

Dear Ms. Hoffman-Floerke,

As a supporter of Defenders of Wildlife and the Salton Sea -- one of North America's largest stopovers for migratory birds -- I am writing to offer my comments of the California Department of Water Resources Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report on the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program (PEIR).

The Salton Sea is a national treasure, and the state must take action to prevent its disappearance. A shrinking Salton Sea will not only harm the health of communities in the surrounding Imperial and Coachella Valleys by affecting air and water quality, but it will also harm an important migratory bird stopover in the Pacific Flyway.

With over 90 percent of the wetlands in California gone, the 400 bird species that depend on the Salton Sea will have no other place to go, leading to catastrophic losses for migratory bird populations.

Unfortunately, most proposed alternatives in the PEIR fail to adequately protect fish, wildlife and air and water quality in the Salton Sea area. The PEIR does, however, contain the components and information necessary to formulate a successful plan.

Please incorporate the following features into a final preferred alternative that would meet legal requirements for the restoration of the Salton Sea.

- * Establish between 38,000 50,000 acres of Shallow Saline Habitat Complex, as described in Alternatives 1 and 2, at the southern and northern ends of the Sea to provide habitat for shoreline species;
- * Create concentric rings using geotubes or other dirt-filled barriers, as described in Alternative 4, to provide additional shallow habitat, deeper marine habitat, shoreline and view protection, air-quality protections, and recreation;
- * Provide a large (approximately 10,000 acre) North Lake, which would be the largest recreational lake in Southern California, fed by the Whitewater River to provide recreation and development opportunities without the costs and risks associated with a major mid-Sea barrier or the costs of pumping water from the southern end of the Sea (Similar to the proposals found in Alternatives 5-7);
- * Provide at least one-half acre-foot of water per acre of exposed Seabed, as stipulated by the Salton Sea Advisory Committee, to prevent dust pollution caused by exposed playa, as described in Alternatives 1-3, 5-6 and 8;

* Construct shallow saline habitat (known as "early start habitat") immediately to provide resources for birds during the long permitting and construction process, as described in all of the proposed alternatives; and

* Develop a plan that provides water for habitat and air quality mitigation first, in case of possible shortages or system malfunctions, as described in Alternatives 1-3.

A Final Preferred Alternative that contains all of these components would best meet the legal requirements to maximize habitat, air quality and water quality, while also providing substantial recreation and development opportunities.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.