies were held in June 2025 with permit applications anticipated to be submitted in early 2026. Project design is planned to be finalized in late 2026. Construction is estimated to begin in early 2027 with completion in 2029. With the SSP now leading design and project implementation, important steps are expected in 2026 as follows:

- Advance and finalize land access and water agreements between the State, Reclamation, and IID.
- Finalize all permitting packages.
- Complete 95 and 100 percent designs.
- Development and release of bid documents in late 2026.
- Finalize remaining public access and recreation features into project design.

#### **2.1.5 Kane Spring Project**

The Kane Spring Project is located at the southwestern corner of the Sea and encompasses approximately 3,200 acres. The project may expand in the future as funding becomes available. Prior to 2024, the project concept for Kane Spring (originally called the Trifolium Extension Multi-Benefit Project) was developed

## Aerial view of Kane Spring wetlands.



by IID as a part of its Salton Sea Air Quality Mitigation Program (SSAQMP), in collaboration with Reclamation. In the first quarter of 2024, the Kane Spring Project transitioned to the State's SSP program and planning began on the project.

The goal of the project is to enhance and improve water use efficiency of drain water on the exposed lakebed to stabilize and manage

wetland habitat while minimizing impacts on the existing biological resources at the site. The multi-benefit project will implement vegetation-based dust control and water-based dust control measures, which will also provide additional shoreline wildlife habitat. Water use efficiency will be improved by the rerouting of relatively fresh drain water, which currently flows to the Sea, for use on both current and future exposed lakebed.

Current project objectives include the following:

- Maintain and potentially expand existing pupfish habitat.
- Maintain and potentially expand existing wetlands
- Stabilize emergent wetlands by removing excess drain water (above consumptive use of the wetland) and by using this water more

efficiently on adjacent areas of the exposed lakebed. This water will be used to create more compatible and/or water efficient dust control and habitat over a significantly larger area and may include the creation of ponds for additional habitat area.

- Implement vegetation enhancement projects to stabilize the exposed lakebed.

In 2025, conceptual design, land and water access agreements, and surveys (land, biological, and cultural) activities were conducted. The SSP plans to pursue a Progressive Design Build (PDB) project delivery method for project implementation, with a target date for bid advertisement in mid-2026. The following project activities are planned for 2026:

- Geotechnical surveys;
- Groundwater monitoring;
- State and federal permitting;
- Development and release of bid documents;
- Public outreach; and
- Start design.

### **2.1.6 Desert Shores Channel Restoration Project**

This project consists of a marina with five boat channels (or “fingers”) situated within the Imperial County community of Desert Shores, a residential development in the northeast quadrant of the Salton Sea region. Due to the receding shoreline,

the marina has become disconnected from the greater Salton Sea. With active community engagement and in partnership with Imperial County, the State, and Reclamation, SSA is leading efforts to mitigate the impacts of this decline. Supported by a \$1.25 million grant from Reclamation, SSA continues to advance this project with strong community participation, the committed support of the SSP Team, and in collaboration with Imperial County. Funded by the grant, SSA has also engaged a consultant to manage initial phases of the project, including outreach to communities, and an engineering firm to gather geotechnical and hydrological data to advance the project towards design and implementation.

Initial findings from the 2025 engineering effort identified more complex challenges than anticipated, including higher seepage losses due to soil types and risk of liquefaction. Informed by these findings and applying them to an evaluation of various design options, a project will be designed that is technically and fiscally feasible. The Reclamation grant is currently being modified to allow for additional design and permitting that will facilitate a “shovel ready” project. Key next steps for this project include (1) developing a land access strategy and (2) initiating the design process.

### **2.1.7 Mundo Project**

The 2,354-acre Mundo Project is located approximately 10 miles southeast of the

community of Bombay Beach (**Figure 10**). Landowners within the project site are the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), IID, and the State of California. The SSP would use all lands within the project site, although Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) funding would only be applied to the non-federal lands portion of the site. Due to federal cutbacks, the planning for this site has slowed considerably. The Mundo site has areas of heavy vegetation cover due to flow from agricultural drains onto exposed lakebed. Restoration activities planned at the site include vegetation enhancement and enhancement of existing wetlands. Seaward portions of the project site are not expected to be exposed until 2026. This site continues to be on the list of future planning areas as the Sea recedes and conditions are monitored.

### **2.1.8 Travertine Project**

The 297-acre Travertine Project is located near the community of Salton Sea Beach, along the western shore of the Salton Sea (**Figure 11**). Landowners within the project site are IID and Torres –Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians. The Travertine site is primarily unvegetated, with scattered areas of iodine bush scrub and tamarisk. The planned restoration activity at the site is vegetation enhancement. Seaward portions of the project site are not expected to be exposed until 2027. For this project, the early planning stage to determine surveys, land access, permits, and design schedule has begun.

Figure 10. The Mundo Project site.

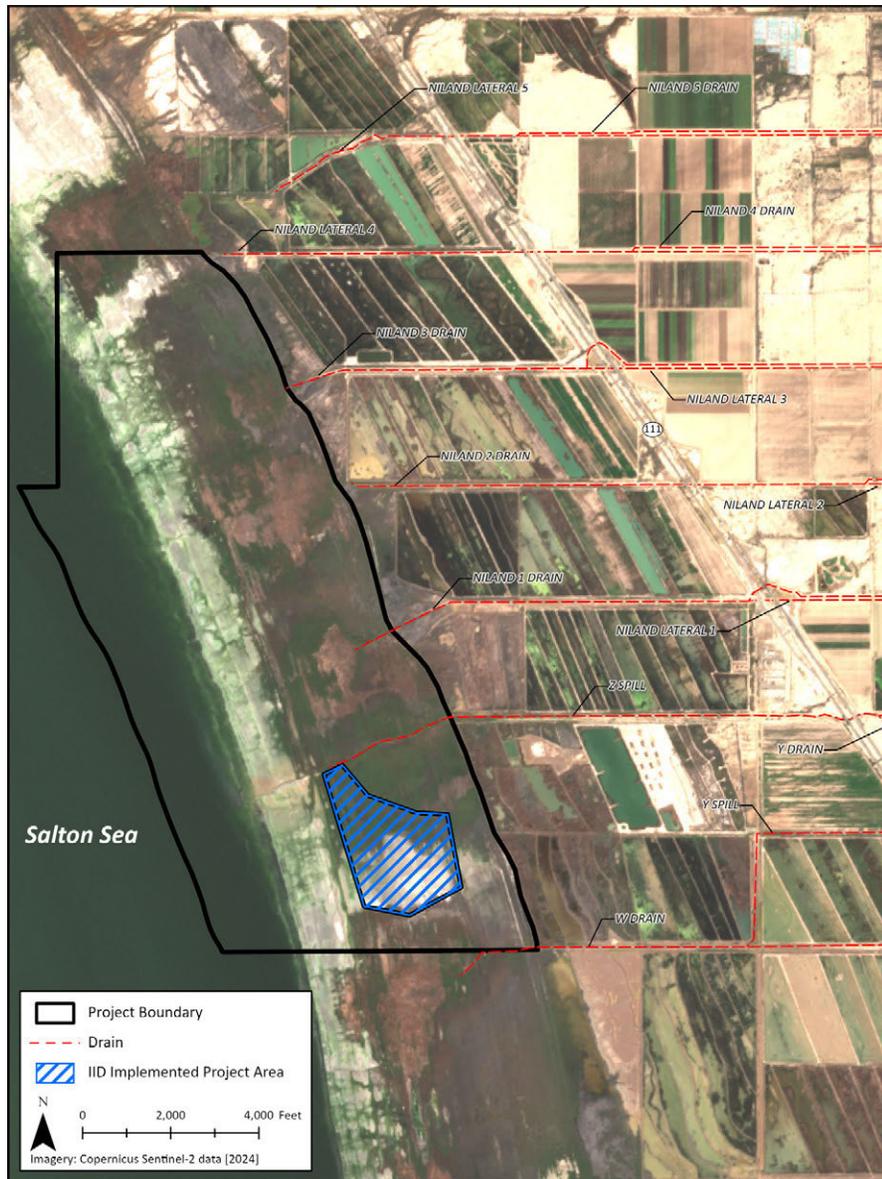
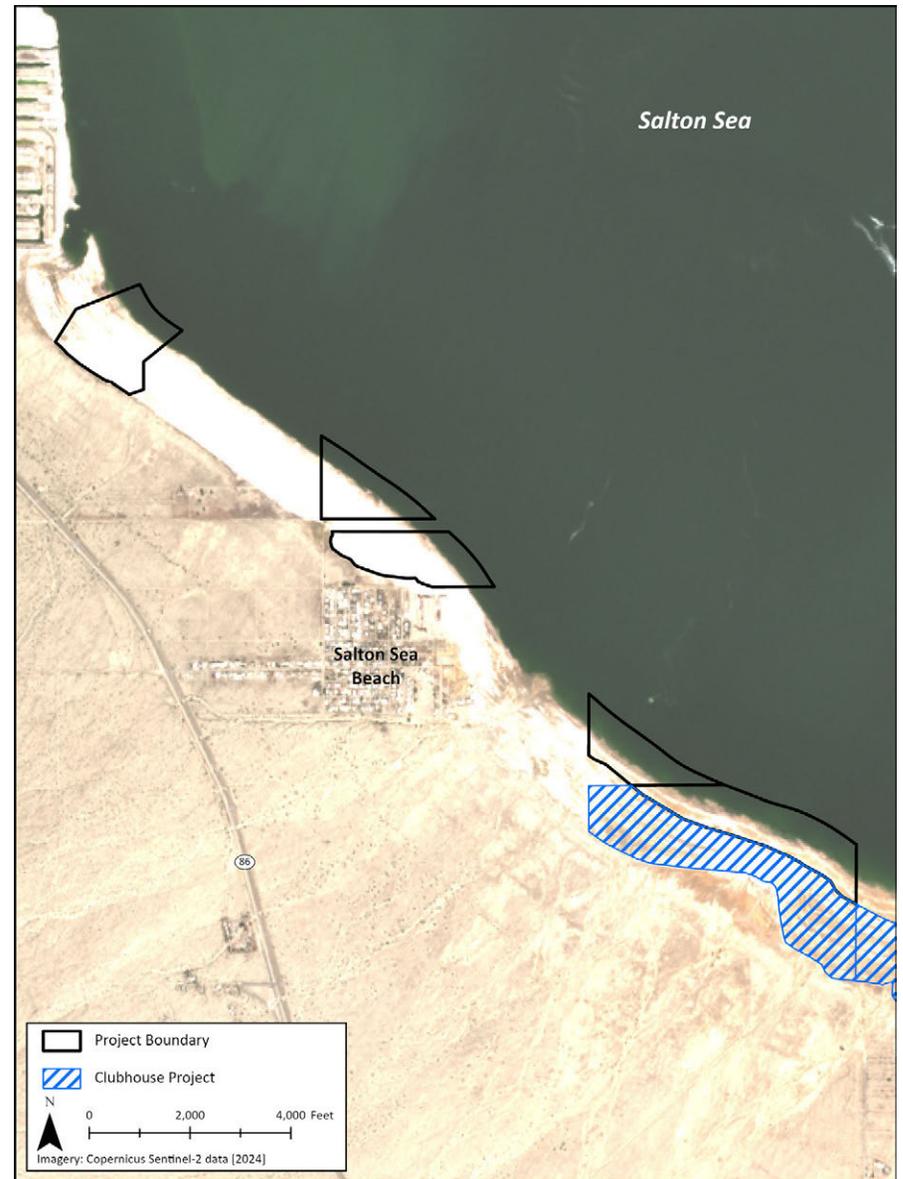


Figure 11. The Travertine Project site.



### **2.1.9 Imperial Wildlife Area Wister Unit Marsh Bird Habitat Restoration Project**

A bird habitat restoration project is proposed for development at the Wister Unit of the Imperial Wildlife Area (IWA) encompassing an estimated 130 acres. The area has historically been operated for waterfowl and other wildlife. The area has a series of reservoirs and ponds that gravity flow from east to west and are managed by CDFW. The project envisions ponds that may support wetland species, such as Yuma Ridgway's Rail, California Black Rail, other secretive marshbirds and other avian species. An opportunity may also exist to include a desert pupfish pond. The project may include invasive species removal, walking trails, interpretive signs, and a viewing platform to support recreational use of the marsh. Further land access is not required at this site because this is part of an existing CDFW wildlife area.

Conceptual design and contracting for this project began in 2025. A number of options were analyzed by the State team to minimize delays and keep the project on track. Ultimately, the most cost-efficient and time-efficient way to move this project forward involves breaking the project into two phases:

- Phase 1: Vegetation removal. CDFW was able to identify a non-profit contractor already in the region for vegetation removal and clearing the site for project construction.

This work will begin in 2026. Invasive species line most drains and ponds in the area and consume a disproportionately large amount of water, which reduces the amount of water available downstream to enter the Salton Sea and/or future projects. Removal of invasive tamarisk and phragmites will result in an increase in both habitat quality and water availability – critical components for project success at Wister. CDFW and DWR are finalizing a cost-sharing agreement to fund this work.

- Phase 2: Wetland Restoration – Unit Y16. This area was historically operated as waterfowl ponds but has been fallowed due to an overgrowth of invasive vegetation and chronic berm leakage. Removing native vegetation and repairing/enhancing features to maximize water flowing through the project will enhance habitat quality to support waterfowl and marsh birds, which are being displaced as the Salton Sea shoreline recedes. Design is also considering the feasibility of public access walking paths to provide opportunities for recreation.

Next steps expected to occur in 2026 include the following tasks:

- Complete cost-sharing agreement between CDFW and DWR.
- Pre-project assessment work, including surveys, approvals, and contracting.

- Clearing the site of tamarisk and phragmites.
- Advancing through conceptual design and initiating final design.
- Construction site preparation.

### **2.1.10 SCH Vegetation Project**

The SCH Vegetation Project is envisioned to cover 537 acres south of the current footprint of the SCH project. This proposed project includes the development of wetland and upland vegetated habitat across the project area to suppress dust and provide habitat. Since the pupfish connectivity project at SCH has progressed, the SCH Vegetation Project design and water and land access agreements will be prioritized in 2026.

Next steps in developing this project include the following tasks:

- Formalization of water and land use agreements with IID.
- Progression of the design.

## **2.2 Non-SSP Project Updates**

Additional major restoration work, largely independent of SSP Team staff or resources, continues to be performed by partner organizations while also benefiting the Salton Sea environment. Two key projects are noted below.

### 2.2.1 Quantification Settlement Agreement Mitigation Implemented by IID

As part of the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) water transfer, IID is required to implement environmental mitigation for QSA environmental impacts. Important elements related to this include Managed Marsh (marsh habitat creation), burrowing owl conservation, desert pupfish refugium and monitoring, and the SSAQMP. Operation and maintenance of the Managed Marsh and desert pupfish refugium are ongoing.

