

SALTON SEA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

**May 18, 2005
9:30 – 4:00
Sacramento, CA**

Welcome and Introductions

Rick Hoffman, Riverside County, welcomed the Advisory Committee members and led introductions of those present (see attached list).

Updates from the Resources Agency

Mr. Hoffman introduced Dale Hoffman-Floerke, the newly appointed Chief of the Colorado River and Salton Sea Office. Ms. Hoffman-Floerke provided a brief overview of her recent assignments at the Department of Water Resources (DWR), and noted that she is looking forward to working with the Committee Members and members of the public on this challenging project.

Public Comments

The following public comment was provided:

- The amount of water transferred under the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) should be described in the Ecosystem Restoration Plan. In addition, the Ecosystem Restoration Plan should describe changes in the Salton Sea watershed resulting from the water transfer, how these changes relate to, or affect, the restoration of the Sea, and how they are being addressed in the Plan.

Update on Project Schedule

Gwen Buchholz, CH2M HILL, provided an update on the project schedule. It was noted that a revised version of the No Action Report will not be prepared prior to preparation of the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR). However, the Advisory Committee will have opportunities to review and comment on the No Action description and analysis as part of the preparation of the Draft Programmatic EIR.

Summary of Public Meetings

Joe Grindstaff, Chief Deputy Director of DWR, provided an update on the public outreach process. Six public meetings were held throughout the Salton Sea watershed in mid-April. Mr. Grindstaff noted some of the meetings were not well attended. Timely and well-distributed advertisement of the meetings was suggested to increase

attendance. Mr Grindstaff noted that although attendance was lower than in the first round of meetings, the public was actively involved at the meetings.

Development of Inflow Projections

Laura Harnish and Armin Munevar, CH2M HILL, provided an overview of the development of the inflow projections, the development of the modeling tool, and an update on the progress of the Model Working Group.

Inflows Development

Ms. Harnish noted that the Model Working Group was established to provide technical guidance and exchange ideas and information on model development and input to the model. The first meeting of the Working Group was held on May 11 and focused on the inflows under the No Action Alternative.

Future meetings of the Working Group will include finalizing the inflows under the No Action Alternative, addressing variability of inflows, and discussing model selection. The No Action Alternative is being developed in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act; uncertainties in future conditions are being addressed as part of the variability analysis.

Based on information developed as part of the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) Water Conservation and Transfer EIR/EIS, an overview of the historic inflows to the Sea and the future baseline (No Action) for the QSA was provided. The Working Group is addressing discrepancies between published data and gage data for the historic inflows, and is also clarifying climate data used to generate the hydrologic data set used for the QSA baseline. An overview of the inflows under the QSA (generally referred to as the QSA delivery schedule) was also provided. It was noted that the schedule was slightly modified to correct a minor error in the published QSA delivery schedule.

Ms. Harnish noted that the No Action Alternative for the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Plan will be based on the corrected QSA delivery schedule and adjusted for projects, policies, and additional data available since the approval of the QSA. Adjustments are anticipated for actions in Mexico, incorporation of revised inflows from the Coachella Valley Water District as a result of implementation of the Coachella Valley Water Management Plan, and possible refinements to unmeasured inflows. The term “unmeasured inflows” was used in prior modeling analyses to represent inflows from local watersheds, inflows from direct precipitation, losses due to evaporation, and to “mass balance” the model. The Working Group is discussing the possibility of breaking out some of these inflow components, rather than combining them in a single inflow value. The various inflow assumptions will be documented and a report will be prepared once the inflows are better refined.

Ms. Harnish noted that one of the next steps for the Working Group is to develop the variability for future inflows. The variability analysis will be considered in the design of

facilities and used to assess the ability of each alternative to operate over the range of expected conditions. It was noted that climate changes in the Colorado River basin and in the Salton Sea watershed could affect inflows to the Sea. However, because of the complexity of projecting future climate change at the scale of the Colorado River basin and the Salton Sea watershed, and because of the uncertainty of the effects of future climate changes on agricultural and other land use practices in the Salton Sea watershed, a climate model may not be the most appropriate tool to determine future climate-induced changes to inflows.

A question was raised regarding potential future changes in inflow resulting from legal or policy changes, such as Part 417 reviews and changes to the Law of the River. It was suggested that these issues require undue speculation and that inflow projections should continue to be developed using a technical approach.

Model Development

Mr. Munevar provided an overview of the model development process and discussed the next steps for the Model Working Group. It was noted that the model will be developed on a parallel track with development of the alternatives. The model will likely be running a few months after resolution of the key model development needs and model assumptions.

It was suggested that the model include nutrient and selenium parameters because these are key concerns for biota. Mr. Munevar noted that multiple models may be needed to include these parameters.

The Model Working Group will be holding two meetings in June. Committee Members should contact DWR if they would like to participate in these meetings.

