



RAUL RUIZ, M.D.
Member of Congress
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3605

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October 5, 2020

The Honorable Brenda Burman
Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Aurelia Skipwith
Director
Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Commissioner Burman and Director Skipwith:

I am writing to you as a follow up to the House Natural Resources Committee hearing titled “Federal and State Efforts to Restore the Salton Sea.” This hearing was the first Congressional hearing since 1997 to address the public health crisis at the Salton Sea, and I am disappointed that you did not attend. Each of your departments play a critical role in managing the health of the Salton Sea, and your absence at this hearing to account for how your work protects our environment and the public’s health was unacceptable.

The Bureau of Reclamation owns 79,000 acres of land at and around the Salton Sea and has managed this land as an agricultural drainage sink since 1909. The Salton Sea Reclamation Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-372) required the Bureau to develop and consider a range of options to manage the salinity of the Sea, and these proposals were published in 2007. Most recently, the Bureau has partnered with the State of California on dust suppression and other projects at the Salton Sea. The Bureau also plays a critical role in the management of the Colorado River reservoirs.

The Fish and Wildlife Service manages over 32,000 acres as part of the Sonny Bono National Wildlife Refuge at the Salton Sea. This refuge is a critical part of the Pacific Flyway and provides habitat for numerous endangered species. The Fish and Wildlife Service is also a partner in the construction of the Red Hill Bay habitat project, which has been under construction since 2015.

In lieu of your testimony at the hearing, I am requesting that you answer the following questions related to your actions and responsibilities at the Salton Sea. Please provide your answers within 30 days.

Bureau of Reclamation:

1. Please provide a list of all dust mitigation or habitat projects at the Salton Sea that the Bureau of Reclamation has funded or otherwise contributed to.
2. Please describe how the Bureau has implemented the 2016 MOU between the Department of Interior and the California Natural Resources, including all funding allocated pursuant to that document.
3. Please describe how the Bureau contributes to California's Salton Sea Management Program.
4. How many acres of lakebed owned by the Bureau are currently exposed? Of those acres, how many are emissive?
5. What is the Bureau's plan to treat additional federally-owned lakebed that becomes exposed and what is the estimated cost?
6. Does the Bureau require Congressional appropriations to undertake mitigation efforts on exposed, emissive federally-owned land?
7. What steps has the Bureau taken to address water quality at the Salton Sea?
8. How does the Bureau account for the Salton Sea as part of its management of the Colorado River?

Fish and Wildlife Service

1. Please provide a list of all endangered species that are present at the Salton Sea.
2. Please describe how the populations of the species have changed over the past decade.
3. What funding is available to the Fish and Wildlife Service to improve water quality and habitat generally at the Salton Sea?
4. Please describe how the degradation of air and water quality at the Salton Sea affect the health of the National Wildlife Refuge.
5. Please describe how the Fish and Wildlife Service contributes to California's Salton Sea Management Program.

The unfolding public health and environmental crisis at the Salton Sea is one of the most pressing issue that my constituents face, and any solution will require full participation from federal, state, and local partners working in coordination. Thank you for your attention to this issue and I am looking forward to your answers to the above questions.

Sincerely,


Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress