



RAUL RUIZ, M.D.
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November 1, 2022

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

I write regarding the clear Congressional intent for the Department of the Interior (DOI) Bureau of Reclamation (BoR) to address the ongoing public health and environmental crisis at the Salton Sea. The Inflation Reduction Act's \$4 billion in drought mitigation funding specifically authorizes its use for restoration projects "caused by drought in a river basin or inland water body."¹ As you work to oversee negotiations over voluntary reductions in the amount of water used by Colorado River stakeholders, I strongly urge you to distribute the drought mitigation funding in a way that upholds the federal government's responsibilities to protect the Sea and the region.

California is a senior water rights holder on the Colorado River, yet California water agencies have already offered substantial water cuts in the spirit of good-faith negotiations.² Imperial Irrigation District (IID), Metropolitan Water District, Coachella Valley Water District, and Palo Verde Irrigation District offered up to 400,000 acre-feet of reduced water usage in a significant proposal towards reaching the BoR's water conservation goal. This is not California's first time reducing water usage from the Colorado River. The Quantification Settlement Agreement conserved over 500,000 acre feet of water, IID has conserved over 7.2 million acre feet of water since 2003, and other water agencies have also implemented programs to reduce water usage. These actions have helped bring the parties closer to a resolution by spurring additional water cut offers by other parties.

California stakeholders have asked that any Colorado River water cuts come with money to support the Salton Sea. Not only is this a reasonable request, but mitigation funding for the Salton Sea should be a prerequisite for any water cuts to the region. Toxic dust from the Salton Sea's exposed lakebed has led to unacceptable air quality and increased levels of respiratory

¹ Section 50233(b)(3) of P.L. 117-169.

² <https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2022/09/12/california-discusses-up-400-000-acre-feet-colorado-river-cuts/10358666002/>

issues in the nearby communities, including high rates of asthma and bronchitis. The Salton Sea is largely fed by agricultural runoff, so any water reductions in the area will only expose more lakebed quicker. The federal government must address the harm that any water cutbacks will cause disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

The federal government should become a full partner in restoring the lake. As I called for in my August 2, 2022, letter, this includes supporting the Salton Sea Management Program, evaluating the impacts of the current water cutbacks and future reductions, guaranteeing that no environmental laws are violated, and engaging with local leaders to provide an opportunity for meaningful consultation.

As a doctor, I am deeply concerned by the effects of the Salton Sea on my constituents' health. Denying the Salton Sea proper mitigation funding would exacerbate the issue and further hurt vulnerable, disadvantaged, and tribal communities. I urge you to instead work to restore the Salton Sea and reverse the environmental injustice that has plagued the region for far too long.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Please reach out to my office with any questions or concerns at (202) 225-5330.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Raul Ruiz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Raul" and last name "Ruiz" clearly distinguishable.

Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress

CC: Commissioner M. Camille Calimlim Touton, Bureau of Reclamation