



**"Playa Breaking" Ceremony
Red Hill Bay Restoration Project
Nov. 5, 2015**

NEWS RELEASE

November 5, 2015

Contact: Christian Schoneman, 1-760-348-5278 ext. 227
Marion Champion, 1-760-604-4120

Federal, state and local partners kick off Salton Sea Red Hill Bay Restoration Project

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge, in cooperation with the state Department of Water Resources, Imperial County and state and local agencies, commemorated the kickoff of a 420-acre wetlands restoration project at the Salton Sea that could prove pivotal, as restoration efforts move forward, in addressing California's largest and most troubled body of water.

Officials gathered at the Red Hill marina, the footprint of the shrinking sea, for a "Playa Breaking" ceremony.

The Red Hill Bay Restoration Project is designed to restore and improve the quality of wetland habitat in the Red Hill Bay marina to conditions similar to what the Salton Sea shoreline was like decades ago. The objective is to reestablish the marina as an important shallow-water habitat for migrating water birds while covering the newly exposed playa with saline water to decrease fugitive dust emissions, protecting public health.

"This project is an important contribution to the state, federal and local agency effort to return ecological values to the Salton Sea that benefit both wildlife and the people who value the Salton Sea," said Ren Lohofener, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Southwest Region.

Congressman Raul Ruiz (CA-36) spoke on the House floor to celebrate the groundbreaking. "The Red Hill Bay Project is the first step in realizing my vision to combat the health threats, environmental crisis, and adverse economic impacts of the receding Sea by transforming this threat into an opportunity to prevent dust exposure and spur renewable energy and tourism," said Dr. Ruiz. "This first large scale ground-breaking project shows that if we work together, we can achieve results towards a bigger vision."

On the scientific side, the restoration project will pump water from both the Alamo River and the Salton Sea, blending the waters in two 210-acre impoundments. This new practice of using agricultural drain water to create wildlife habitat, once considered not viable, has since been developed by the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Reclamation, concluding that the mixing of the water sources has the potential to provide much-needed water for habitat creation while meeting targeted salinity levels.

Added IID Board President Stephen Benson: "For all of us who call the Imperial or Coachella Valley our home, today's groundbreaking marks an important first step towards a realistic restoration program. Red Hill Bay is a significant project because it demonstrates what can be accomplished when we forge a partnership between federal, state and local agencies.

"IID has and will continue to advocate for a Salton Sea restoration program that includes short-term, medium-term and long-term solutions. We are encouraged by the recent actions announced by our governor and the Salton Sea Task Force and we look forward to continued collaboration between all parties."

Projects of similar design are currently being planned by state and local agencies.

###



"Playa Breaking" Ceremony
Red Hill Bay Restoration Project
Nov. 5, 2015

NOTE: For event photos and video, contact the Imperial Irrigation District's Communication Section at 1-760-604-4120 or by writing to mjchampion@iid.com.



THE RED HILL BAY RESTORATION PROJECT *will restore and improve the quality of wetland habitat to conditions similar to what the Salton Sea shoreline was decades ago. The objective is to reestablish the Red Hill Bay area as an important saline shallow-water habitat for migratory water birds and to cover the newly exposed playa with saline water.*



Red Hill Bay Restoration Project

“Playa Breaking” Ceremony · Nov. 5, 2015

✧ 10 A.M. • WELCOME ✧

Chris Schoneman

Project Leader, Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Bruce Wilcox

Assistant Secretary, Salton Sea Policy, California Natural Resources Agency

✧ GUEST SPEAKERS ✧

Raul Ruiz, M.D.

Congressman, California’s 36th Congressional District

Jennifer Gimbel

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Department of the Interior

Ryan E. Kelley

Imperial County, District 4 Supervisor

John J. Benoit

Fourth District, Riverside County & Board President, Salton Sea Authority

Stephen W. Benson

Board President, Imperial Irrigation District

Eduardo Garcia

Assemblymember, California’s 50th Assembly District

Ben Hueso

California State Senator, 40th District

✧ “PLAYA BREAKING” CEREMONY ✧

✧ BRUNCH ✧