Grant Applications to the Wildlife Conservation Board from the Salton Sea Authority for Wetlands Master Plan on the New and Alamo Rivers

Al Wright, Executive Director of the Wildlife Conservation Board, provided an update on the Salton Sea Authority's (SSA's) grant applications for development of a Wetlands Master Plan for the New and Alamo rivers. The Master Plan will be prepared in two separate phases. Phase I will address water quality concerns, including selenium ecotoxicity, potential impacts from wetlands construction and operation, and cost effectiveness of wetlands as compared to other water treatment techniques. The Wildlife Conservation Board will consider funding Phase I of the Master Plan at its May 26 meeting. Based on the results of Phase I, Phase II may be considered for funding at a later date. Ron Enzweiler, SSA, noted that Phase I is anticipated to be completed around the end of this calendar year.

Update on Recreation and Local Economics Efforts

William Brownlie, Tetra Tech, provided an update on the recreation and local economics study. Mr. Brownlie noted that the objectives of the study are to identify recreation opportunities, evaluate priorities for activities, evaluate recreation capacity, and estimate economic benefits of a restored Sea. The project team re-initiated the Recreation Task Force previously created by the SSA, developed a survey, and held two local meetings to obtain input. Mr. Brownlie presented the preliminary survey results.

The study is considering watershed-wide recreation and economic opportunities and benefits that are independent of a specific restoration alternative. However, it was noted that recreation opportunities and economic benefits may vary substantially within the watershed depending on the alternative selected. The Recreation Task Force is composed of representatives from both the northern and southern watershed.

Members of the Advisory Committee noted that representatives from different areas, both within and outside of the watershed, could have different priorities for recreation opportunities. In response to the concern regarding the limited sample size for the survey and limited representation of some interests on the Task Force, Mr. Brownlie indicated that he would distribute the survey to Committee Members and make the survey available on DWR's website.

Development of Alternatives

Darryl Hayes and Gwen Buchholz, CH2M HILL, provided an overview of the development of the restoration alternatives including example water balances and potential infrastructure components. The various drivers and objectives for development of the alternatives were also briefly discussed. Numerous alternatives centered on a core set of infrastructure facilities may be considered in the Ecosystem Restoration Plan.

With regard to the water balance, Mr. Hayes noted the potential tradeoffs when considering each alternative configuration, location of infrastructure facilities, future inflows, and natural treatment, habitat and air quality management acreage. The location of the barrier would affect both the amount of material needed and the flexibility of the facility and the environment to respond to future changes. In addition, future inflows could result in tradeoffs between the acreage of natural treatment, habitat and air quality management, and the elevation and salinity of the Sea.

Conveyance facilities that are being considered include open canals, pump stations, desilting basins, and pipelines. These facilities would need to be appropriately sized and configured to handle a variety of flows including local flooding. In the event that conveyance features are sited within the newly exposed Sea-bed, there may not be sufficient elevation differences to transport water by gravity under all conditions and some pumping may be needed. A Committee Member requested that potential

expansion of the geothermal area in the southeastern area of the Sea be considered when developing and siting conveyance facilities.

The infrastructure and conveyance facilities will be developed through an iterative process with the Working Groups and the Advisory Committee, and modified based on additional information from concurrent studies including the ongoing water quality, habitat and air quality management studies. The flexibility of alternatives will also be considered under differing salinity and elevation target ranges which are anticipated to be developed by the appropriate Working Group.

The North Sea, South Sea, Combined Sea and Evolving Sea infrastructure configurations, and an inflow value of 950,000 acre-feet per year were used in the presentation for illustration purposes only.

Summary of Action Items / Future Meetings

Based on the request of the Advisory Committee, a Habitat Working Group will be established. In addition, more of the Advisory Committee meetings will be held in the Southern California area.

Ms. Hoffman-Floerke noted that she is looking forward to working with the Advisory Committee, and encourages broad participation of the Committee Members and their representatives in the up-coming Working Group meetings.

The next Advisory Committee meeting will be held in July in the Southern California area. Additional information will be provided via the Committee's e-mail reflector.

Handouts

Copies of the following presentations and related materials:

- Recreation and Economic Opportunities Evaluation
- Status of Project Schedule
- Public Outreach Update
- Update on Fish Sampling Protocol
- Inflow Update
 - Table 1. Salton Sea Water Budget
 - Table 2. QSA Baseline Inflows to the Salton Sea
- Development of Ecosystem Restoration Plan Alternatives

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members or Alternates Present:

Jose Angel, Regional Water Quality Control Board
Larry Biland, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Fred Cagle, Sierra Club
Celeste Cantu, State Water Resources Control Board
Bart Christensen, State Water Resources Control Board
Michael Cohen, Pacific Institute
Kim Delfino, Defenders of Wildlife
Bob Ham, Imperial Valley Association of Governments
Rick Hoffman, Riverside County
Al Kalin, Imperial County Farm Bureau
Anne Kinsinger, U.S. Geological Survey
Julia Levin, Audubon California
Debi Livesay, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Sylvia Oey, Air Resources Board
Brad Poiriez, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District
Steve Robbins, Coachella Valley Water District
Jason Rhine, California Waterfowl Association
John Scott, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Vincent Signorotti, Geothermal Energy Association
Mike Walker, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Dan Walsworth, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bruce Wilcox, Imperial Irrigation District
Gary Wyatt, Imperial County