

SALTON SEA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

November 4, 2004
9:30 – 3:30
Sacramento, 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 Secretary / Initial Comments

Secretary Chrisman noted that the Water Supply, Reliability and Improvement Act (H.R. 2828), commonly known as the CALFED authorization bill, was signed by President Bush and enrolled as Public Law No 108-361. The act also directs the Secretary of the Interior, in coordination with the State of California and the Salton Sea Authority (SSA), to complete a feasibility study on a preferred alternative for Salton Sea restoration by December 31, 2006. Secretary Chrisman noted that the State is working with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) to coordinate efforts. The act provides the authorization needed to seek federal appropriations for the feasibility study; obtaining an appropriation would be the next step.

The next Advisory Committee Meeting will be on November 30, 2004, in conjunction with the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) Fall Conference in Palm Springs. An overview of the status of Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) implementation will be provided at the meeting as was requested by Committee members. Relatedly, a hearing on the coordinated QSA litigation is scheduled for November 5, 2004.

Public Comments

The following public comment was provided:

- Larry Porter, concerned citizen – Mr. Porter noted that water transfers outside of the Salton Sea watershed may not be in the best interest of the basin. These water transfers have impacts on endangered species (including species fully protected under the California Fish and Game Code), air quality, and agricultural resources. Once this water supply is being used by others, it may be difficult to re-allocate water in the Salton Sea watershed.

Update on Project Schedule

Gwen Buchholz of CH2MHILL noted that work is underway on preparing the draft No Action Alternative Report, identifying conceptual alternatives and developing screening

criteria, identifying data gaps, and preparing focused reports on air quality and selenium. With regard to identifying conceptual alternatives and developing screening criteria, Ms. Buchholz noted that this task order was recently initiated and more information will be available at the November 30 meeting. Screening criteria will be developed with input from the Advisory Committee, and the criteria will be used to screen out the conceptual alternatives that do not meet the purpose and need of the project.

Defining the No Action Alternative Conditions

Gwen Buchholz, Laura Harnish, and Harry Ohlendorf of CH2MHILL provided an overview of the initial draft No Action Alternative Report, which will be distributed to the Advisory Committee shortly. Ms. Buchholz thanked Advisory Committee members for their comments on the Baseline Report and noted that comments submitted helped the consultant team in preparing the No Action Alternative Report. She noted that this is an initial effort based on readily available information. The report was prepared in a format to be later inserted into the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) as a portion of the alternatives description section. As such, the report is not intended to be a stand-alone document. Member's suggestions for information sources and contacts along with any comments on the report should be sent to the Committee's e-mail reflector (salton_sea@water.ca.gov).

Discussion on the No Action Alternative included:

- The description of the No Action Alternative was prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, which provide that the "no project" analysis discuss existing conditions at the time the notice of preparation is published, as well as what would be reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project were not approved. It was noted that projects by others that do not fit the criteria for inclusion in the No Action Alternative will be considered for inclusion in the cumulative impacts analysis. Additionally, projects or actions that are speculative in nature will also be considered for inclusion in the cumulative impacts analysis. Projects or actions by others to be considered for the No Action Alternative and the Cumulative Impacts sections of the PEIR are likely to be revisited as more information is known about these projects. Ms. Harnish described the types of projects that would be considered in the analysis of cumulative impacts and asked committee members to post any additional projects that should be considered to the reflector prior to November 19.

Various projects and other future changes in the Salton Sea watershed were discussed, including: Total Maximum Daily Load implementation (existing TMDLs included in the No Action Alternative, but not future TMDLs whose effects can't be quantified); agricultural to urban land conversion; General Plan build-out; population projections; effects of drought in the Colorado River service area;

long-term water management operations on the lower Colorado River; and wastewater treatment and energy generation projects in Mexico.

There was extensive discussion among committee members about future land use and population projections, including differences among Department of Finance and SCAG projections. The Committee was provided with DOF's most recent projections, which were revised downwards significantly from the prior projections. Committee members suggested showing both DOF and SCAG projections, and using only the eastern part of Riverside County, not whole-county data.

With respect to the future quantity and quality of water reaching the Salton Sea, one member noted that agriculture was declining in the Imperial Valley and more conversion to urban land use should be expected. There was discussion about potential impacts of urban land conversion to the sea, as well as potential flow impacts due to long-term drought conditions on the Colorado River. It was remarked that continued urban growth in Mexicali could cancel out any water quality benefits that TMDL implementation might provide.

It was noted that additional information is needed on land use for tribal lands and in the Mexicali Valley.

Dr. Ohlendorf described the biological changes that were anticipated under the No Action Alternative. He noted that the current ecosystem likely would transition from a system that supports fish to a simpler system possibly dominated by brine shrimp and other invertebrates. While this future ecosystem might support many of the same birds that currently use the Salton Sea, he cautioned that the health of the future ecosystem could be significantly influenced by water quality (e.g. synergistic effects of nutrients, selenium and salinity).

- Additional detail is being prepared for selenium and air quality information. These topics will not yet be covered in the initial draft No Action Report to be provided to Committee members for review.
- Study Period – The Committee discussed the merits of a 45, 50 or 75-year study period in detail. Although several Committee members suggested that the projection of No Action Alternative conditions for greater than 45 years would be speculative, the Committee eventually recommended a 75-year period, which matches the study period used for the QSA and water transfer environmental documents.

Salton Sea Authority Request for State Bond Funds

Ron Enzweiler, SSA Executive Director, provided an overview of the Salton Sea Authority's proposed request for \$12 million in State bond funds (list of projects included with handouts) and requested the Committee's endorsement of the SSA's planned

request at a future Wildlife Conservation Board Meeting. Committee members briefly discussed some of the proposed projects, but expressed concerns with some and did not have enough information on them. Secretary Chrisman requested that the SSA continue refining its proposed projects and working with Committee members and the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to address concerns and to minimize duplication of efforts. The SSA has about \$1.5 million of the unspent State General Fund monies from 1999-2000 Member's requests that should be put to use before State bond monies are committed. Further discussion was deferred for the November 30 meeting, where the SSA will provide more detail on the proposed projects.

Science Symposium Update

Doug Barnum, U.S. Geological Survey Salton Sea Science Office, provided an update on the Salton Sea Science Symposium that was mentioned at the previous committee meeting. USGS anticipates holding the symposium in March 2005 in Riverside; cosponsors will include DWR, SSA, and the Water Education Foundation. The symposium is intended to provide a forum for making restoration-related scientific information available in time for its consideration in this process. Additionally, USGS is coordinating a peer review of the SSA's preferred Integrated Water Management Plan alternative (also referred to as the "North Lake" alternative). The review will take place at the University of California, Riverside in mid-November. Michael Cohen with the Pacific Institute will be coordinating preparation of a summary paper.

Update on Biological Monitoring Data

Kim Nicol, Department of Fish and Game (DFG), provided an update on the status of DFG's fish monitoring at the Salton Sea. Numerous tilapia were found during the recent sampling event, but no corvina, croaker or sargo were found. Following a question asked by a Committee member, Ms. Nicol noted that tilapia and desert pupfish have a competitive interaction but that tilapia do not prey upon desert pupfish. It was also noted that two desert pupfish were caught in the gill nets which were set in fairly deep water, 150 feet off-shore, suggesting that pupfish may be making more use of deeper water than was previously known.

Doug Barnum provided an update on the avian density, water quality, and pileworm monitoring at the Sea. Dr. Barnum noted that monthly bird surveys in agricultural fields have been started, and approximately six months of data have been collected. Both USGS and USBR conduct water quality monitoring for basic parameters such as salinity. USGS surveys once a month; USBR surveys quarterly. Dr. Barnum also described 2004 pileworm surveys carried out by San Diego State University, at the request of USBR on behalf of DWR and DFG. The data analysis and report preparation for the pileworm survey are underway. Based on preliminary results, it does not appear that there is a statistically significant difference in density of pileworms between a 1999 survey and the 2004 survey. However, Dr. Barnum noted that fewer pileworms were found at water depths of 6 and 10 meters in 2004 than were found at the same water depths in 1999. Pileworms are an important part of the Sea's invertebrate food base.

Preliminary Results of Data Gaps / Analytical Tools Study

Gwen Buchholz of CH2MHILL provided an overview of the progress in identifying data gaps and available analytical tools (e.g. models). Ms. Buchholz noted that an extensive annotated bibliography is in preparation and will be distributed to the Committee for review in the near future. The analytical tools under consideration are intended to provide an objective basis for describing and comparing impacts associated with alternatives. The tools used need to allow for repetitive or iterative analysis and need to be reproducible by others. Because this is a public process, any computer models used need to be publicly available. Member's suggestions for additional data and analytical tools should be sent to the Committee's e-mail reflector.

Technologies and Management Techniques to Limit Exposures to Selenium

Charles Phillips of SAIC provided an overview of selenium treatment technologies. Mr. Phillips noted that a report is in preparation and will be distributed to the Advisory Committee. It was noted that there is no perfect or "off-the-shelf" treatment technology, and that all technologies will require modification to meet specific site characteristics. Treatment may be more effective when two or more technologies are combined. Mr. Phillips also noted that costs included in the presentation were not directly comparable. The report under preparation is limited to treatment technologies, and source reduction was not included. Citing the high cost of treatment, Committee members suggested that the feasibility and cost of source reduction be considered. An update on the Setmire Study (USBR) in the Imperial Valley was requested for the next meeting. It was also suggested that the presentation's costs be reformatted to be comparable.

Wrap Up / Future Meetings

The next Advisory Committee meetings were identified as follows:

- November 30 in Palm Springs (in conjunction with the ACWA conference). This will be an all-day meeting. The meeting will be held at the Palm Springs convention center.
- January in Sacramento (date to be determined).

Members should contact Rick Hoffman or Jeanine Jones with suggested meeting agenda items. Jeanine Jones requested that members send a copy of their 2005 Board meeting schedules to DWR to assist in planning Advisory Committee meetings around these board meetings.

Handouts

Copies of the following presentations:
Project Schedule

Initial Draft Report of No Action Alternative
Development of the No Action Alternative
List of Projects As Unanimously Approved by the Salton Sea Authority Board on
10/28/04 Requesting State Bond Funding (provided by the Salton Sea
Authority)
Identify Data Gaps and Available Analytical Tools
Treatment Technologies and Management Techniques to Limit Exposures to
Selenium

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members or Alternatives Present:

Larry Biland, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Steve Birdsall, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District
Bart Christensen, State Water Resources Control Board
Michael Cohen, Pacific Institute
Kim Delfino, Defenders of Wildlife
Bill DuBois, California Farm Bureau Federation
Bob Ham, Imperial Valley Association of Governments
Rick Hoffman, Riverside County
Bill Gaines, California Waterfowl Association
Elston Grubaugh, Imperial Irrigation District
Leif Horwitz, United States Geological Survey
Gary Johnson, Regional Water Quality Control Board
Al Loya, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Mark Nichols, Cabazon Band of Mission Indians
Sylvia Oey, Air Resources Board
Larry Purcell, San Diego County Water Authority
Tom Raftican, United Anglers of Southern California
Steve Robbins, Coachella Valley Water District
Vincent Signorotti, Geothermal Energy Association
Dennis Underwood, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Mike Walker, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Dan Walsworth, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
John Wohlmuth, Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Gary Wyatt, Imperial County