Other mitigation measures, such as the burrowing owl conservation program, which includes periodic population studies and pre-inspection surveys to mark potential burrows before operation, and maintenance or construction activities within IID's irrigation and drainage system, are still being conducted and are in various stages of completion. Ongoing monitoring of pupfish and their use of direct-to-sea drains occurs annually. IID continues to coordinate with the Habitat Conservation Plan Implementation Team on pupfish connectivity planning.

The SSAQMP is a comprehensive science-based adaptive approach to address air quality mitigation requirements associated with the QSA water transfer. The SSAQMP includes mapping playa exposure, modeling wind conditions, and estimating annual emissions. Data from the annual emissions monitoring program is used

Least Sandpiper and two Western Sandpipers on the shore of the Salton Sea.



to recommend proactive dust control projects on areas around the Salton Sea that have the potential to become emissive. Since 2016, IID has implemented over 2,500 acres of surface roughening and vegetation enhancement projects around the Salton Sea on high priority exposed lakebed. One deep groundwater well and six shallow groundwater wells have been

developed for the future establishment of vegetation near Salton City and Bombay Beach. Remote sensing, ground-based sensors, and imaging are used to monitor and adaptively manage implemented projects. Annual reports and data from the SSAQMP are shared with the ICAPCD, South Coast Air Quality Management District (South Coast AQMD), and SSP.

Additional information about QSA environmental mitigation can be found at [www.iid.com/water/library/qs-water-transfer/mitigation-implementation](http://www.iid.com/water/library/qs-water-transfer/mitigation-implementation).

Funding for the implementation of QSA environmental mitigation activities is from the QSA Joint Powers Authority (JPA), which is comprised of designated representatives from the CDFW, Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), IID, and San Diego County Water Authority. Additional information about the QSA JPA can be found at [www.qsajpa.org](http://www.qsajpa.org).

### 2.2.2 New River Improvement Project

The New River contains untreated waste and other solid pollutants as it flows north through the city of Calexico before emptying out into the Salton Sea. This polluted waterway is a threat to human health and ecosystems and limits economic development in the Imperial Valley. Therefore, the New River Improvement Project addresses this longstanding problem to help minimize human contact as follows: (1) by installing an automated trash screen (**Figure 12**) to remove solid waste, (2) by building a diversion structure and bypass pipeline to prevent the untreated river from flowing through a 1.5 mile stretch of the New River within the City of Calexico, and (3) by rerouting treated wastewater

**Figure 12.** An automated trash screen installed in the New River in Calexico allows for the removal of solid waste.



to restore flow in the river channel through the city, to maintain floodplain wetlands, and to improve water quality.

DWR, together with the State Water Resources Control Board and California State Parks, contributed \$46.5 million dollars to support the City's efforts to improve conditions for the New River.

In early 2025, the contractor installed the electrical and mechanical components of the project. After completing these components, the system underwent operational testing, and the city staff received system training. In May 2025, regional leaders from local, state, and nonprofit organizations gathered in the City of Calexico **(Figure 13)** to celebrate the completion of Phase 1 of the project. The completion of Phase 1 marks an important milestone for environmental and public health for the area, including for the Salton Sea.

**Figure 13.** State representatives, City officials, and community partners cutting the ribbon to celebrate the completion of Phase 1 of the New River Improvement Project on May 23, 2025.





# 3 Partnerships

Partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies; the community; tribal governments; and other interested parties are crucial in helping to fulfill the goals of the SSP. The SSP Team is working with partners to pursue available funding sources; develop projects; share data; improve community engagement, outreach, and involvement; and streamline planning and approval processes. In addition, the SSP Team is collaborating with partners to develop templates for land access, water availability, public access opportunities, and other elements key to the success of the SSP.



## 3.1 Alianza

Alianza has been a longstanding partner on community outreach and engagement, serving as the co-chair for the SSP Community Engagement Committee. Alianza has been leading the work for the [Campaign for Thriving Salton Sea Communities](#), which helps the SSP continue to identify community priorities and other initiatives occurring around the Sea. Alianza has also developed an online tool for land use alignment to map and track major infrastructure projects in Coachella and Imperial valleys.

## 3.2 Audubon California

The SSP Team has continued to partner with Audubon California to address data gaps and develop projects at the Salton Sea. Audubon California has continued to conduct quarterly shoreline bird surveys. They collaborated with the SSP during the development of the Salton Sea Monitoring Implementation Plan (MIP) and helped identify strategies to streamline data sharing between SSP partners.

In addition, the SSP Team has been working with Audubon California to support the Bombay Beach Wetland Enhancement Project, which will suppress dust while also creating managed wetland habitat on the east

side of the Sea (additional details on this project are provided in Chapter 2). In 2025, Audubon and their contractors worked with the State team to advance public access conceptual renderings, which are being incorporated into the design package. Additionally, Audubon has partnered in several community engagement opportunities to answer questions and receive community feedback on the Bombay Beach Wetland Enhancement Project. In January 2026, Audubon was awarded \$2 million in federal appropriations funding through Reclamation, secured with the support of Representative Dr. Raul Ruiz, Senator Alex Padilla, and Senator Adam Schiff. These funds will help advance implementation of public access at the Bombay Beach Wetland Enhancement Project.

Audubon, USFWS, CDFW staff, and other volunteers conducted shorebird surveys in April, August, and December 2025. This successful and coordinated effort surveyed shorebirds along the entire shoreline of the Salton Sea. Future shoreline surveys are currently being planned for April 2026. Additionally, Audubon California has collaborated on community tours to bring residents, high school students, and participants from their Salton Sea Leadership Program to SSP projects and other areas of interest. Staff are actively involved in the SSP Community Engagement Committee.

### **3.3 Bureau of Land Management**

BLM is a cooperating agency working with USACE to implement projects covered in the EA for the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan. The State coordinates with BLM when projects are being designed and implemented on BLM land. The SSP coordinated with BLM for temporary encroachment permits for surveys and preconstruction work at the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project and for a right-of-way grant to construct the portion of the SCH project that overlaps with BLM land. BLM staff from the two regional offices participate in monthly coordination meetings with DWR and USACE to maintain continued collaboration amongst the federal cooperating agencies for implementation of the projects analyzed in the EA.

### **3.4 California Air Resources Board**

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) is a participant in the performance and air quality monitoring of vegetation enhancement and dust suppression projects with SSP's Air Quality Team. CARB staff helped in the preparation of the air quality monitoring plans and reports. CARB staff are also members of the Community Engagement Committee.

### **3.5 California State Parks**

In 2025, the California State Parks team, leading the work at the Salton Sea State Recreation Area, has been working closely with the SSP on a boat ramp feasibility study to identify the best area to establish a new boat ramp that connects to the

Sea. Additionally, the State Parks team collaborated and presented at an SSP community meeting to ensure close coordination on the updated General Plan for the Salton Sea Recreation Area.

### **3.6 Coachella Valley Water District**

CVWD owns land along the northern shore of the Sea, as well as drains with inflows into and towards the Sea. CVWD is an SSP Team partner and has provided access to property and data crucial to project planning and design, has participated in SSP meetings, and has provided access to install air quality monitoring equipment at four sites to evaluate the potential for dust emissivity. The State will continue to work with CVWD as projects planned along the northern shore are advanced in 2026 and beyond.

### **3.7 Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board**

The construction or operation of SSP projects may impact water bodies, wetlands, or Waters of the State that are regulated by the Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board (CRBRWQCB). This may include impacts to wetlands that require a 401 certification or compliance with the Waste Discharge Requirements (WDR) Program permit, direct discharges of pollutants (regulated by the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System or NPDES permit), or stormwater discharges from project areas (requiring a SWPPP). Necessary applications have been filed with the CRBRWQCB.

**SSP Team and partners gather to observe the release of water into the Species Conservation Habitat Project in May 2025.**



During 2025, the SSP Team continued coordination and discussions with the CRBRWQCB regarding SSP program milestones and progress and upcoming permitting needs. The SSP Team also provided input into the CRBRWQCB planning processes. A regular standing meeting continued through 2025 to facilitate ongoing collaboration for project permitting, and implementation has led to a more efficient permitting process. In addition, CDFW staff have continued to coordinate with the CRBRWQCB to conduct quarterly water quality sampling in the Salton Sea to inform programs and maximize resources. The data will go through a quality assurance process and will

be entered into the publicly available California Environmental Data Exchange Network. Preliminary data is published on CRBRWQCB's [website](#).

### **3.8 Imperial Irrigation District**

The SSP Team and IID have been collaborating on a broad range of Salton Sea management priorities, including the SCH Project and Expansion, Bombay Beach Wetland Enhancement Project, and Kane Spring Project. Easements were also finalized and recorded for the Tule Wash and Clubhouse project areas on IID land.

IID was an integral partner and signatory in developing the December 2022 Salton Sea Commitment Agreement and secured an additional \$245 million for the SSP upon execution of the System Conservation Implementation Agreement in August 2024.

IID continued to share their available geologic, water quality, and drain flow data in 2025. DWR uses this data as needed to supplement their groundwater data collection and design of projects, such as Kane Spring and SCH Vegetation. IID continues to share annual emissions estimates and proactive dust control planning and

monitoring data as part of the SSAQMP, used by the SSP to support the DSAP.

The SSP Team is working with IID to develop a Programmatic Land Access Agreement for future projects. The SSP Team also entered into a number of other permits for planning and design work.

### 3.9 Imperial County

The SSP Team participated in interagency meetings on the Desert Shores Channel Restoration Project, which includes Imperial County and the SSA. Imperial County has taken the lead role in CEQA compliance.

The SSP Team recognizes that partnering with local agencies can provide substantial public benefits and will continue to coordinate with Imperial County to identify lands and projects that may be eligible for partnering with the State.

### 3.10 Imperial County Air Pollution Control District

ICAPCD is a key partner for the SSP Team in implementing projects around the Sea. ICAPCD staff have served as members of the Long-Range Planning Committee (LRPC), MIP Working Groups, and the Community Engagement Committee. Recently, ICAPCD has toured SSP restoration projects. In 2025, the SSP Team closely collaborated with ICAPCD on dust suppression projects.

### MESA students from Imperial Valley College join SSP Team members to learn about career paths related to ongoing restoration projects at the Salton Sea.



### 3.11 Imperial Valley College

In 2025, the SSP formalized a new and impactful partnership with the Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) Program at Imperial Valley College (IVC). The MESA Program supports students, particularly those from underserved and underrepresented communities, pursuing STEM majors and prepares them for transfer to four-year institutions while strengthening their academic and professional pathways in science, engineering, and technology fields.

This collaboration reflects SSP's commitment to workforce development by connecting restoration projects at the Salton Sea with educational opportunities for the next generation of STEM

professionals. The partnership fosters real-world learning, career exposure, and direct engagement with SSP staff, advancing students' understanding of ecological restoration work and potential careers in environmental science and project delivery.

In Spring 2025, SSP hosted a group of MESA students for an on-site visit to the SCH Project at the Salton Sea. During this tour, students were introduced to the restoration activities underway, including habitat development and ecosystem improvements. SSP staff facilitated interactive field discussions, providing context on operational restoration goals, engineering methodologies, and conservation practices. The experience aimed to bridge classroom knowledge

with field applications, highlighting the skills and interdisciplinary collaboration required in large-scale environmental restoration projects.

The visit was complemented by a classroom-style dialogue between MESA students and SSP professionals. Staff from engineering, project management, and biological science backgrounds shared personal insights about their academic journeys and career paths that led them into the restoration field. These discussions underscored the diverse educational routes and professional competencies that contribute to successful careers in environmental and resource management.

Building on the spring activities, the SSP and the MESA Program organized a second engagement in Fall 2025, deepening the relationship and continuing their workforce development efforts. This follow-up visit reaffirmed SSP's role as a regional educational partner and provided returning and new MESA participants with more exposure to restoration operations and career conversations. Students had the opportunity to observe seasonal progress at the SCH Project and revisit key themes in project logistics, interdisciplinary teamwork, and restoration science.

The fall session further emphasized career pathways by facilitating additional discussions with SSP staff, including engineers, biologists, and project managers. These sessions helped students connect theoretical STEM coursework with tangible job functions and professional

development strategies relevant to restoration and related environmental sectors.

The partnership between SSP and the IVC MESA Program enhances regional workforce development by integrating hands-on learning with intentional career exploration. By engaging students directly with ongoing restoration projects and professionals in the field, SSP contributes to building a diverse pipeline of future scientists, engineers, and environmental practitioners. This collaboration is anticipated to expand in subsequent years with additional learning activities, mentorship opportunities, and potential internship or field-work pathways aligned with SSP objectives and regional employment needs.

### **3.12 Government-to-Government Consultations and Partnership with California Native American Tribes**

CNRA, DWR, and CDFW are all committed to meaningful and timely consultation with California tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the Salton Sea area. The CNRA Tribal Consultation Policy (2012, rev.2025) requires the SSP to provide tribes with an opportunity for government-to-government consultation early in project planning and development to ensure tribal input is considered and cultural resources are appropriately managed and protected.

The SSP Team initiated a formal government-to-government consultation process with 25 tribal Nations that may be affected by projects

described in the DSAP and completed the consultation process in July 2020. Since then, with the assistance of DWR's Office of Tribal Affairs, multiple tribal roundtables and informational meetings have been held. The most recent tribal roundtable was held on February 11, 2025, co-hosted by Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians and CNRA, with facilitation support from DWR Office of Tribal Affairs. The purpose of the 2025 Tribal Roundtable was to seek a better understanding of tribal priorities, interests, and concerns early in the development of SSP-related plans and conceptual SSP projects. Throughout the implementation and operation of SSP projects, the SSP Team remains committed to meaningful consultations and development of partnerships with tribes with interests and concerns related to SSP projects.

In addition to the early project planning consultation, USACE led Tribal Consultation for Section 106 compliance for the EA. The SSP Team as well as the federal cooperating agencies were invited to participate in the consultations. In 2024, tribal consultation for the EA and development of the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement was completed. As SSP projects seek Section 404 coverage under the Letter of Permission (LOP) Procedures prepared for the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan, USACE is inviting the 26 traditionally and culturally affiliated tribes to consult by preparing the necessary documentation to support Section 106 consultations. The USACE invited tribes to consult on three SSP Projects in 2025.

