

March 17, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Marcy Kaptur  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Energy and Water  
Committee on Appropriations  
2362-B Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Member Mike Simpson  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Energy and Water  
Committee on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs Lowey and Kaptur and Ranking Members Granger and Simpson:

I am writing to request language for the benefit of the Salton Sea in the FY21 Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee report. The Salton Sea is a 370 square mile hypersaline terminal lake spanning Riverside and Imperial Counties in Southern California. For decades, inflows to the Sea have been reduced, resulting in thousands of acres of exposed lakebed and rapidly declining water quality that threatens the local ecosystem and public health of surrounding communities.

In addition to owning more than 40% of the land underneath and surrounding the Salton Sea, the federal government has long played a role in the management of the Salton Sea and supported efforts by the State of California (the State) to mitigate its decline. The Army Corps of Engineers is the lead permitting agency for the Salton Sea Management Program operated by the State and the Corps has authorities under the Water Resources Development Act to construct mitigation projects. The Department of Interior is the primary agency managing water operations in the Western United States, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the State of California for Salton Sea management activities, and has been directed to develop sea management plans by Congress in 1998 and 2004.

In their FY 2021 Budget Justification, the Bureau of Reclamation recognizes the impending crisis at the Salton Sea. This document notes that "Reclamation estimates that approximately 8.75 square miles of Reclamation-owned lands will be emergent from the Sea as it recedes over the next 10 years" and states that the Bureau may have "significant air quality mitigation costs" related to the Clean Air Act and "may have a significant funding need in future years to address Reclamation managed lands."

Congress and the Bureau should not wait to address this crisis until it is too late – a significant investment in federal funding is urgently needed to protect the public's health.

In order to supplement the work that the State is doing to mitigate the public health and environmental effects of the declining Salton Sea, I ask that the Committee include the following report language:

Bureau of Reclamation, Water and Related Resources account:

*“The Committee supports the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Department of the Interior and the California Natural Resources Agency to support management activities at the Salton Sea. Additionally, the Committee is concerned by the public health, environmental, agricultural, and natural resource impacts at the Salton Sea. The Committee encourages the Department to partner with federal, state, and local agencies and coordinate use of all existing authorities and funding sources to support the State of California’s Salton Sea Management Program and reduce the likelihood of severe health and environmental impacts.”*

Bureau of Reclamation, Water Conservation and Delivery:

*“Within the Bureau’s Colorado River Water Conservation and Delivery program, the Committee encourages the Bureau to allocate increased funding for activities and projects associated with habitat improvement, water quality, and system development, prioritizing projects that will benefit economically disadvantaged communities and take a multi-agency approach.”*

Army Corps of Engineers: Construction account:

*“The Committee encourages the Army Corps to carry out Section 3032 of P.L. 110-114.”*

Army Corps of Engineers: Investigations Account:

*“The Committee encourages the Army Corps to evaluate new starts under their Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Authority for inland lakes with associated public health risks and energy development potential. The Committee recognizes inaction on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Resolution dated April 25, 2016 encouraging the Corps to investigate such projects.”*

The Salton Sea is the single largest emerging public health crisis in California and air quality issues that arise from the Sea have the potential to affect millions of people as far away as Los Angeles. The federal government has a significant and meaningful role to play in mitigating and managing air and water quality issues, restoring critical natural habitat, and protecting the public’s health. Thank you for your support of these vital programs and for considering these requests.

Sincerely,



Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
Member of Congress