SALTON SEA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

July 15, 2005
9:30 – 4:00
San Diego, CA

Welcome and Introductions

Mike Chrisman, Secretary for Resources, welcomed the Advisory Committee members and led introductions of those present (see attached list).

Updates from the Resources Agency

Mr. Chrisman noted that the third series of public outreach meetings are tentatively scheduled for mid-September. The meetings will focus on the alternatives and habitat values at the Salton Sea. A newsletter and brochure are also being prepared.

Public Comments

No public comments were provided.

Update on Project Schedule

Gwen Buchholz, CH2M HILL, provided an update on the project schedule. It was noted that a revised version of the Baseline Report will not be prepared prior to preparation of the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR). However, the Advisory Committee will have the opportunity to review and comment on the baseline description during the preparation of the Draft Program EIR. It was noted that the Final Program EIR will be completed and certified by the Secretary for Resources on or prior to the December 31, 2006 legislatively-mandated deadline.

Update on Fish Sampling Program

Jack Crayon, Department of Fish and Game (DFG), provided an update on the status of DFG's fish monitoring at the Salton Sea. Three distinct size classes of tilapia were found during the recent, Spring 2005, sampling event. No corvina, croaker or sargo were found. The number of tilapia found was approximately 10 percent of the number found in the 1999 sampling event but was greater than both the Winter 2004 sampling event and the Spring 2003 and 2004 sampling events. Mr. Crayon noted that limited water quality data were also collected. The Summer 2005 sampling event is underway.

Mr. Crayon noted that historic levels of fish species are difficult to determine due to the lack of long-term monitoring. The first rigorous monitoring effort at the Sea was conducted in 1999/2000. DFG's current quarterly fish monitoring effort was initiated in 2003.

Mr. Crayon also noted that there is limited information on the pileworm population at the Sea; however, based on a recent sediment sampling effort, the population appears to be declining. This decline will not affect tilapia because this species is not dependent on pileworms, but other species may be affected.

Update on Recreation and Local Economics Efforts

Ron Enzweiler, Salton Sea Authority (SSA), provided an update on the recreation and local economics study. Mr. Enzweiler noted that in response to the concern regarding the limited sample size for the recreation survey and limited representation of some interests on the Task Force at the May 18, 2005 Advisory Committee Meeting, the recreation survey was distributed to the Advisory Committee and the project mailing list for the project. Overall 94 responses were received. Mr. Enzweiler presented the revised survey results. Based on the preliminary results, the existing recreational uses of the Sea were ranked the highest ("must have") by the survey participants.

Mr. Enzweiler also provided an overview of the SSA's activities related to financing their proposed Salton Sea Revitalization Project, including development of a Master Plan for the area, an overview of the Infrastructure Financing District and related Benefits Assessment District, and an overview of the discussions with the Imperial Irrigation District and the Coachella Valley Water District regarding future inflows to the Sea.

Development of Alternatives

Gwen Buchholz, Laura Harnish, Armin Munevar, David Christophel, Darryl Hayes, Pamela Vanderbilt and John Dickey, CH2M HILL, provided an overview of the development of the alternatives and an update on the progress of the various working groups.

Overview of the Habitat-Based Approach to Development of Alternatives

Ms. Buchholz provided an overview of the habitat-based approach to development of alternatives and noted that future inflows play a critical role in the development of project components and overall project alternatives. Ms. Buchholz noted that the project alternatives will be habitat based, and requirements to develop and maintain habitat (such as specific water quality requirements) will drive other components of the project (such as water treatment).

Inflow Assumptions

Ms. Harnish provided an overview of the meeting between the State (DWR, State Water Resources Control Board, and California Environmental Protection Agency) and representatives from Mexico and a summary of the activities of the Model Working Group.

State representatives met with representatives from Mexico on June 20, 2005 to discuss future changes in Mexico that have the potential to affect flows in the New and Alamo rivers. Ms. Harnish noted that the meeting was productive. The team is working with various representatives from Mexico to gather data and better understand future land use, population, and water management changes in the Mexicali Valley that may affect flows in the New and Alamo rivers.

There was discussion among the Committee Members regarding future flows in the New River. It was noted that due to changed water management practices in Mexico, baseflows might not exist in the New River from Mexico in the future, and flows in the river across the border may be limited to stormflows or flows due to other infrequent or emergency events. Therefore, the Ecosystem Restoration Plan may want to assume a range of values for flows in the New River at the border.

The Model Working Group held two meetings in June to discuss inflows, variability, and model development. The group agreed on future inflows to the Sea under the Quantification Settlement Agreement and the refined historical hydrology (includes refinements for local watershed inflows). The group has also discussed approaches for determining inflows from Mexico under the No Action Alternative, developing future uncertainty (variability), and projecting future salt loads.

Mr. Munevar provided an overview of the approach for addressing future hydrologic uncertainty. Future inflows to the Sea are an important component of the design and performance of alternatives. A relative understanding of future inflows will allow for informed decisions regarding the acceptable level of risk for design and siting of facilities. Mr. Munevar noted that for each inflow source, the potential drivers for future changes and the resulting changes in future inflows will be identified. A probability distribution that best describes the uncertainty based on existing data and direction from the Working Group and Advisory Committee will be selected. It was noted that the analysis will identify a list of drivers and a range of future inflows based on the drivers; future inflows will not be quantified for each individual driver.

The following were noted by Committee members as areas where additional information or consideration may be needed:

- changes in inflows related to the All-American Canal Lining project;
- potential “forced” water transfers (such as a Part 417 action);
- population growth in the Imperial Valley; and,
- irrigation of additional lands in the Imperial Valley.

Habitat Components

Mr. Christophel provided an overview of the habitat components of alternatives, including an overview of the various bird guilds and the habitat types used by those guilds, and an overview of additional habitat considerations. The existing habitat types at the Sea were also discussed.

Mr. Christophel provided an update on the progress of the Habitat Working Group. The Working Group has requested additional information on existing habitat types at the Sea. As part of the discussion, a few Committee Members suggested that this assessment include acreage of existing habitat types, along with water demand, land ownership, and relative species use for each habitat type. The next Habitat Working Group meeting will be held on August 9, 2005.

Barriers and Other Infrastructure Components

Mr. Hayes provided an overview of the barriers and other infrastructure components of alternatives. It was noted that the alternatives development and evaluation will be an iterative process as the habitat, infrastructure, water quality, and air quality components are refined. Mr. Hayes noted that it is important to understand the water needs (including water quality needs) for the various components, and various tradeoffs may be needed with each alternative configuration to maintain the overall water balance. In addition, it is important to understand the sensitivity of each alternative to inflows and long-term variability. A range of inflows is being considered for each alternative; the presentation included alternative configurations assuming annual inflows of 650,000, 850,000 and 1,000,000 acre-feet for illustrative purposes.

Mr. Hayes provided an overview of the infrastructure components for the North Sea, South Sea, and Combined alternatives. It was noted that the location of the infrastructure components were for illustrative purposes only and these facilities could be located in other areas. However, various considerations were taken in determining the example locations including topography, soils, proximity to other facilities, ease of access, and environmental hazards. Based on questions from the Committee Members, it was noted that a large barrier of the type needed for the project could likely be constructed, but construction wouldl be challenging and costly. A separate preliminary design and construction (project phasing) analysis is underway for construction of the barrier.

The following were noted by Committee Members and the public with regard to the alternative configurations and location of infrastructure components.

- Salt water wetland habitats could be managed to maintain various water depths and salinity targets. Water depths of less than 6 inches may be desirable.
- Fresh water marsh habitats could be managed for seasonal flooding. Selenium would need to be managed if drain or river water is used. Mosquitoes may be of concern in these fresher-water areas.
- Exposed lands may be used for expanded agricultural activities.
- Air quality management may not be needed on every acre of exposed land.

Air Quality Management Components

Clean Air Act Compliance

Ms. Vanderbilt provided an overview of the Clean Act General Conformity compliance regulations and process as it relates to the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Plan.

General Conformity requires the evaluation of construction and operation emissions from Federal Actions (including permitting actions) in areas that are not in attainment or maintenance for the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Federal actions should not cause or contribute to new air quality violations, increase the frequency or severity of exiting violations, or delay timing of attainment of interim emissions reductions. It was noted that various portions of the Salton Sea watershed are not in attainment of the NAAQS or the California Ambient Air Quality Standards for carbon monoxide, fine particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter (PM_{10}), fine particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter ($PM_{2.5}$), and ozone.

Compliance with the General Conformity requirement can be achieved in several ways, including project phasing, identification of the project in the State Implementation Plan (SIP), offsetting emissions, demonstration that emissions do not cause or contribute to NAAQS violations, demonstration that emissions do not exceed applicable SIP budgets, and a State commitment to revise the SIP. General Conformity compliance is only required for the proposed action and is not needed for all of the project alternatives. General Conformity compliance is anticipated to be a major consideration for construction activities, and may necessitate project phasing and the use of alternative construction methods, construction equipment, and transportation methods.