**California Natural Resources Agency Secretary Wade Crowfoot addresses the crowd gathered for the release of water into the Species Conservation Habitat Project in May 2025.**



In the fall of 2024, a working group including representatives from the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe, the SSP, DWR Office of Tribal Affairs, and the CDFW Office of Communications, Education and Outreach was formed to develop interpretive panels for display at the SCH Visitor Observation Area. CDFW's Office of Communications, Education and Outreach provided professional interpretive signage services including specialists, illustrators, and graphics design. A site visit was conducted on February 12, 2025, to the SCH Visitor Observation Area with invitations extended to

the 26 traditionally and culturally affiliated tribes, USFWS, CNRA, DWR and CDFW. Over 10 working group meetings were held in 2025, to draft text, provide references, art, and imagery contributing to the development of interpretive panel designs. The working group collaboration will continue in 2026 until the signage is approved, finalized, and installed.

Tribal monitors are providing subject matter expertise for construction and/or pre-construction cultural resources and tribal cultural resources surveys on multiple SSP projects to inform avoidance, protection, management and treatment measures as needed. Monitors from

Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians and Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians are providing tribal services including monitoring at the SCH Project site (Center and West Ponds Expansion Project). Torres Martinez is also providing tribal services including surveys, monitoring, and document reviews for various Vegetation Enhancement Project sites and Bombay Beach Wetlands Enhancement Project site.

In December 2025, the first government-to-government consultation meeting between Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians and the Department of Water Resources was held to support information sharing and collaboration on the North Lake Wetlands Project. Consultation meetings are proposed to continue through recurring monthly meetings or upon tribal request.

Consistent with CNRA's Tribal Consultation Policy and DWR's Tribal Engagement Policy (2016), tribes may request consultation at any time as part of an ongoing consultation process.

### **3.13 Natural Resources Conservation Service**

The NRCS is a cooperating agency working with USACE to fund planning and implementation of projects covered in the EA for the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan through a Watershed Plan. The NRCS-led development of the Watershed Plan kicked off in 2024, with the intention of having a Watershed Plan that could provide the SSP with eligible federal watershed funding for restoration projects. In 2025, NRCS had limited resources to move the

project forward, but the SSP hopes that progress is made on the Watershed Plan moving into 2026.

### 3.14 Riverside County

The SSP Team continued to meet regularly with the County of Riverside and their contractors in 2025 to coordinate project and planning priorities related to projects at the northern end of the Salton Sea. These discussions were critical for informing an agreement in principle between SSA, of which Riverside County is a member, and the SSP to implement an expanded North Lake Wetlands Project that includes the project area for the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project.

### 3.15 Salton Sea Authority

The SSA is a JPA with a focus on protecting human health and revitalizing the environment and economy of the Salton Sea. The SSA's board members represent five of the major interested parties at the Sea: the CVWD, County of Imperial, County of Riverside, IID, and the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians. This representation makes the SSA uniquely positioned to assist in planning and implementing the SSP.

CNRA and the SSA have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining how the parties will coordinate and consult to support the broader goals of the Salton Sea restoration and the SSP. The MOU contemplates continued close coordination between the SSA and the SSP to ensure prompt communication of local priorities to CNRA through the SSA, as outlined in the MOU,

**Great Blue Herons nesting on rookery poles.**



and to seek out federal funding opportunities for projects that will help restore the Sea. CNRA staff hold regular standing meetings with SSA, serve as ex officio members on the SSA Board, provide monthly updates at Board meetings, and coordinate on planning, funding, and public outreach.

SSA and the SSP are the Non-Federal Sponsors of the USACE Feasibility Study. Work on the Feasibility Study officially began in March 2023 and continued throughout 2025, as described below under the USACE section.

In November 2025, SSA and the SSP presented a joint plan for implementing an expanded North Lake Wetlands Project that includes the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project area. Advancing this expanded project is a critical priority for the State in 2026.

### 3.16 South Coast Air Quality Management District

South Coast AQMD has regulatory authority over the contribution or control of anthropogenic fugitive dust emissions in the Salton Sea region within Riverside County. Dust control projects located within the South Coast AQMD's jurisdiction are subject to applicable Air District Rules and Regulations. The SSP Team coordinated with the South Coast AQMD during the development of the DSAP, especially related to project areas in Riverside County. South Coast AQMD was an active part of the MIP Working Group. The State worked collaboratively with the South Coast AQMD prior to project construction and has coordinated with them on monitoring station locations in their jurisdiction.

### **3.17 Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians**

The Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians are traditionally and culturally affiliated with the Salton Sea area and owns land along the northern shore of the Salton Sea in the vicinity of the Whitewater River.

In September of 2023, the first temporary entry permit (TEP) was finalized between the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians and DWR. The TEP allows entry to three parcels of land to conduct reconnaissance and surveys to inform, plan, and design the North Lake Project. The TEPs are renewed annually and was maintained through 2025 to support further survey efforts.

As an important partner in the region, CNRA is committed to regular government-to-government consultations and partnering with the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Tribe on projects impacting the Salton Sea. Initial conversations on potential partnerships on northern shore projects have continued, and the State looks forward to working with the Tribe in this region to support their priorities and gather field data to help evaluate potential alternative approaches for dust suppression and mitigation. The State is also working with the Tribe to identify collaborative projects to expand on existing restoration work on exposed lakebed that is being funded by the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy. Tribe members are part of and collaborate on the Community Engagement Committee and have a seat on the Salton Sea Conservancy.

Beginning in October 2023 and continuing throughout 2025, tribal informational meetings and consultation meetings were held on a weekly basis with the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians and the SSP. The focus of these meetings was to support information sharing on various SSP projects. In 2024, Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians and DWR established a Tribal Services Agreement as a mechanism to compensate the Tribe for services such as surveys, monitoring, document review, and participation in the planning and development of projects. In collaboration with Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians, the SSP established protocols and procedures when accessing land and performing work around the Sea, scheduled tours and site visits, and planned for ways to engage tribal youth. In 2025, the SSP coordinated with tribal monitors to inspect ongoing construction activities at vegetation enhancement sites and the SCH Project. Tribal representatives participated in various tours and events at the SCH Project and vegetation enhancement sites in 2025. Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Tribe hosted the hybrid tribal roundtable for the SSP in February 2025.

Collaboration and tribal monitoring is expected to continue into 2026, along with the following activities:

- Participating in design of interpretive panels for the SCH Visitor Observation Area.
- Actively engaging in the Yuma Ridgway's Rail selenium research.

### **3.18 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

In November 2024, USACE and DWR completed the multi-year efforts to establish a programmatic permitting pathway and complete the NEPA process for SSP projects. These efforts were funded through a Water Resources Development Act agreement. In 2025, DWR submitted two application packages using the LOP procedures, and held two pre-notification, pre-filing meetings with federal landowning and permitting agencies, and state permitting agencies. The first set of permits using the EA were issued in September 2025. Two additional sets of permits for SSP projects are anticipated to be issued in 2026.

To support implementation of SSP projects, USACE and DWR also collaboratively prepared a draft Monitoring and Discovery Plan for the protection of inadvertent cultural resources. USACE circulated the plan with consulting parties to the Programmatic Agreement and will finalize the plan in 2026. USACE staff are also working closely with the SSP Team to facilitate coordination and information sharing with other consulting federal agencies with permitting or landowner actions. Monthly meetings were initiated in 2025 between DWR, USACE, and the federal consulting agencies and will continue into 2026.

The USACE Los Angeles District leads the development of the Feasibility Study in partnership with SSA and the SSP. This state-federal partnership brings together a multi-disciplinary team to evaluate long-term Salton

Sea ecosystem restoration projects. When completed, the study's Tentatively Selected Plan will be recommended to Congress for authorization. If the project in the Recommended Plan is approved by Congress, it has the potential to receive a 65% federal cost share for construction.

### 3.19 U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

The SSP Team meets regularly with Reclamation to advance implementation of the vegetation enhancement projects and the Reclamation-funded SCH expansion, as described in Chapter 2. In September 2024, the SSP received a \$170 million commitment from Reclamation and another \$5 million commitment in January 2025, the last of the remaining funding installments, to accelerate dust suppression and aquatic habitat projects at the Sea. In total, SSP received \$245 million from Reclamation between 2023 and 2025, which will be used to expand the SCH.

In 2025, the SSP continued to coordinate with Reclamation to identify federal funding opportunities to advance SSP projects and priorities:

- Coordinated with Reclamation to fund a pilot project for a boat ramp at the north end of the Sea.
- Conducted preapplication meetings for Bombay Beach Wetlands (June 2025) and regular meetings during the year to discuss projects.

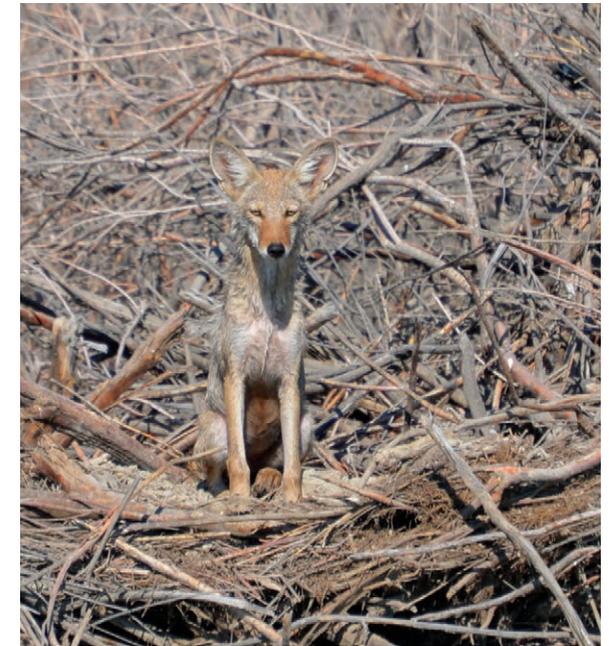
- Conducted preapplication meeting for the Center and West Ponds Expansion Project (January 2025) and Land Access Agreement approval under the Programmatic Land Agreement.

### 3.20 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The USFWS operates the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge in Imperial County. USFWS partners with the SSP Team on monitoring and information sharing, as part of the SCH Project and on developing the SCH vegetation projects that are adjacent to USFWS refuge lands. A special use permit was authorized by the USFWS for a parcel in the SCH expansion area. The USFWS also plays a key regulatory role for all SSP activities that may affect federally protected species. USFWS staff serve on the MIP Working Group and the Science Committee. The USFWS is also an active member of the QSA Implementation Team and participates in quarterly meetings. The QSA Implementation Team is responsible for implementing the mitigation requirements of the QSA water transfer.

Through 2025, the Yuma Ridgeway's Rail and Selenium working group continued to meet with participants from the USFWS, CDFW, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), DWR, University of Idaho, and Reclamation. The purpose of the working group is to discuss the current selenium research and the various construction and proposed projects affecting the marshes and the federally listed Yuma Ridgeway's Rail around the

Coyote near the Salton Sea.



Salton Sea. A priority for this group has been to identify risks, constraints, and opportunities for wetland enhancement and restoration around the Sea. This effort going forward will also help create comprehensive documents to identify research needs and results, as well as standard protocols for data collection. DWR is helping to fund this selenium research, allowing USGS to expand their work to include an area adjacent to SCH.



# 4 Community Engagement

The SSP Team continued to place a strong focus on community engagement throughout 2025. The SSP Team continues to seek to develop and actively maintain an engagement program that enables consistent lines of open communication to intentionally serve and engage the frontline communities of the Salton Sea region, creating opportunities for community members to share concerns and provide input, and ultimately contribute to the delivery of projects that improve conditions for communities around the Salton Sea.



## 4.1 Community Engagement Committee

The Community Engagement Committee advises and assists 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 SSP projects, for the State to integrate into the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan and long-term restoration projects for the Salton Sea. The Committee's Charter lays out its advisory role, its composition, and its dedication to inclusivity of all through implementing accepted principles underlying equity and environmental justice. SSP outreach and engagement activities follow the direction of the Community Outreach and Engagement Plan, released in December 2024. This plan has gathered the best strategies and tactics to best engage with Salton Sea communities, based on the recommendations received by the Committee and members of the public.

## 4.2 Engagement Activities

Local SSP Team members served as the point of contact in coordinating and hosting tours of SSP projects throughout 2025 and participated in numerous meetings and forums across the region to provide presentations and program updates.

**Imperial Valley College tour at the Salton Sea.**



**Community meeting at Bombay Beach.**



The SSP hosted and participated in multiple tours throughout the year, with more than a dozen tours at both the SCH and Vegetation Enhancement Project sites. The SSP Team invited and hosted tribal partners, community organizations, partner agencies and legislators, academia, and regional media to provide updates about the latest project milestones and identify areas for collaboration.

Public engagement through in-person and virtual meetings has occurred as a part of all major ongoing SSP activities. Over the past year, the SSP Team has also been involved in the following activities:

- SSP Update community meetings
- Community Engagement Committee meetings

- MIP Annual Work Plan meetings
- SSP Annual Report workshops
- SSP project tours
- SWRCB annual workshop
- SSP End-of-Year recap community meetings

In addition, the SSP Team members participated at various other regional meetings and forums and provided updates, including the following:

- Community Meeting at Bombay Beach Community Services District
- Coachella Valley Water Counts Academy
- Desert Recreation District
- Water Education Foundation
- IVC Mesa Student Tour at SCH
- Imperial Valley Salton Sea Conference

- Monthly SSA Board meetings
- Quarterly QSA JPA meetings
- CRBRWQCB SSP update
- Salton Sea Action Committee meetings
- San Diego County Water Authority Board, SCH Tour
- SCH Tour for Latino Heritage Month
- Desert Healthcare Foundation Health Summit

### **4.3 Engagement for the Salton Sea Management Program and Community Needs Report**

In 2024, the SSP released the *Salton Sea Management Program and Community Needs Report* (CNRA, 2024b) and the related *Salton Sea Community Needs and Recommended Actions*

Report (Better World Group, 2024). These reports identified community needs related to the Salton Sea, described the status of the SSP efforts, and listed potential future opportunities. These potential future opportunities with added funding and capacity would address community needs while implementing restoration projects. Using the *Salton Sea Management Program and Community Needs Report* (Community Needs Report) as a guide, the SSP continues our commitment to seek and recognize opportunities to integrate the identified needs to enhance the work at the Sea.



In 2025, in response to the recommended actions identified in the Community Needs Report, the SSP established a partnership with the IVC MESA Program that reflects SSP's commitment to workforce development by connecting restoration projects at the Salton Sea with educational opportunities for the next generation of STEM professionals, work also continued to

#### Community meeting at Coachella.



enhance existing tribal engagement to fulfill the State's commitment to early, often, and meaningful tribal consultation, and in project planning and development the SSP is incorporating opportunities expand project benefits to include recreational features that reflect our commitment to equitable outdoor access and recreation at the Sea. In addition, Governor Newsom's January 2026 budget proposal includes \$30 million to facilitate public access across priority State projects at the Salton Sea.

