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January 2, 2007

Email: SaltonSeaComments@water.ca.gov

Attn: Dale Hoffman-Floerke  
Salton Sea PEIR comments  
CA Department of Water Resources  
Colorado River & Salton Sea Office  
1416 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 1148-6  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Comments on Draft PEIR for Salton Sea**

Dear Mr, Hoffan-Floerke,

I am writing for our chapter as the Conservation Chair for the Altacal Audubon Society, based in Chico California. We have been alerted to the problems surrounding the Salton Sea and restoration efforts described in the Programmatic Environmental Impact Report for the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program (PEIR). We recognize the 'Sea' as essential habitat to millions of resident and migratory birds whose populations, without the current size and habitat provided by the sea, would be in jeopardy. The Salton Sea is particularly vital I to birds now, as the wetlands historically spread across the California landscape and used by birds along the Pacific Flyway, have dwindled to approximately 5 percent; a 95% loss of wetland habitat.

I recently drove south to the Salton Sea to see for myself why we should be concerned about this shrinking giant inland body of water. Also, I was set to find the first State record of the Ross' gull, the Arctic wanderer had confused his bearings but fortunately found refuge at the Sea. Hundreds of people drove down to see this bird and no doubt added revenue to the local economy while searching for the gull, another valuable reason to keep the Sea bird friendly. Further, as the Sea evaporates, the No Action scenarios described in the PEIR discuss the toxins that will be exposed, windblown, and airborne, degrading the health of residents of the Imperial and Coachella valleys.

Clearly these three reasons alone are enough to support the best protection of the Salton Sea, yet legal requirements to maximize wildlife habitat and provide air and water quality protection are not satisfied in any of the alternatives in the PEIR.

Therefore, we urge that DWR construct a final preferred alternative that includes actions and features from several of the alternatives in the PEIR. These activities would meet the legal requirements for restoration and address the Valley health, recreation and development opportunities. We have reviewed and support the following recommendations given by California Audubon.

- Between 25,000 – 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;

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- 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;
- Similar to the lakes found in Alternatives 5-7, 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;
- 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.

Not only do we agree that this hybrid plan is the best alternative for people AND wildlife, we also understand by advocating this plan, the State will not have to redo the PIER process again. We believe that this is an essential and viable alternative. Thank you for your consideration.

Dawn Garcia  
Conservation Chair  
Altacal Audubon Society

