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Salton Sea Advocates Grade California's Restoration Plans for the Sea *No single plan excels, but final plan could still get an "A"*

SACRAMENTO -- None of the ten Salton Sea restoration plans assessed in the Department of Water Resources' draft Environmental Impact Report earned high marks for achieving restoration goals, according to the Salton Sea Coalition's Restoration Plan Report Card released today. The alternatives contain all the right components, though, to develop a successful plan.

The Coalition, a diverse group of conservation, recreation and hunting and fishing organizations, released its report card assessing each alternative in an effort to help citizens and policymakers understand the strengths and weaknesses of each proposed plan. According to the Coalition, in order to earn an "A" grade, the final plan should "mix and match" components from several of the project proposals to produce a new plan that meets the legal requirements to provide enough habitat for fish and wildlife, ensure no new air quality impacts, and improve water quality at the Sea, as well as local expectations for recreation and economic development.

"Some of the potential restoration plans provide a good start toward solving a difficult problem, but the State's assessment shows that none of the plans excel at protecting and restoring the Salton Sea," said Laura Washburn, Salton Sea Coalition Coordinator.

An "A" project should include the following components:

- Maximum feasible shoreline and shallow water habitat for birds and endangered pupfish (found in Alternatives 1 & 2)
- Water clean enough for fish and birds, including minimizing exposure to selenium and hydrogen sulfide (found in Alternatives 1 & 2)
- Enough water to ensure that for every two acres of seabed exposed, an acre-foot of water would be available to keep dust to a minimum (found in Alternatives 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8);
- A 10,000 acre lake at the north end of the Sea, fed solely by the Whitewater River, for a fishery and recreation (a smaller version of the option found in Alternatives 5, 6 and 7);
- Ability to function and provide environmental benefits before completion (found in Alternatives 1-4); and
- Designed to provide flexibility to accommodate changes in conditions and minimize risk of failure (found in Alternatives 1, 2 and 4).

"Failing to restore the Salton Sea is simply not an option," said Kim Delfino of Defenders of Wildlife. "The Sea is just too important to the people, agriculture, economy and wildlife of the region for us *not* to save it."

"During the next 90 days, hunters, anglers, conservationists and public health advocates will be working to ensure that state adopts a final plan that restores the maximum feasible wildlife habitat, maintains water quality and prevents harm to air quality, which is critical for public health and the recreational and agriculture industry in this area," stated Jason Rhine of the California Waterfowl Association.

In the Coalition report card released today, only three proposed projects earned above a C grade, with the two habitat Projects (Alternatives 1 and 2) doing the most to address the legal mandates and additional considerations of time to provide habitat benefits, flexibility, agricultural impacts, dependability, and recreational benefits. Both “No Action” alternatives, which allow the Sea to shrink and turn into a dusty, hyper-saline sink, received “F” grades. The other alternatives did not fare as badly as the No Action alternatives, but still received below-average grades.

“This DEIR contains information on all of the elements we need to save the Salton Sea,” said Michael Cohen of the Pacific Institute. “We will work with the state and other stakeholders to assemble these elements into a restoration project that successfully meets the needs of people, wildlife, the local economy, and the law.”

Today’s DEIR release kicks off a 90-day public comment period to be punctuated by workshops in Sacramento, Oakland, San Diego and the Imperial and Coachella Valleys. Residents in each of these localities will have the opportunity at these meetings to learn more about the proposed restoration projects and provide written comments.

“Developing the best restoration plan is essential, but we also need to secure the funding to implement that plan,” said Julia Levin, policy director for Audubon California. “The only hope of immediate, and substantial, funding for restoration is passage of Proposition 84, which is on the November ballot. Prop 84 includes \$47 million specifically allocated for the Salton Sea, plus several hundred million dollars for water quality, lake protection and related issues.”

The Salton Sea DEIR is comprised of six restoration alternatives developed by the state, and two additional alternatives submitted for evaluation in early 2006 by other interests. The Salton Sea Coalition's report card is based on those original submissions, but the Coalition notes that the Salton Sea Authority and the Imperial Group have made some improvements to their respective plans since they were submitted early this year.

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The Coalition has posted its Report Card, and the basis for calculating grades, online at www.saltonseacoalition.org/reportcard.

The Salton Sea Coalition is comprised of 13 organizations of varied interests and backgrounds that have joined together to support and advocate for the protection and revitalization of the Salton Sea, an important part of California’s natural, cultural and agricultural heritage. The Coalition organizations represent more than 1.3 million Californians, including approximately 15,000 members and supporters who live in Imperial and Riverside Counties.