#### 4.4 SSP Project Tracker Website

The SSP Team developed the online Project Tracker to provide a comprehensive public platform with updated information on SSP

projects. The Project Tracker shows progress under the Salton Sea Management Program Phase 1: 10-Year Plan in a single location.

Integrated into the SSP website at [www.saltonseaca.gov](http://www.saltonseaca.gov), this tool tracks current progress on Phase 1: 10-Year Plan projects. Projects are viewable and sortable by project phases, activity type, and category. The Explore Projects and Project Info sections display information on the activities, outcomes, and different SSP 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 [State Water Resources Control Board Order 2017-0134](#). Updates to the Project Tracker will continue to occur twice per year.

#### 4.5 Air Quality Website

The SSP Team has completed the design of an air quality data [website](#), which further links to a real-time data website and an archived data website. The real-time data website displays parameters measured continuously across the 21-station air quality monitoring network around the Salton Sea. Parameters include particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>), wind speed and direction, air temperature, relative humidity, precipitation, and saltation flux.

High-precision sensors are used to conduct continuous measurements of these parameters. Due to the large volume of data collected, measurements are aggregated into 10-minute intervals to facilitate subsequent spatial and temporal analyses. The 10-minute interval data are manually reviewed to ensure data validity and are stored on the archived data website. Saltation data require additional post-processing and quality assurance and therefore are available only on the archived data website rather than the real-time data website.

Air quality data have been used to evaluate the relative effectiveness of dust suppression measures implemented under the Program over time. The real-time and archived data websites are publicly available to support transparency and scientific review. Data collected from the

monitoring equipment support science-based decision-making to protect public health and improve environmental conditions around the Salton Sea; however, these data are provided for analytical and project-evaluation purposes only and are not suitable for regulatory compliance determinations.

#### 4.6 Salton Sea Hub Site

The Salton Sea Hub Site is designed to provide new capabilities and tools that will help organize projects, partners, data, visualization tools, and public outreach. The website is envisioned to connect multiple data sets, shapefiles, ArcGIS Online layers, websites, dashboards, Story Maps, and web applications related to the Salton Sea. The ArcGIS Community Hub will be the platform for the Salton Sea Hub Site because of its ease of use and connectivity to existing state, federal, and NGO partners' ArcGIS online published datasets. In early 2026, the SSP Team, led by CDFW, launched the Salton Sea Hub Site at the following link: <https://saltonseacdfw.hub.arcgis.com/>.

#### 4.7 The SSP Website and E-Newsletter

The SSP Team continues to update the program website, [www.saltonseaca.gov](http://www.saltonseaca.gov), to provide both information on SSP projects and opportunities to offer input. The Team is consistently working to ensure a better user experience while navigating the website as well as ensuring compliance and accessibility. The State also continues to share news and information via the CNRA SSP Update e-newsletter that debuted in November 2019.

The SSP e-newsletter provides information on project delivery, important program milestones, the SSP Team, upcoming meetings, and opportunities for engagement. It also offers opportunities for feedback and public comment periods. The SSP e-newsletter is distributed via the CNRA Salton Sea electronic mailing list. These updates occurred at a regular frequency in 2025. You can register to receive the SSP e-newsletter by clicking [here](#).

#### 4.8 Contacting the SSP Team

We encourage the public, community partners, tribal governments, and other interested parties to get involved!

We encourage participation in many ways:

- Attend workshops and committee meetings. Most meetings are open to the public and are accessible virtually. Updates on future meetings are provided through newsletters, flyers, and announcements in traditional and social media.
- Communicate via email: Interested individuals can reach out by email at [cnra-saltonsearesources.ca.gov](mailto:cnra-saltonsearesources.ca.gov).
- Receive website updates and newsletters: Information on current and future updates is provided on the SSP website: <https://saltonseaca.gov/>. Interested individuals may also [sign up](#) to receive regular email updates about the SSP.

# 5 Planning

In 2025, the SSP Team continued its strategic vision and planning activities on five main fronts for delivering dust suppression and habitat projects in the remaining years of the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan:



- The Bombay Beach Wetlands Enhancement Project has been accepted as a Pilot Project for the newly passed Cutting the Green Tape Initiative for a Restoration Management Permit. This permit, in one application, will cover activities related to construction for State Endangered and Threatened Species, Fully Protected Species, and effects to Waters of the State that are covered in a Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement (LSAA).
- The Salton Sea Conservancy is the first new State conservancy created in 15 years and will play a critical role in shaping the future of the Salton Sea. With the Conservancy being responsible for operating and maintaining completed projects, this will allow the SSP to continue its focus on building more large-scale habitat restoration and dust suppression projects at the Salton Sea.
- Beyond the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan, the SSP Team continues to work with USACE and SSA to complete the Feasibility Study for the long-term restoration of the Salton Sea. The study will identify a Tentatively Selected Plan, including completion of the initial design of a project, that will be recommended to Congress for approval. If approved, it will bring substantial funding into the region to finalize project design and construction.

- The Salton Sea MIP, a regional-scale monitoring plan for the Salton Sea ecosystem, was completed in December 2022. The MIP recommended an Annual Work Plan be completed to outline planned and possible monitoring to take place the following year. The second annual Work Plan was completed in 2025, and included surveys and investigations completed during 2025. Development of the 2026 Work Plan began in November 2025 and will be available on the SSP website in early 2026. This will include updated information from the 2025 Work Plan in addition to new studies planned for 2026.
- Following the finalization of the EA in November 2024, LOP Procedures under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) streamlined permitting for activities and projects under the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan.

This chapter also presents an overview of the current funding status and financial planning for the SSP (see Section 5.4). Additional planning efforts to enhance public engagement are described in Chapter 4 (Community Engagement).

## 5.1 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Feasibility Study

The Feasibility Study is a joint effort by USACE Los Angeles District, the SSA, and the SSP. A state and federal, 50-50 cost-share agreement was signed in December 2022 to develop and finalize the

Feasibility Study. DWR and the SSA represent the non-federal co-sponsors in the agreement with USACE. The Feasibility Study officially began in March 2023.

The Feasibility Study's goal is to recommend a restoration plan to Congress for Ecosystem Restoration at the Salton Sea. If a feasible and federally justified restoration solution is identified and approved, it has the potential to receive a 65% federal cost share for construction. The Feasibility Study builds upon the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan and the Long-Range Plan (LRP), which focuses on creating habitat and suppressing dust on exposed lakebed around the Salton Sea.

The Study evaluates different ecosystem restoration plans, referred to as "alternatives," based on effectiveness, cost efficiency, acceptability, duration to achieve restoration benefits, and resiliency to future water supply scenarios. The Study also evaluates existing and future conditions at the Sea without these ecosystem projects.

Work in 2025 includes the development of models, the selection of the final array of long-range restoration alternatives, public updates and meetings, as well as continued federal and state coordination to gather information and progress the evaluation of alternatives through USACE's planning process in accordance with federal regulation and policy.

In partnership with Audubon, an ecological model was developed and approved, and a hydrologic

and hydraulic (H&H) model of existing and future-without-project conditions was also developed but not yet finalized. In December 2025, a Hydrologic Modeling Update virtual meeting was held, a follow-up to the 2024 Future Hydrology Workshop, to provide an update on the model and the proposed hydrologic scenarios for feedback and input. Also in 2025, public outreach and engagement included an update to the SSA Board in November 2025 and participation in the SSP Community Meetings in December 2025.

Planned work in 2026 includes public outreach and meetings, finalizing the H&H model and selection of hydrology scenarios, and the evaluation of the final array of alternatives. It is anticipated that a recommended plan, or preferred restoration alternative, will be selected.

## 5.2 Salton Sea Conservancy

In September 2025 after passage by the California State Legislature, Governor Newsom signed Senate Bill 105, which provides funding for the Salton Sea Conservancy (Conservancy). The Conservancy was created by Senate Bill 583, which was authored by Senator Steve Padilla and signed by Governor Newsom in September 2024.

The Conservancy is governed by a 22-member Board of Directors, which includes designees from Federal, State, local, and tribal entities, as well as NGO representatives and members of the public. This includes one representative of an NGO focused on environmental justice work in the region and one representative of an NGO focused

Tour group at the New River Diversion Structure.



Species Conservation Habitat Project New River Diversion Structure.



on fish and wildlife habitat work in the region, both appointed by the California Natural Resources Secretary.

### **5.3 Salton Sea Monitoring Implementation Plan Annual Work Plan**

The final version of the MIP was released in December 2022 (CNRA, DWR, and CDFW, 2022). The MIP was built from prior scientific efforts to identify, prioritize, and describe monitoring activities to track the status and trends of resources at the Salton Sea, which can be used to inform the implementation of the restoration programs. The MIP recommended that an annual study or work plan be produced, which would highlight the planned monitoring activities to be conducted in the upcoming year.

In 2025, CNRA, DWR, and CDFW collaborated with partner agencies, NGOs, and the scientific community to compile an inventory of planned monitoring and studies for 2026, including baseline status, effectiveness monitoring, and focused studies. The Work Plan promotes collaborative science to leverage partner expertise and investments. It supports the SSP's vision for dust suppression and habitat projects during the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan, while also informing long-range planning beyond the Phase 1: 10-Year Plan. The 2026 MIP Annual Work Plan will be released in early 2026.

The data collected will form the basis to evaluate the overall, long-term effectiveness of projects through an adaptive management approach. It is envisioned that individual projects would develop effective monitoring plans based off the MIP, tailored to that project's specific objectives. This would provide consistent methodology, facilitate comparison to regional trends, and allow for the roll-up of results across multiple projects. Where possible, monitoring activities would be coordinated among partners to increase data sharing and realize economies of scale.

An environmental DNA study was conducted in 2025 by CDFW staff, after identification of a knowledge gap around plankton and macroinvertebrate research in and around the Salton Sea. Samples were collected in the Salton Sea, the SCH ponds, and other waters within the Salton Sea watershed. Analysis of samples collected in 2025 will be completed in the spring of 2026.

### **5.4 Funding Status and Planning**

A total of \$245 million in federal funding has been committed to advance the expansion of the SCH Project. In December 2023, \$70 million was allocated for construction and project management of the initial SCH Expansion. This was followed by an additional \$170 million committed in September 2024, and the final \$5 million in January 2025 to support the design and construction of further SCH expansion phases. These funds are committed to the State through a Reclamation funding agreement, providing

reimbursement to the State for work performed. Together, this investment is now actively supporting construction of the SCH Expansion ponds, increasing the project's footprint to approximately 9,500 acres.

In addition, Proposition 4 (Climate Bond) funding authorizes \$160 million for Salton Sea restoration and management projects, along with up to \$10 million to establish the Salton Sea Conservancy, which will support the long-term operation and maintenance of the State's restoration projects. Proposition 4 funding will advance priority projects around the Sea including the North Lake Wetlands Project in the northern Salton Sea, the Bombay Beach Wetlands Enhancement Project along the eastern shoreline, and the Kane Spring Project in the southern Salton Sea. In addition, in 2025, the Wildlife Conservation Board awarded the SSP a \$5,231,066 Proposition 50 grant to support construction of the Bombay Beach Wetlands Enhancement Project.

The Governor's January 2026 Budget Proposal includes \$30 million proposed for the SSP to support continued planning and implementation efforts. This funding is intended to enhance and expand priority Salton Sea projects, with a primary focus on advancing new public access opportunities across SSP project sites. If approved, this investment would address a key community priority identified through the Community Needs Report process: improving public access to SSP projects for Salton Sea communities.



## 6 Next Steps

Thanks to new funding, strengthened partnerships and improved efficiencies, the SSP's 15,000-acre target for habitat projects is firmly within reach. As outlined below, the SSP Team will continue to advance these high-priority projects over the course of 2026 and will work towards significantly expanding its dust suppression projects to more closely align with new areas of exposed lakebed that are at high-risk for contributing emissive dust pollution.



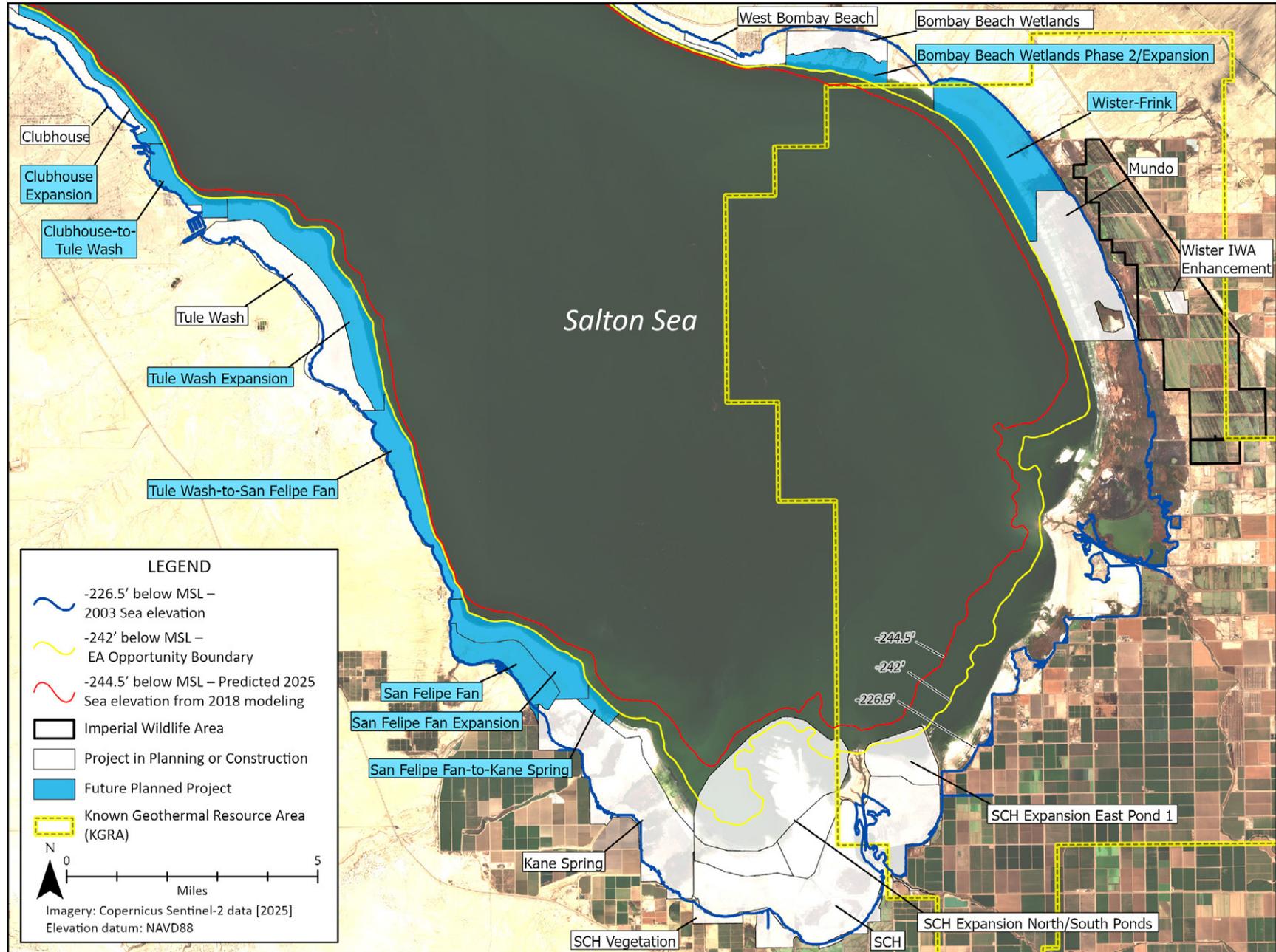
Using the NEPA EA opportunity area as a guide and incorporating new information gathered in 2024 allowed the SSP Team to identify and refine future specific projects to meet the State Water Resources Control Board Order target of 29,800 acres. This was done (1) by identifying project areas and associated landowners and (2) by focusing on key attributes for successful project delivery, such as water availability, elevation and year of anticipated actual exposure, dust emissions avoided, and projected water need.

