

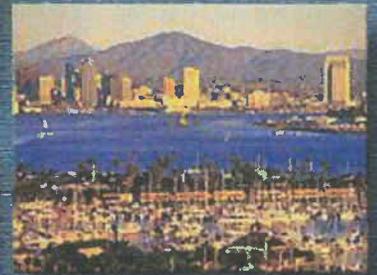
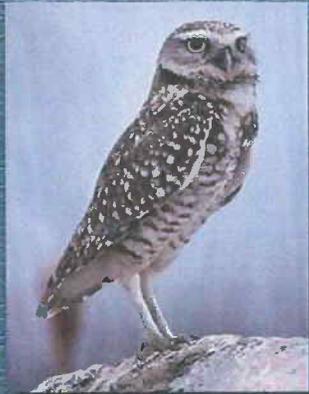


# Imperial Irrigation District Water Conservation and Transfer Project



## Habitat Conservation Plan

## Final Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Impact Statement



Prepared for



Imperial Irrigation District

Prepared by



U.S. Bureau of Reclamation



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or federal agencies, or by any other third parties willing to contribute to the mitigation effort, or any combination of the foregoing. The use of water obtained by IID from sources outside the Imperial Valley could require appropriate subsequent environmental review. The amount of water discharged to the Sea would be calculated annually based on the proportion of efficiency conservation (e.g., system and on-farm) and fallowing used to generate the water for transfer." As previously described, the amount of water discharged annually would match the anticipated Project-related reduction in inflow plus or minus any increment necessary to maintain the salinity trajectory but not to exceed the elevation levels projected for the Project as described above.

### Conclusion

By maintaining suitable salinity conditions in the Sea, IID would ensure continued persistence of fish (and therefore piscivorous birds covered by the HCP) for a period consistent with that projected under the Salton Sea Baseline. Under this approach, the level and duration of use of the Salton Sea by piscivorous birds would be expected to be the same as under the Salton Sea Baseline. In addition, maintaining the salinity trajectory associated with the 95-percent confidence bound until 2030 likely would result in a deceleration in the rate of salinization in the Sea. Any improvement over the Salton Sea Baseline likely would provide indirect benefits to salt-sensitive species, including several of the sport fish species that are the basis for the recreational sport fishery.

Avoiding salinity impacts would also result in the avoidance of biological impacts associated with changes in surface elevation. Because water surface elevation in the Sea under this strategy would be held at or above the Salton Sea Baseline projections, to 2030 conservation-related changes in the use of nesting islands by covered species would not occur as a result of the Project. Likewise, potential impacts on the tamarisk scrub community adjacent to the Sea (e.g., shoreline strand) would not be affected by the Project prior to 2030 and might be avoided altogether. Implementation of this strategy also provides the ancillary benefit of allowing time for a Salton Sea restoration project to be developed.

Mitigation for air quality impacts associated with the decline of elevation after the year 2030 is described in the Master Response on *Air Quality – Salton Sea Air Quality Monitoring and Mitigation Plan*. It should be noted that although the Salton Sea Habitat Conservation Strategy would provide mitigation water to the Sea until 2030, because the elevation would be maintained above the Baseline projection up to 2030, the elevation would not fall below the Baseline projection until the year 2035.

and Mono Lakes generated unmistakable dust emissions. While there has been no systematic monitoring program at the Salton Sea, there does not appear to be any substantial anecdotal information that these areas have historically contributed observable dust emissions.

This is consistent with observations of soil crusts in the Salton Sea area. Crusts re-form when rain falls on these desert lakebeds and then progressively break apart over time; the extent and rate of breakage indicate the erosive forces to which the crusts are subjected, and, to some extent, the amount of wind erosion. Year-old crusts are generally heavily damaged in emissive areas at Owens Lake. Relatively old crusts (at least 18 months) generally show little damage at the Salton Sea.

In summary, weaker driving forces at Salton Sea, especially the absence of sand in potentially exposed areas, are consistent with observations suggesting that exposed sediments are not as emissive as they have been at Owens Lake.

### **3.9.4 Difficulties Associated with Specific Prescription of Mitigation**

Without information on the nature and extent of the potential problem to be mitigated, it is unwise and impractical to propose or commit prematurely to costly dust control mitigation measures. Further, the dust control mitigation measures studied and under implementation at other lakebeds, such as Mono and Owens, may not be feasible or practical at the Salton Sea, given limitations on financial resources and the constraints on water availability for mitigation in this desert area. Nor would it be prudent to propose use of ratepayers' money to fund dust control measures for a problem that does not currently exist and may never materialize.

Under shoreline exposure scenarios, it is currently impossible to predict the extent and intensity of potential increases in dust emissions or the associated increases in ambient concentrations of the pollutant PM10 in excess of standards. The Draft EIR/EIS describes conditions at the Salton Sea that would naturally inhibit PM10 suspension, i.e., the combination of moisture present in the unsaturated zone beneath the exposed playa, the probable formation of dried algal mats and stable salt crusts consisting of chloride and sulfate salts, and the relatively low frequency of high wind events at the Salton Sea. In the best case, no problem would occur; in the worst case, a problem would emerge at some later date, after 2035, as the Sea's shoreline becomes exposed. Shoreline exposure caused by the Project will be delayed until that date because of implementation of the Salton Sea Habitat Conservation Strategy, which would provide mitigation water to the Sea to offset reductions in inflow caused by the Project. See the Master Response on *Biology – Approach to Salton Sea Habitat Conservation Strategy* in Section 3.5. IID would be responsible for impacts associated with implementation of the Proposed Project, apart from impacts associated with shoreline exposure anticipated from Baseline conditions.

### **3.9.5 Monitoring and Mitigation Plan**

Rather than focusing on site-specific and costly dust control mitigation for an undefined and future potential problem, a phased approach is proposed to detect, locate, assess, and resolve this potentially significant impact. The following 4-step plan would be implemented