Playa Air Quality Management

Dr. Dickey provided an overview of the potential control approaches and stabilization methods for playa (exposed sea bed) areas. The approach to the playa air quality management uses the Owens Lake efforts as a working model, and conservatively assumes that emission control actions would be needed on all exposed areas where no other land use has been identified. The approach to controlling emissions from playa areas includes identifying control measures, researching existing and developing new control measures, monitoring the effectiveness of measures after implementation, and refining/adapting measures over time as additional information becomes available.

A preliminary list of control measures was identified using various performance criteria including the extent and effectiveness of measures, integration of these measures with the Ecosystem Restoration Plan goals, feasibility, and cost. Overall, two categories of measures are being considered, those that require water and those that require only minimal or no water. It was noted that wetting the exposed playa with drain or river water is not being considered due to eco-risk concerns; however, wetting the surface with Sea water is being considered. Based on the list of options developed, two temporary control measures (sand fences and chemical stabilizers) and two permanent control measures (water-efficient vegetation and stabilization with brine) are being considered in detail. It was noted that the salt crust will also be a factor in controlling emissions along with limiting access and disturbance to the playa. Various focused investigations are underway to better estimate emissions from the playa and better understand the effectiveness of individual control measures at the Salton Sea.

Results of Recent Field Work

Due to limited time, this discussion was deferred to a future meeting.

Update on Science Panel Discussions

Dr. Doug Barnum, U.S. Geological Survey, provided an update on the efforts of the Science Panel. The Panel is serving in an internal advisory role to the project team. The Panel has been tasked with the following: review and comment on project reports and the range of alternatives; provide a scientific basis for alternatives; and, provide scientific guidance for the various project activities. The Panel has held three meetings, during which nutrient and contaminant dynamics, and alternative configurations were the primary topics of discussion.

The Panel has noted that there is an overall lack of long-term, integrated data on the Salton Sea. This lack of long-term data limits the understanding of on-going and long-term trends at the Sea, and limits the ability to predict how project alternatives will affect the ecosystem. The Panel strongly recommends the implementation of an integrated monitoring program.

Update on USBR Feasibility Study

Mike Walker and Paul Weghorst, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), provided an overview of Reclamation's Feasibility Study. Mr. Walker noted that Public Law 108-361, signed in 2004, directs the Secretary of the Interior, in coordination with the State of California and the SSA, to prepare a feasibility study on a preferred alternative for Salton Sea restoration. Based on a question from a Committee Member, it was noted that Congress has authorized only the completion of the study; additional authorization is needed for Reclamation to take further action.

Mr. Weghorst noted that Reclamation will complete the Feasibility Study in two phases. Phase I will consist of a Value Planning Study, a risk analysis, a variability assessment, and a Decision Memorandum and Report. A preferred alterative will be selected in Phase I and the Feasibility Study will be prepared on that preferred alternative in Phase II. Mr. Weghorst noted that Reclamation's process for preparation of a Feasibility Study is rigorous and follows the U.S. Water Resources Council's Principles and Guidelines. Phase II may take 1 to 3 years depending on the preferred alternative selected.

To the extent possible, Reclamation anticipates coordinating with DWR and DFG on preparation of the Feasibility Study and the two processes are expected to be complementary. Reclamation is evaluating the same alternatives that are currently being considered in the Ecosystem Restoration Plan.

Summary and Action Items

The next two Advisory Committee meeting were identified as follows: August 17 at the Sacramento Convention Center, and September 20 in the Imperial Valley area. Additional information will be provided via the Committee's e-mail reflector.

Handouts

Copies of the following presentations:

- Status of Project Schedule
- Update on Fish Sampling Protocol
- Recreation and Economic Opportunities Evaluation
- Habitat-based Approach to Development of Alternatives
- Inflows/Modeling Working Group
- Habitat Update
- Barriers and Other Facilities in the Development of Alternatives
- Air Quality Management for Alternatives – Clean Air Act General Conformity Compliance
- Playa Air Quality Management for Alternatives
- Field Work and Sampling Update
- Salton Sea Science Panel

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members or Alternates Present:

Fred Cagle, Sierra Club
Celeste Cantu, State Water Resources Control Board
Tellis Codekas, Coachella Valley Water District
Michael Cohen, Pacific Institute
Maria de la Paz Carpio-Obeso, Regional Water Quality Control Board
Bill DuBois, California Farm Bureau Federation
Bill Gaines, California Waterfowl Association
Larry Grogan, Imperial County
Bob Ham, Imperial Valley Association of Governments
Rick Hoffman, Riverside County
Julia Levin, Audubon California
Debi Livesay, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Sylvia Oey, Air Resources Board
Carol Roberts, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
John Scott, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Vincent Signorotti, Geothermal Energy Association
Mike Walker, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Laura Washburn, Defenders of Wildlife
Bruce Wilcox, Imperial Irrigation District