In 2025, the SSP Team refined the project list as presented herein. The projects chosen to meet the 29,800-acre target are shown in **Figure 14**. The northern Salton Sea is shown in **Figure 14a**, and the southern Salton Sea is shown in **Figure 14b**. Projects that are described in Chapter 2 (SSP Project Delivery) are labeled on the figure as “Projects in Planning or Construction.” Projects labeled “Future Planned Project” are further described in **Table 2**. Taken together, the future planned projects comprise 10,241 acres. The projects listed as in planning or construction (described in Chapter 2) total 20,715 acres. The summed acreage value of 30,956 acres is higher than the acreage target of 29,800 acres from the State Board Order to allow for optionality as planning and design progress over the coming years. **Table 2** presents project work planned for 2026 to 2028. Site specific

**Figure 14a. Northern Salton Sea. Future planned projects, shown in blue shading, will meet the State Board Order acreage requirement. Project areas discussed in Chapter 2 are denoted as “Project in Planning or Construction” on the figure. Note: IWA = Imperial Wildlife Area.**



**Figure 14b. Southern Salton Sea. Future planned projects, shown in blue shading, will meet the State Board Order acreage requirement. Project areas discussed in Chapter 2 are denoted as “Project in Planning or Construction” on the figure. Note: IWA = Imperial Wildlife Area.**



**Table 2. Salton Sea Program Projects Planned for 2026 to 2028**

Year	SWRC 2017-0134 Year End Goal	SWRC 2017-0134 Cumulative Year End Goal	Projects
2026	4,000	21,600	<p>Continue construction on the SCH Expansion (7,490 acres).</p> <p>Complete remaining construction at Tule Wash (Reclamation) vegetation enhancement (298 acres).</p> <p>Initiate and complete construction on vegetation enhancement at Tule Wash and Clubhouse on IID Parcels (380 acres).</p> <p>Initiate construction on Wister Unit Marsh Bird Habitat Project (130 acres).</p> <p>Initiate Progressive Design Build Contract for design and construction on the Kane Spring Project (up to 3,200 acres).</p> <p>Initiate contract for the North Lake Wetlands Project (up to 2,000 acres), including North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project area. This project could include an additional 800 acres for the North Lake Wetlands Expansion.</p> <p>Complete design at the Bombay Beach Wetland Project (577 acres).</p> <p>Initiate permitting and land access on vegetation enhancement expansion project surrounding Clubhouse and Tule Wash (approx. 2,000 acres).</p> <p>Initiate design and permitting at the SCH Vegetation Project (537 acres).</p> <p>Ongoing construction work to continue.</p>
2027	4,000	25,600	<p>Continue construction on SCH Expansion and possible completion.</p> <p>Initiate construction on the Clubhouse and Tule Wash Expansion vegetation projects (approx. 2,000 acres). This would be the initial phase of these expansion projects, accounting for part of the full acreage values listed for 2028.</p> <p>Initiate design and permitting on the Travertine Project (297 acres).</p> <p>Initiate design and permitting on the Mundo Project (2,354 acres).</p> <p>Ongoing construction work to continue.</p>
2028	4,200	29,800	<p>Complete construction at SCH Project (7,490 acres).</p> <p>Initiate construction at Desert Shores Channel Restoration Project (30 acres).</p> <p>Initiate construction on San Felipe Fan Project (866 acres).</p> <p>Initiate construction at the SCH Vegetation Project (537 acres).</p> <p>Initiate construction on the Bombay Beach Wetland Phase 2 Expansion Project (236 acres).</p> <p>Initiate construction on remaining vegetation enhancement projects to meet 29,800-acres. Projects will be selected from the following universe of potential projects to achieve 29,800 acres (also shown in Figure 14): Wister Frink, 2058 acres; Clubhouse-to-Tule Wash, 479 acres; San Felipe Fan-to-Kane Spring, 192 acres; San Felipe Fan Expansion, 1014 acres; Clubhouse Expansion, 516 acres; Tule Wash-to-San Felipe Fan, 1024 acres; Tule Wash Expansion, 1761 acres; and Whitewater West, 1295 acres. Note that not all projects listed above will be selected—the SSP will determine which of the above projects to implement for purposes of reaching 29,800 acres based on site readiness and project feasibility. Additionally, the acreage for the projects listed above are estimates. Final acreage of these projects will be refined based on site investigation.</p>

investigations will refine acreage estimates and guide which projects can be taken from concept to implementation.

One factor that has informed the choice of future project locations is the amount of available acreage on which to construct projects. The Sea has receded at a slower pace than predicted in 2018, at the start of the 10-Year Plan period. The actual exposed acreage in 2025 is about 20,000 acres smaller than was projected in 2018 because inflows to the Sea have been higher than predicted by prior modeling studies. The acreage difference corresponds to the area between the 244.5 feet below mean sea level (msl) elevation

(the red line on **Figure 14**), which is the previously predicted 2025 elevation (predicted in 2018), and the current shoreline as shown on the figure. Some of the project expansion areas are identified based on the recession trend of the Sea and may not be immediately buildable because they have recently become exposed, and the lakebed is still saturated. At other sites in proximity to freshwater inflows, available acreage on which to implement restoration projects is limited by the growth of wetlands from water flowing to the exposed lakebed from agricultural drains. As of 2025, wetlands have formed on 11,800 acres of the exposed lakebed.

Further discussion of available acreage on which to implement projects, including description of recent wetland mapping efforts, is presented in Appendix A (Existing Conditions).

### 6.1 Meeting State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134 Targets

The State Water Resources Control Board Order sets out annual targets that the SSP Team has been actively working towards. Progress on those targets over the period from 2018 to 2025 is presented in **Table 3**.

**Table 3. Salton Sea Program Projects Summary**

Year	SWRC 2017-0134 Year End Milestone	SWRC 2017-0134 Cumulative Year End Milestone	Land Access Secured	Total Acres Under Construction in Each Year	Habitat Acres Completed <sup>1</sup>	Dust Suppression Acres		Cumulative Reported Acres to SWRCB	Projects
						Interim Dust Suppression Acres <sup>2</sup>	Dust Suppression Acres Completed <sup>3</sup>		
2018	500	500	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2019	1,300	1,800	4,100	-	-	-	-	-	-
2020	1,700	3,500	0	755	-	755	-	755	Three interim dust suppression projects completed within the SCH footprint (755 acres).
2021	3,500	7,000	1,709	5,809	22	500	-	1,277	Construction on the 4,100-acre Species Conservation Habitat project began in Jan 2021. 22 acres of desert pupfish habitat created at SCH. 500 acres of interim dust control implemented within the SCH footprint. 30 acres were converted to completed acres from within the SCH footprint.

**Table 3. Salton Sea Program Projects Summary (Cont.)**

Year	SWRC 2017-0134 Year End Milestone	SWRC 2017-0134 Cumulative Year End Milestone	Land Access Secured	Total Acres Under Construction in Each Year	Habitat Acres Completed <sup>1</sup>	Dust Suppression Acres		Cumulative Reported Acres to SWRCB	Projects
						Interim Dust Suppression Acres <sup>2</sup>	Dust Suppression Acres Completed <sup>3</sup>		
2021 (con)									Construction began on three vegetation restoration projects on Reclamation Lands (1,709 acres): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clubhouse Vegetation Enhancement Project (399 acres);</li> <li>• Tule Wash Vegetation Enhancement Project (1,217 acres);</li> <li>• Bombay Beach West Vegetation Enhancement Project (93 acres).</li> </ul>
2022	1,750	8,750	0	5,504	15	25 118*	290 197*	1,607	<p>Approximately 290 acres were seeded/planted and irrigated within the existing rows of grass bales at Clubhouse and West Bombay Beach sites.</p> <p>25 acres were converted to completed acres from the Clubhouse site.</p> <p>Major progress on the SCH Project included completion of most pond berms, nesting islands, the causeway connecting the saline water source to the pump and habitat ponds, and the New River Diversion Structure.</p> <p>*The 93 acres at West Bombay Beach were previously reported as complete. However, seeding was not successful, so these areas were moved to interim dust suppression since this site received bales and furrows. West Bombay Beach will be re-seeded in 2025.</p>
2023	2,750	11,500	1,000	4,960	130	319	414	2,445	<p>414 acres vegetation completed in 2023 (171 acres at Clubhouse and 243 acres at Tule Wash).</p> <p>319 additional acres of grass bales installed at Tule Wash (reported as interim dust suppression acres).</p> <p>67 acres were converted to completed acres from the Tule Wash site.</p> <p>Major construction completed on SCH.</p> <p>130 habitat acres consist of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100 acres in the east and west sedimentation basins at SCH.</li> <li>• 30 acres submerged at the south end of the diversion structure on either side of the New River Diversion Channel within the SCH footprint.</li> </ul>

**Table 3. Salton Sea Program Projects Summary (Cont.)**

Year	SWRC 2017-0134 Year End Milestone	SWRC 2017-0134 Cumulative Year End Milestone	Land Access Secured	Total Acres Under Construction in Each Year	Habitat Acres Completed <sup>1</sup>	Dust Suppression Acres		Cumulative Reported Acres to SWRCB	Projects
						Interim Dust Suppression Acres <sup>2</sup>	Dust Suppression Acres Completed <sup>3</sup>		
2024	2,700	14,200	1,132	5,292	180	258	691	3,225	691 acres of vegetation completed in 2024 (31 acres at Clubhouse and 660 acres at Tule Wash). 258 additional acres of grass bales installed at Tule Wash (reported as interim dust suppression acres). 252 acres were converted to completed acres from the Tule Wash site. Completed construction at the original SCH Project (4,100 acres). Filled 180 acres in East Pond and Center Pond. Initiated construction on the first SCH Expansion project—East Pond 1.
2025	3,400	17,600	5,265	8,039	1,830	310	107	3,896	2,010 acres of aquatic habitat created in East Pond and East Pond 1. Note: The East Pond 180 acres reported in 2024 are not counted in the 2025 total. 453 acres converted from interim dust suppression to aquatic habitat at East Pond and East Pond 1. All previously reported interim acreage at SCH is now either filled or under construction in the SCH expansion and is no longer reported as interim acreage. 107 acres of vegetation completed in 2025 (93 acres at West Bombay Beach and 14 acres at Tule Wash). 93 acres were converted to completed acres from the West Bombay Beach site. 310 acres of grass bales at Tule Wash (reported as interim dust suppression acres).
<b>Cumulative to date:</b>			<b>13,206</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>	<b>2,177</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>	<b>1,409</b>	<b>3,896</b>	

1 Aquatic habitat is complete when wetted.

2 Immediate and ongoing dust suppression within the footprint of habitat or dust suppression projects under construction. These acres will become dust suppression acres completed or habitat acres completed and will not be double counted in cumulative reporting.

3 Vegetation enhancement is complete when planted/seeded and site has irrigation.



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## Acronyms and Glossary

AB	Assembly Bill	CWA	Clean Water Act
ac	Acre	CY	Calendar Year
Administration	Newsom Administration, Governor of California	DIP	Deficit Irrigation Program
AF	Acre-Feet	DSAP	Dust Suppression Action Plan
AQMD	Air Quality Management District	DWR	California Department of Water Resources
ARD	Aquatic resource delineation	EA	Environmental Assessment, part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance process
BLM	U.S. Bureau of Land Management	EID	East Interception Ditch
CA	California	EIR	Environmental Impact Report
CARB	California Air Resources Board	EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
CBO	Community-Based Organization	Feasibility Study	Imperial Streams and Salton Sea Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife	ft	foot or feet
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act	FY	Fiscal year
CH	Clubhouse	GF	General Fund
CNRA	California Natural Resources Agency	GGRF	Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund
CPUE	Catch Per Unit Effort	g/L	grams per liter
CRBRWQCB	Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board		
CVWD	Coachella Valley Water District		

H&H	Hydrologic and Hydraulic	NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
ICAPCD	Imperial County Air Pollution Control District	O&M	operations and maintenance
IID	Imperial Irrigation District	Order	State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134
IVC	Imperial Valley College	Pacific Flyway	The Pacific Flyway is a major north–south 4,000 to 10,000-mile flyway for migratory birds in the Americas, extending from Alaska to Patagonia, passing through the western US (AK, AZ, CA, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA).
IWA	Imperial Wildlife Area	PDB	Progressive Design Build
JPA	Joint Powers Authority, created to fund mitigation activities to address impacts of agricultural-to-urban water transfers from the Quantification Settlement Agreement (see QSA)	PM <sub>2.5</sub>	Particulate matter 2.5 micrometers in diameter
K	Thousand	PM <sub>10</sub>	Particulate matter 10 micrometers in diameter
KGRA	Known Geothermal Resource Area	PRC	Public Resources Code
LOP	Letter of Permission	Prop	Proposition
LRP	Long-Range Plan	QSA	Quantification Settlement Agreement, an agreement among state, federal, and local agencies allowing the transfer of irrigation water from IID to the San Diego County Water Authority, Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), and Metropolitan Water District of Southern California for urban use.
LRPC	Long-Range Planning Committee	Reclamation	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
LSAA	Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement	R&T	Revenue and Taxation
M	Million	SB	Senate Bill
MESA	Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement	SCH	Species Conservation Habitat
mg/l	milligrams per liter	Sea	Salton Sea
MIP	Monitoring Implementation Plan	South Coast AQMD	South Coast Air Quality Management District
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding	SSA	Salton Sea Authority
mssl/MSL	mean sea level	SSAM	Salton Sea Accounting Model
MWH	Montgomery Watson Harza Constructors	SSAQMP	Salton Sea Air Quality Mitigation Program
NAVD88	North American Vertical Datum 1988	SSP	Salton Sea Program
NDVI	Normalized Difference Vegetation Index		
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act		
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization		
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System		

State	State of California
SWPPP	Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan
SWRCB	State Water Resources Control Board
TAFY	thousand acre-feet per year
TDS	Total dissolved solids
TEP	temporary entry permit
TW	Tule Wash
µg/L	micrograms per liter
U.S.	United States
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USBR	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
WBB	West Bombay Beach
WCB	Wildlife Conservation Board
WDR	Waste Discharge Requirements
WID	West Interception Ditch
WR	Water Rights



## Appendix A. Existing Conditions

This appendix provides an update on current conditions in the Salton Sea region, including Salton Sea inflows, elevation, salinity, water quality, acreage for project implementation, fish and bird surveys, boat ramps and access points, and an environmental DNA study.

### A.1 Inflows

Inflows to the Salton Sea are a key driver of water elevations and salinity. **Table 4** presents water inflow to the Salton Sea by year and region for the calendar years 2016 to 2025. The SSP Team performed a detailed analysis of inflows to the Salton Sea through 2022 as part of the LRP preparation and refined the methodology for the inflow sources to the Sea, as summarized in the table. Recent annual flows for 2023 through 2025 were compiled using the same methodology. Detailed information and derivations for each of these inflow terms can be found in Appendix B (Hydrology and Climate Change) of the LRP (CNRA, 2024a).

Despite the ending of mitigation water flows at the end of 2017, total estimated inflows to the Salton Sea remained stable through 2022. However, in 2023, total inflow dropped to 987 thousand acre-feet per year (TAFY). Inflow further declined in 2024 to 906 TAFY and 2025 to 890 TAFY, driven in large part from conservation measures implemented by IID in response to the Colorado River drought.

The inflow terms to the Sea presented in **Table 4** can be considered flows to the original Salton Sea shoreline. However, as discussed in Section A.5 below, over the last several years wetlands have formed from water flowing across the exposed lakebed from agricultural drains. These wetlands

consume water that would otherwise flow to the Sea. Therefore, the actual inflows to the Sea are reduced by this amount. Furthermore, with the SCH coming online within the last year, inflow to the Sea is further reduced by water diverted to the SCH. These flow terms, presented as negative values to represent water use, are presented in **Table 4** to give a more complete picture of water flow reaching the Sea.



**Table 4. Water Inflow to the Sea by Year (in Thousand Acre-Feet per Year [TAFY])**

Year	Imperial Valley	Mexico	Coachella Valley	Local Watershed	Ground-water	Total Inflow to Sea	Project and Wetland Water Use (1)
2016	983	70	80	4.4	11.5	1,149	-
2017	942	69	77	4.7	11.8	1,104	-
2018	913	61	75	4.7	12.2	1,065	- 33.9
2019	883	64	80	5.0	12.3	1,044	- 39.0
2020	892	63	82	4.9	12.3	1,054	- 44.1
2021	934	62	81	4.7	12.3	1,094	- 49.2
2022	911	62	74	4.4	12.3	1,065	- 54.3
2023	839	53	78	4.7	12.3	987	- 59.4
2024	776	46	70	4.5	12.3	906 <sup>(2)</sup>	- 70.1
2025	759	43	71	4.9	12.3	890	- 85.6

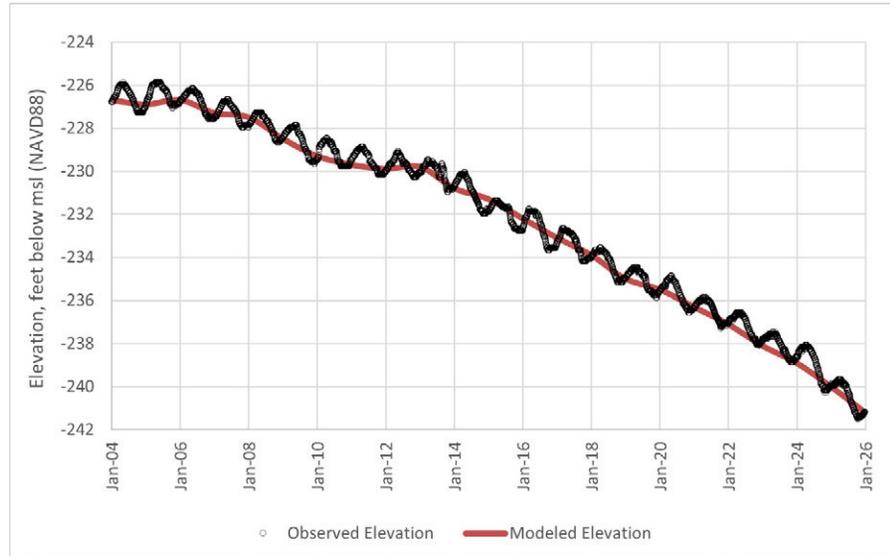
Notes:

1. Project water use includes water consumed by wetlands near the Salton Sea shoreline and water diverted for the SCH Project. This represents water that does not reach the Sea, so is presented as a negative term. Through aerial photo analysis, 2018 was determined to be the first year that non-negligible areas of wetlands were observed and hence is the first year that wetland water use was estimated.
2. In the 2025 Annual Report, total inflow to the Sea for 2024 was presented as 909 TAFY. The number changed due to updating 2024 provisional USGS gage data for this report.

## A.2 Salton Sea Elevation

The elevation of the Sea is measured daily, and lakebed exposure can be estimated from the elevation-area relationship of the Sea. For the SSP, a need exists to develop future projections of lakebed exposure, on the timescale of 5 to 10 years, because a large fraction of the State Water Resources Control Board Order WR 2017-0134 project construction will likely occur on land that is currently underwater. The SSP Team uses a computer program, the Salton Sea Accounting Model (SSAM), originally developed by Reclamation, to predict Sea elevation and salinity. The model makes predictions of the future state of the Sea via mass balance of water volume and salt mass on an annual timestep. Freshwater inflows add water and salt to the sea, direct precipitation and evaporation add/remove water but not salt, and salt precipitation removes salt but not water.

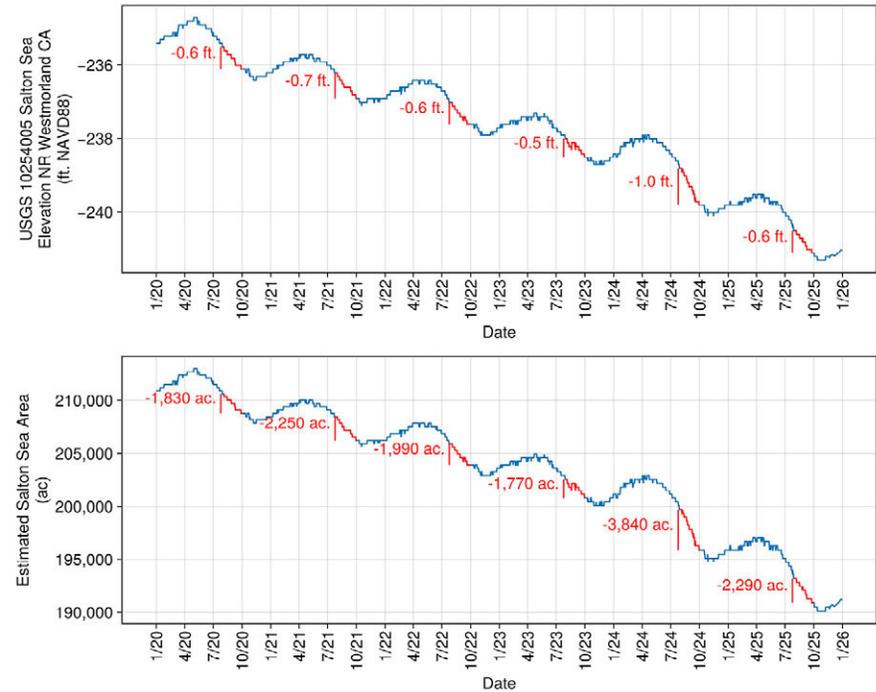
**Figure 15.** Observed Salton Sea water surface elevation (NAVD88 datum) compared with SSAM model predictions. This calculation is based on the total inflow to the Sea and accounts for reductions due to estimated use for the SCH Project and emergent wetlands forming downstream of the inflows.



The water surface elevation measured on December 31, 2025, was 241.2 feet below mean sea level (msl). **Figure 15** illustrates the observed Salton Sea water surface elevation compared with SSAM model predictions. By using future estimated inflows, predicted Sea elevation can be used to bracket near-term expected elevations and lakebed exposure for planning purposes.

Conservation efforts by IID and CVWD in 2024 decreased inflow to the Sea, as noted in Section A.1. To evaluate Salton Sea elevation declines in 2024 as compared to earlier years, we examined IID and CVWD consumptive use

**Figure 16.** Observed Salton Sea elevation (USGS station: Salton Sea NR Westmorland CA – 10254005; NAVD 88 reference) and corresponding area estimates. The changes from Aug 1 to Sep 30 of each year are highlighted in red. Notes: ac = acre(s), ft = foot/feet, NR = near.



over 2020 to 2025. Specifically, we examined the decline of Salton Sea elevations in 2024 and 2025 and their potential attribution to the decreased inflow from conservation efforts including the Deficit Irrigation Program (DIP) implemented by IID during August and September of 2024 and 2025.

**Figure 16** above presents the observed Salton Sea elevation (using the NAVD 1988 datum) and corresponding area estimates based on an elevation-area-capacity curve for the Sea. In the preceding four years a decline of 0.5 to 0.7 feet between August 1 and September 30 occurred. In 2024, this decline increased to 1.0 feet and in 2025 decreased to 0.6 feet.

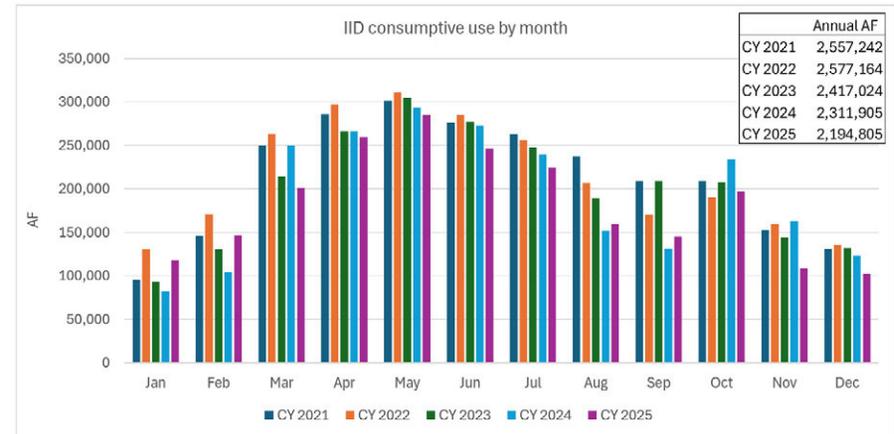
**Figure 17** and **Figure 18** compare the monthly water deliveries to IID and CVWD, respectively, over the past five calendar years. These values represent the water supplied from storage in Lake Mead (termed consumptive use in Reclamation’s annual reports). Because of the DIP, a substantial reduction in the IID’s consumptive water use in 2024 and 2025 occurred in August and September (**Figure 17**).

For IID, the total annual water use has decreased each year between 2022 and 2025, with 2025 water use 117,100 acre-feet (AF) lower than in 2024 (see inset box on **Figure 17**). For CVWD, no continuing decline in water use exists. The 2024 and 2025 water use values are higher than in 2023 and slightly lower than values in 2021 and 2022 (see inset box on **Figure 18**).

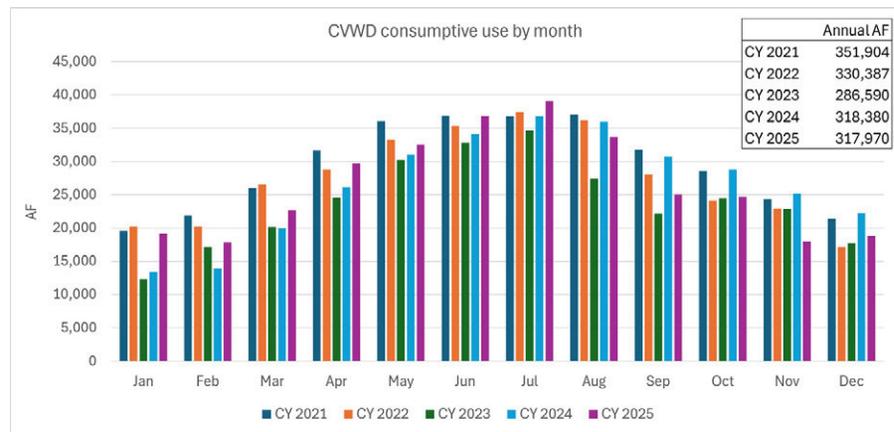
### A.3 Salton Sea Salinity

Salinity data collected by Reclamation and CRBRWQCB (in coordination with CDFW) are represented by the observed data presented in **Figure 19** and are plotted alongside SSAM-predicted salinity values. For each date when data were collected, there were typically six data points representing surface and bottom samples taken at three separate locations at the Sea. Salinity at the Sea has continued to increase over the past two decades and appears to show a more rapid increase over the last five years. In 2020, 2021, and 2022, salinity sampling was not conducted because of COVID-19 restrictions and because of challenges in boat ramp access due to declining Salton Sea elevations. Water quality monitoring was reinstated in November 2023. Since that time, CDFW in coordination with the CRBRWQCB was able to use the boat ramp at the SCH project to launch an airboat and access the lake to perform water quality sampling on a quarterly basis. Salinity, reported as total dissolved solids (TDS), ranged from 82,000 milligrams per liter (mg/l) to 90,000 mg/l collected at three sampling locations in the Salton Sea in December 2025.

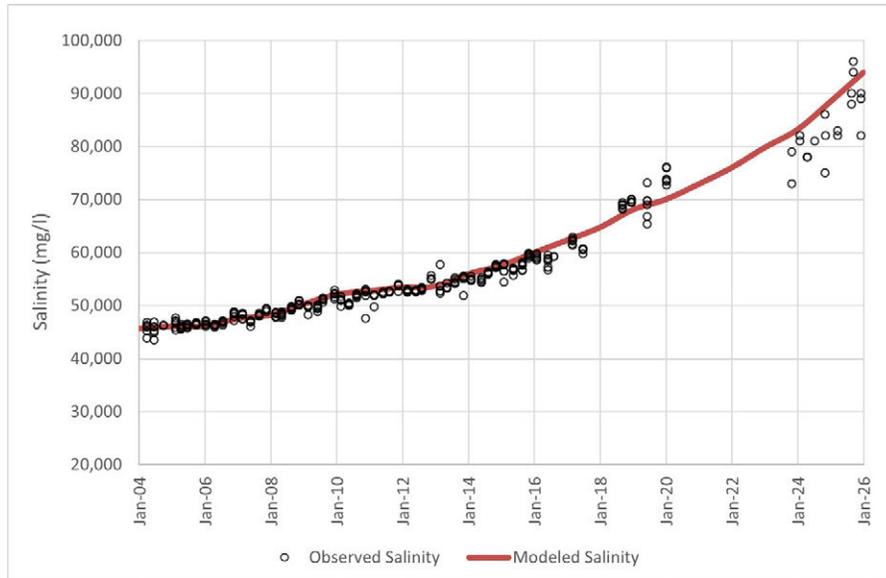
**Figure 17. IID water deliveries by month from 2021 to 2025. Annual acre-feet are shown in the insert box. Notes: CY = calendar year and AF = acre-feet. Water use is reported by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (<https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/hourly/use.pdf>). The CY 2024 values are different than reported in last year’s annual report due to the updated provisional 2024 data.**



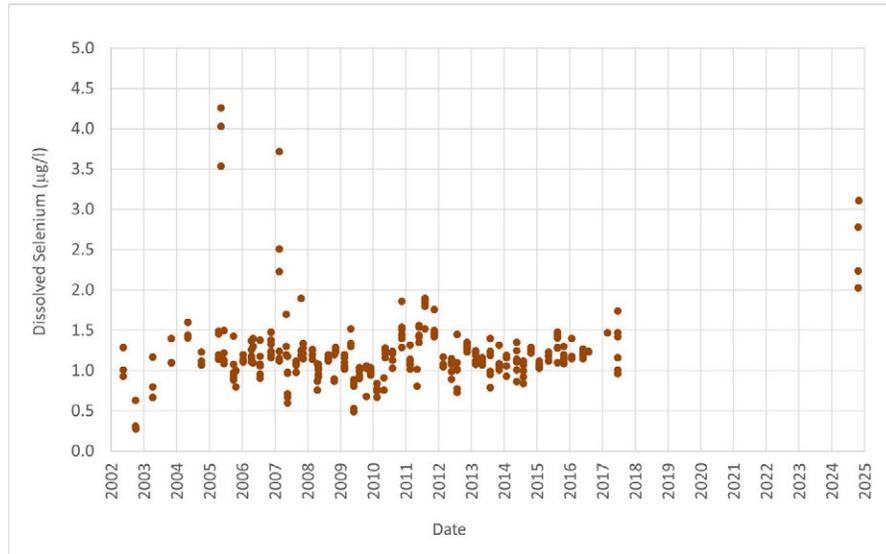
**Figure 18. CVWD water deliveries by month from 2021 to 2025. Annual acre-feet are shown in the insert box. Notes: CY = calendar year and AF = acre-feet. Water use is reported by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (<https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/hourly/use.pdf>). The CY 2024 values are different than reported in last year’s annual report due to the updated provisional 2024 data.**



**Figure 19. Observed salinity (mg/l) and SSAM model-predicted salinity. Note, data from Station USGS3 shown in previous years' annual reports have been removed from this plot as USGS3 does not represent average conditions in the Sea.**



**Figure 20. Dissolved selenium concentrations at locations in the Salton Sea.**



Some sampling locations appear to be more influenced by nearby freshwater sources as the Salton Sea shoreline recedes. CDFW samples verify that the southeast sampling site (USGS3) is less saline than mid-lake waters. This location is also very shallow (a few inches in depth) and is not representative of average conditions in the Sea. These data are no longer plotted as observed salinity points on **Figure 19**. As water quality monitoring continues in 2026, more data will provide a clearer understanding of the conditions across the Sea.

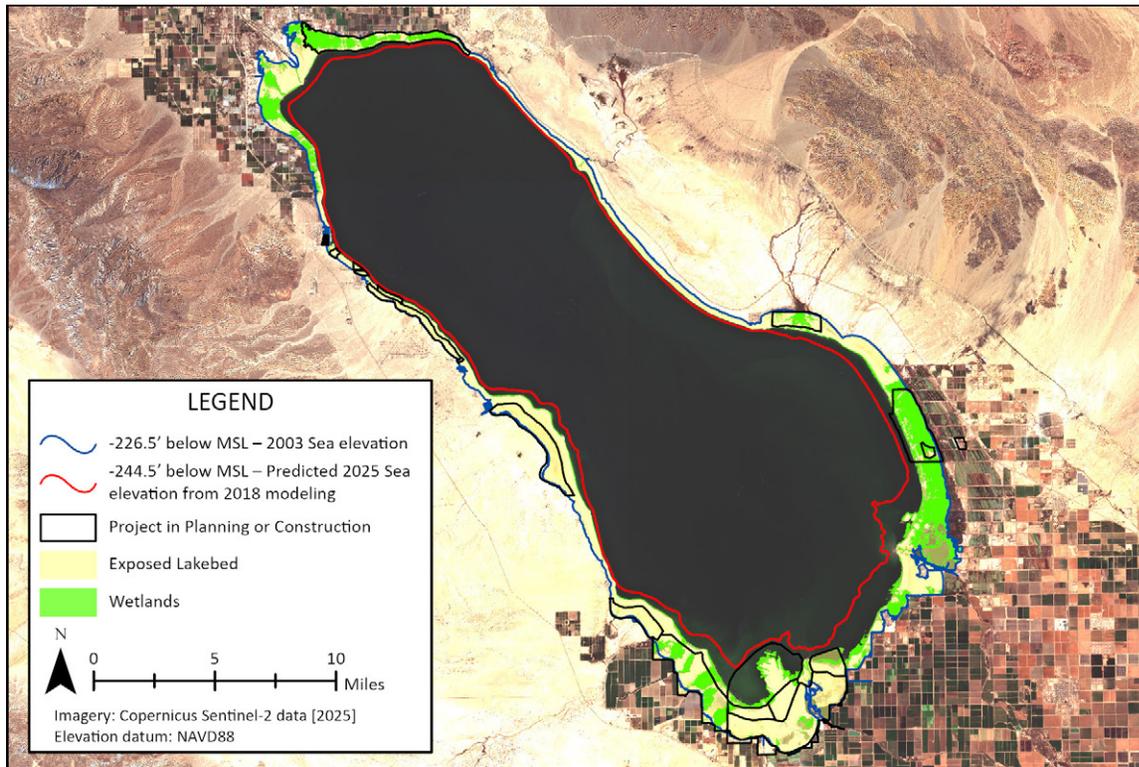
#### A.4 Salton Sea Water Quality

Dissolved selenium concentrations sampled at the Salton Sea by Reclamation and USGS between 2002 and 2017 ranged from 0.3 to 4.3 micrograms per liter ( $\mu\text{g/L}$ ) (**Figure 20**). Two large spikes were observed in 2005 and 2007, but dissolved concentrations were otherwise consistent over this time period. Average selenium was approximately 1.2  $\mu\text{g/L}$  over the period from 2002 to 2017. Data were collected by Reclamation in 2018 and 2019; however, the data were reported as nondetectable at a large detection limit ( $> 20 \mu\text{g/L}$ ), so they were not reported on this figure. Selenium sampling resumed in 2024 at four locations at the Sea. Selenium concentrations were higher than past observations and ranged from 2.0 to 3.1  $\mu\text{g/L}$  in November 2024 (**Figure 20**). Selenium concentration data were not collected in 2025.

#### A.5 Acreage Available for Project Implementation

The Sea has receded at a slower pace than was predicted by prior modeling studies in 2018, which was at the start of the 10-Year Plan period. This is because inflows to the Sea have been larger than predicted. **Figure 21** shows a map of the Salton Sea, available exposed lakebed for project implementation, and the previously predicted 2025 elevation (from 2018 modeling as presented in IID [2018]), corresponding to an elevation of 244.5 feet below msl (North American Vertical Datum 1988 [NAVD88 datum]). When compared to the actual shoreline in 2025 (**Figure 21**), the exposed acreage in 2025 was about 20,000 acres smaller than was projected in 2018.

**Figure 21.** Map of the Salton Sea showing available exposed lakebed for project implementation. The red line illustrates the previously predicted 2025 elevation (IID, 2018), corresponding to an elevation of 244.5 feet below msl (NAVD88 datum). When compared to the actual shoreline in January 2025, shown in this image, the exposed acreage is about 20,000 acres smaller than was projected in 2018.



satellite imagery from January 2025. A date early in the year was chosen when vegetation was not under water stress and thus easier to detect.

Results from the mapping exercise are presented in **Figure 21**. Wetlands estimated from the 2025 imagery are mapped on this figure. Wetlands have formed on 11,800 acres of the exposed lakebed. The areas labeled “Project in Planning or Construction” are consistent with those discussed in Chapter 2. The presence of wetlands makes project implementation more challenging, due to the difficulty of accessing areas with heavy vegetation and the potential for the presence of special-status species, including endangered species. However, projects that include wetland enhancement are in the planning or construction phase for areas with existing wetlands. These projects include North Lake Wetlands, Bombay Beach Wetland Enhancement, Kane Spring, and Mundo, as described in Chapter 2. Further project development on downslope areas of exposed lakebed could occur in the future as the Sea continues to recede.

Available acreage on which to implement restoration is partly limited by the growth of wetlands from water flowing to the exposed lakebed from agricultural drains. Audubon California (2020) assessed the amount and distribution of newly emerging wetlands on exposed playa. The study used multispectral 10-meter resolution satellite imagery and a Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI)

to identify vegetation and differentiate between algal and plant vegetation. NDVI is a commonly used index for detecting and quantifying relative health and density of vegetation, calculated from imagery containing red and near-infrared bands. Following the methodology that Audubon California (2020) employed, the calculation of existing and emergent vegetation within the analysis area was repeated using Sentinel-2

## A.6 Salton Sea Fish Surveys

CDFW staff and conservation partners conducted surveys for desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*) in 2025. The habitat surveyed included CVWD and IID irrigation drains, tributary streams to the Salton Sea, SCH West Interception Ditch (WID) and East Interception Ditch (EID), the Bombay Beach Wetland Complex, ponds (North Shore Marina, Varner Harbor, USFWS Pupfish Pond), and refuges.

Desert pupfish were found in most of the north end (CVWD) drains, and in several of the south end (IID) drains that were surveyed. The species was abundant in many CVWD irrigation drains, with over 1,600 desert pupfish captured (Catch Per Unit Effort [CPUE] of 27.1) in one drain. Two new observations of desert pupfish were made in CVWD irrigation drains on the north end of the Salton Sea; additional surveys will be performed in 2026 to see if the fish are still present. A robust population was observed in a pool at the Bombay Beach Wetland complex as well as extensive desert pupfish habitat. Future surveys will inform department staff to the extent of this population.

Desert pupfish were also abundant in San Felipe Creek, but surveys in Salt Creek yielded only non-native species, including largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), in the upper reaches of this drainage. However, desert pupfish were abundant in lower Salt Creek, with over 1,000 pupfish captured (CPUE of 23.9), due to increased flows, habitat variety, an abundance of algae, and possibly other factors. Desert pupfish were also found in the SCH East Pond following initial flooding of this habitat feature in the summer of 2025. In 2025, CDFW staff and partners conducted salvaging efforts of desert pupfish, which involves moving desert pupfish from shallow areas that were drying up to deeper, connected waters. Desert pupfish were captured in Varner Harbor, North Shore Marina and EID, but not WID. Additionally, the species was abundant in most

refuges but currently appears to be declining in some of the designated pupfish ponds at Dos Palmas where tilapia have colonized. Staff also continued to remove invasive non-native species in selected waters, as these species continue to threaten desert pupfish populations.

In addition to desert pupfish focused surveys, CDFW staff conducted general fish monitoring activities within ponds at the SCH project in 2025. Fish surveys were conducted within SCH East Pond and SCH East Pond 1. Fish traps, cast nets, and gillnets were deployed in various habitat types within the ponds. All fish were released into the same pond as they were captured.

SCH fish surveys resulted in observations of desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*), gizzard shad (*Dorosoma cepedianum*), and a few tilapia (*Tilapia spp./Oreochromis spp.*). Fish surveys at SCH ponds will continue through 2026 and beyond. Fish monitoring will compare size classes and estimate relative abundance of fish observed in SCH ponds. Fish monitoring data will be a contributing factor when applying the established decision-making framework for maintaining or adjusting SCH operational parameters.

## **A.7 Salton Sea Bird Surveys**

Bird surveys at the Salton Sea continued in 2025, including work performed by CDFW, USFWS, Point Blue, Audubon California, Oasis Bird Observatory, and the University of Idaho.

## **CDFW Marshbird Surveys**

Secretive marshbird surveys were performed by CDFW staff to evaluate habitat in several locations around the Salton Sea. For the third year, these surveys were performed in the wetland habitat that occurs on the northern shoreline of the lake between the Whitewater delta and the Yacht Club. Emergent marsh growing on Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians land was surveyed for the first time in 2025 in coordination with the Tribe. Yuma Ridgeway's Rail and California Black Rail were found to be using quality habitat in several areas along the northern shoreline. Marshbird surveys were also performed at the southern end of the lake at the Kane Spring site where Ridgeway's Rails and California Black Rails were confirmed to be present.

Additional surveys for secretive marshbirds were performed by USFWS along with support from CDFW staff at other high-quality or managed habitat at the south end of the Sea. The areas of marsh habitat north of Morton Bay have been confirmed to be occupied by Yuma Ridgeway's Rail and represent a large amount of habitat along the Salton Sea that has naturally emerged and has been highly functional. These areas also support protected California Black Rails and desert pupfish.

## **CDFW Wildlife Disease Monitoring**

Monitoring for dead and sick birds by CDFW staff continues to be performed along the Sea.

## Nesting island for Gull-billed Terns and Black Skimmers.



Reported dead and sick birds have been sent to the CDFW Wildlife Investigations Laboratory for further analysis.

### **CDFW Seabird Nesting Surveys**

In 2025, CDFW continued monitoring seabird colony breeding productivity at the SCH project site. Monitoring began in the first week of May and continued weekly until the first week of November. Each monitoring session lasted between two and six hours, depending on site conditions. The duration of each monitoring session was influenced by the weather, the need to navigate around ground-nesting birds, and the time required to count and record the placement of birds within East Pond, East Pond 1, and the surrounding habitat. A total of 26 weeks and 104 hours were dedicated to monitoring the seabird colonies at SCH.

Several species were observed nesting onsite, including Killdeer, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, White-faced Ibises, Great Blue Herons, Cattle Egrets, Snowy Egrets, American Coots, Neotropic Cormorants and various passerine species. Four specific species were prioritized for monitoring in detail: Gull-billed Terns, Caspian Terns, and Black Skimmers. These species were monitored as indicator species to assess the operational health of the pond system. In contrast, California Gulls were monitored due to their potential to colonize SCH and displace other nesting birds through competition for space. These four species nested on several constructed loafing and nesting islands in East Pond, as well as on dredged islands located east of the causeway in the Salton Sea.

Gull-billed Terns nested on three islands in East Pond. Caspian Terns nested on one island in East Pond and on the dredged islands east of the causeway. Black Skimmers nested on four islands in East Pond, while California Gulls nested only on the dredged islands east of the causeway.

Using a spotting scope and binoculars, the total numbers of adults, nests, chicks, and fledglings were recorded weekly for all four species. In addition, observations were conducted to document colony behavior and the birds' interactions with the surrounding habitat. These behavioral observations suggest that birds nesting in proximity to East Pond and East Pond 1 may have contributed to the overall success of each species. A sufficient supply of forage fish in and around the ponds likely enabled successful hatching, chick-rearing, and eventual fledging of each colony.

### **CDFW Aerial Surveys**

CDFW conducted aerial surveys in 2025 to evaluate fish-eating bird populations at the Salton Sea, focusing on American White Pelicans, Brown Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, and other cormorant species. Aerial surveys efficiently count these waterbirds across large, hard-to-reach areas, such as the shoreline and open water of the Salton Sea and freshwater impoundments, which are often inaccessible. These counts help monitor how birds respond to environmental changes at the Salton Sea, especially the flooding and creation of the SCH ponds. An increase in pelican and cormorant populations indicates ecological success and a reliable food supply. Monitoring their populations is vital, as these species are sensitive to food chain disruptions, and the Salton Sea serves as a key stopover and historic breeding site on the Pacific Flyway. A growing SCH population suggests successful support for these species amid ecosystem decline.

### **USFWS Surveys**

Staff at the USFWS's Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge have led several avian surveys annually around the Salton Sea, including the Mid-Winter Aerial Waterfowl Survey, Secretive Marshbird Surveys, Sandhill Crane Evening Roost Surveys, and Mid-Winter Pacific Flyway White Goose Surveys. Additional refuge staff assisted with survey efforts during the Intermountain

West Shorebird Survey, Pacific Flyway Shorebird Survey, and the Christmas Bird Count. Within the refuge boundary, staff also conducted additional Fall–Winter Migratory Waterbird Surveys from October through December.

### **Point Blue and USFWS Coordinated Shorebird Surveys**

Point Blue has continued to lead surveys of shorebirds through the Pacific Flyway Shorebird Survey and Intermountain West Shorebird Surveys. In 2025, Intermountain West Shorebird Surveys were conducted during April and August on foot. This survey at the Salton Sea is a significant undertaking, requiring the expertise and dedication of professional biologists, who are supported by volunteers. Among these individuals were staff from the USFWS, CDFW, Audubon California, Point Blue Conservation Science, and Oasis Bird Observatory, who faced extreme heat to gather invaluable bird population and distribution data.

The Pacific Flyway Shorebird Survey was conducted in December 2025. Due to the constructed boat ramp at the SCH project site, CDFW and USFWS were able to perform surveys from the water and therefore access more of the project area. Results and trend analysis can be previewed here:

<https://migratoryshorebirdproject.org/explore-data/interactive-map/>

### **Audubon California**

Audubon California has continued to support the SSP in a substantial manner and in 2025 worked to support ongoing biological monitoring and coordination of the shorebird survey efforts.

### **Oasis Bird Observatory Surveys**

Oasis Bird Observatory continued to perform weekly surveys along the northern shoreline of the lake. These regularly recurring surveys have allowed the documentation of peak periods of Eared Grebes and Red Knots at the Salton Sea.

### **University of Idaho Yuma Ridgway's Rail Research**

The University of Idaho has continued to perform research on the effects of selenium concentrations on Yuma Ridgway's Rails and their nesting success. The recent thesis presented by Cydney Yost (2025) found that selenium concentrations were higher in all tissue, prey, and egg samples of Yuma Ridgway's Rail collected from agricultural-fed marshes compared to spring-fed and river-fed marshes. However, nesting success was only slightly lower in the agricultural-fed marshes. More information can be found in the Effects of Selenium Accumulation on Yuma Ridgway's Rails 2024 Annual Report (Sliwa et al., 2024), and Effects of Irrigated Agriculture on Selenium Concentrations and Nesting Success in Yuma Ridgway's Rails (Yost, 2025).

## A.8 Boat Ramps and Access Points

The boat launch ramp at the SCH causeway has been a great resource for enabling SSP and collaborating entities to access the Salton Sea to conduct monitoring activities identified in the MIP. However, given the large size of the Salton Sea, it is challenging to access the northern portion of the Sea from the SCH boat ramp at the south end of the Sea. The northern shoreline of the Salton Sea is approximately 32 miles from the SCH causeway launch ramp. An outstanding need exists to safely and efficiently access areas near the north end of the Salton Sea.

The SSP is collaborating with various entities to fund, plan, design, and construct a new or rehabilitated boat launch facility. CDFW staff conducted a preliminary launch ramp assessment with the goal of assisting the SSP in determining a feasible location for the new or rehabilitated facility. Final location selection for any new or rehabilitated launch ramp facility to access the northern portion of the Salton Sea will incorporate a feasibility analysis.

## A.9 Environmental DNA Study

CDFW staff collected water samples from the Salton Sea and SCH ponds to analyze for environmental DNA. The State Water Resources Control Board Freshwater Harmful Algal Bloom team provided valuable technical guidance and equipment to assist CDFW staff in initiating the project. Samples will be analyzed in early 2026

Great Blue Heron pair nesting.



and will provide information about what species are detected and their relative abundance. The data from this study will help characterize the phytoplankton, zooplankton, and macroinvertebrate communities in the Salton Sea watershed, which are listed as monitoring objectives in the MIP and the SCH Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan. This information can also be used to inform sustainable management practices for fish in the SCH ponds.

## Appendix B. Funding Status

**Table 5. Funding Available for the Salton Sea Program (in millions)**

Agency and Source	Authority	Authorized for Appropriation	Appropriated/ Committed	Expended as of 9/30/25	Available for Additional Commitment	Use
<b>DWR - Prop 50<sup>a</sup></b>	WC - 79567	\$19.3	\$19.2	\$19.2	\$0.1	2003-2007 Programmatic EIR/EIS and related studies and planning activities (completed).
<b>DWR via WCB - Prop 50</b>	WC - 79568	\$8.75	\$8.75	\$8.75	\$0.0	Used specifically for the Salton Sea for Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) construction.
<b>DWR &amp; IID via WCB - Prop 50</b>	WC - 79565	\$4.8	\$4.8	\$4.8	\$0.0	\$1M to DWR 2008 Salton Sea planning. \$3.3M allocated to IID for construction of power lines to SCH project (completed). \$0.5M allocated to DWR and reserved for SCH construction.
<b>DWR – via WCB - Prop 12</b>	5096(a)(7)	\$4.75	\$4.75	\$4.75	\$0.0	\$4.75M used for SCH.

**Table 5. Funding Available for the Salton Sea Program (in millions) (Contd.)**

Agency and Source	Authority	Authorized for Appropriation	Appropriated/ Committed	Expended as of 9/30/25	Available for Additional Commitment	Use
<b>DWR – via CDFW - Prop 84</b>	PRC - 75050(b) (3)	\$47	\$43.3	\$42.8	\$4.2	Since 2008, SCH planning, design, and staffing (\$14.5M), plus \$21M used for SCH construction, \$900K for construction management, and \$3M for Financial Assistance Program projects.  (DWR's contract Amount \$39.094M, Appropriated Amount \$39.094M, Expended as of 9/30/2025 \$34.26M, \$0 available for additional commitments from the Reimbursement Contract between DWR and CDFW.)
<b>DWR – (State Operations) - Prop 1</b>	WC - 79736(c)	\$20.0	\$20.0	\$18.25	\$0.0	Staffing and other design costs for SSP projects. (Of the \$20M appropriated, \$5.5M is committed to existing Salton Sea Projects.)
<b>DWR – (Construction) - Prop 1</b>	WC - 79736(c)	\$60.0	\$60.0	\$58.49	\$0.0	Construction of SCH projects.
<b>CNRA - Prop 68</b>	PRC - 80116	\$165.7	\$165.7	\$123.7	\$0.0	\$135.7M for construction of SCH projects, \$20M for Habitat Enhancement and Dust Suppression Projects. Approximately \$10M for staffing and administration.
<b>DWR - General Fund</b>	Budget Act of 2021	\$40.0	\$40.0	\$30.46	\$0.0	Dust suppression and vegetation enhancement projects, staffing, and other design costs for SSP projects.
<b>DWR - General Fund</b>	Budget Act of 2022	\$11	\$11	\$9.45	\$0.0	SCH construction, construction management, and staffing.
<b>DWR - General Fund</b>	Budget Act of 2023	\$50	\$50	\$40.29	\$0.0	Funding committed to SCH and vegetation enhancement projects. Expenditures will occur when agreements are finalized.
<b>DWR – GGRF State Operations</b>	Budget Act of 2024	\$4.319	\$4.319	\$3.53	\$0.0	Item 3860-001-3228 of the Budget Act of 2024, as amended by AB 107 (Chapter 22, Statutes of 2024) appropriates to Department of Water Resources, CA Water Plan Program \$4.319M for 2024 (\$719K for Technical Assistance Staff + \$3.6M Technical Assistance Contracts).

**Table 5. Funding Available for the Salton Sea Program (in millions) (Contd.)**

Agency and Source	Authority	Authorized for Appropriation	Appropriated/ Committed	Expended as of 9/30/25	Available for Additional Commitment	Use
<b>DWR – General Fund</b>	Budget Act of 2024	\$6.835	\$4.98	\$0.0	\$0.0	Item 3860-101-3228 of the Budget Act of 2024, as amended by SB 108 (Chapter 35, Statutes of 2024) appropriates to Department of Water Resources, CA Water Plan Program \$6.835M for 2024.
<b>DWR – General Fund Capital Outlay</b>	Budget Act of 2024	\$60	\$60	\$21.36	\$0.0	Item 3860-301-3228 of the Budget Act of 2024, as amended by SB 108 (Chapter 35, Statutes of 2024) appropriates to Department of Water Resources \$60M for 2024.
<b>DWR - Salton Sea Authority<sup>b</sup> - Prop 68</b>	PRC-80110(a)	\$19.25	\$19.25	\$1.60	\$0.0	\$19.25M to implement North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project.
<b>Revive the Salton Sea Fund</b>	R&T - 18736	\$0.2	\$0.0	\$147.6	\$0.2	Tax Checkoff Box - \$191K balance per State Controller's Office 6/30/2023 Report.
<b>General Fund/ Reimbursements</b>	Budget Act	\$0.935/\$0.316 annually	\$0.935/\$0.316 annually	\$0.935/\$0.316 annually	N/A	CDFW receives \$416K General Fund and \$545K reimbursement (via DWR) annually for positions supporting the Salton Sea. CNRA receives \$166K General Fund and \$150K reimbursement (via DWR) annually to support the Asst. Secretary for Salton Sea Policy position.
<b>CDFW – Water Agency Contribution (Salton Sea Restoration Fund)</b>	2003 QSA Agreements	\$68.5 <sup>c</sup>	\$28.77	\$22.17	See footnote	Annual surveys to monitor bird and fish populations at the Sea, including state and federal endangered species, staff development of various implementation and monitoring plans, issuance of Section 1600 permits, CEQA review, QSA Implementation Team staffing, etc.
<b>DWR - Prop 4</b>	Item 3860-301-6093 Budget Act of 2025 PRC \$91033(a)	\$147.6	\$147.6	\$0.0	\$0.0	Item 3860-301-6093 Budget Act of 2025 PRC \$91033(a)
<b>State Total</b>		<b>\$738.94</b>	<b>\$695.21</b>	<b>\$415.52</b>	<b>\$4.50</b>	<b>Amount shown is available and is committed to projects in the near term.</b>

**Table 5. Funding Available for the Salton Sea Program (in millions) (Contd.)**

Agency and Source	Authority	Authorized for Appropriation	Appropriated/ Committed	Expended as of 9/30/25	Available for Additional Commitment	Use
<b>Federal</b>						
DWR	Bureau of Reclamation	\$1.79	\$1.79	\$1.8	\$0.0	Planning activities include preparing a Watershed Plan and implementation of dust suppression projects.
DWR	Bureau of Reclamation	\$245	\$245	\$52.08	\$0.0	\$70M total committed in December 2023 for construction and project management of initial SCH Expansion. \$175M committed September 2024 for design and construction of further SCH expansion. This funding is committed to the State via a Reclamation funding agreement for State reimbursement for work performed.
<b>Federal Total</b>		<b>\$246.79</b>	<b>\$246.79</b>	<b>\$53.88</b>	<b>\$0.0</b>	
<b>Overall Total</b>		<b>\$985.73</b>	<b>\$942.00</b>	<b>\$469.40</b>	<b>\$4.50</b>	

Notes:

AB = Assembly Bill

CEQA = California Environmental Quality Act

EIR/EIS = Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement

FY = Fiscal year

GF = General Fund

GGRF = Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund

IID = Imperial Irrigation District

JPA = Joint Powers Authority

K = Thousand

M = Million

NRCS = National Resources Conservation Service

PRC = Public Resources Code

Prop = Proposition

QSA = Quantification Settlement Agreement

R&T = Revenue and Taxation

SB = Senate Bill

SSP = Salton Sea Program

WCB = Wildlife Conservation Board

Footnotes:

- Bond funds provided reflect the bond allocations available after statewide bond costs and outyear amounts already committed to by the Legislature. Statewide bond costs are authorized "off the top" in each bond act for things like the State Treasurer's Cost of issuing the bonds, Department of Finance's Costs of auditing bond expenditures, etc. Exact amounts are published on the CNRA bond accountability website.
- The Salton Sea Authority (SSA) is a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) of local interested parties including the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Tribe, two water agencies, and two county governments.
- While a total of \$68.5M will ultimately be available, \$36.9M in payments must be collected between FY 2025-26 and FY 2047-48 to support any expenditures from the fund. Annual payments from water districts average approximately \$1.6M annually, which CDFW uses to fund existing staff and positions received through approved budget change proposals.



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State of California  
**SALTON SEA**  
PROGRAM