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California Department of Water Resources Receives \$14 Million Grant to Support Salton Sea Restoration

SACRAMENTO—California Secretary for Natural Resources John Laird today heralded a \$14 million grant awarded by the state Wildlife Conservation Board to help fund habitat restoration efforts at the Salton Sea.

The [\\$14 million grant](#) of voter-approved bond funds to the California Department of Water Resources will help fund construction of approximately 640 acres of wetland habitat designed to sustain tilapia for the great abundance of fish-eating birds that flock to the Salton Sea. Tilapia is the dominant fish species in the hyper-saline lake. The project aims to enhance habitat for bird species, including cormorant and pelican, where the New River flows into the Salton Sea, about seven miles northwest of the city of Westmorland.

“This new grant will help us build habitat that protects the bird populations at the Salton Sea,” said Laird. “We’re pushing forward with the projects in our 10-year plan to protect wildlife and air quality as water flows to the sea decrease in coming years.”

Agricultural drainage to the Salton Sea is expected to shrink significantly after 2017, when water transfers from the Imperial Valley accelerate under agreements reached years ago. The sea is saltier than the ocean, and as inflows dwindle, lakebed is exposed, creating air quality issues in the Imperial and Coachella valleys. The possibility also exists that the lake could become too salty to support tilapia, eliminating an important food source for birds on the Pacific Flyway.

In May 2015, Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. created the Salton Sea Task Force and directed agencies to develop a comprehensive management plan for the Sea that will meet a short-term goal of 9,000 acres to 12,000 acres of habitat and dust suppression projects. The Governor also set a medium-term plan to construct 18,000 acres to 25,000 acres of habitat and dust suppression projects.

The \$14 million grant awarded yesterday by the Wildlife Conservation Board follows a \$1.85 million grant issued in June by the Board to the Imperial Irrigation District to restore approximately 600 acres of shallow, brackish water habitat in the Red Hill Bay area of the Salton Sea. That project is a joint effort by the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge, Imperial Irrigation District and private geothermal developers to create habitat and

address a highly emissive area of exposed playa.

In 2013, the California Department of Water Resources distributed \$3 million in bond funds for habitat restoration and air quality projects to the Imperial Irrigation District, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Salton Sea Authority. Projects funded by this money are underway.

The habitat work will help fulfill the goals set forth in a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) reached in August between the U.S. Department of the Interior and the California Natural Resources Agency.

In addition, the state of California has committed more than \$80 million in voter-approved bond funds to restore habitat and suppress dust at the lake in the near term.

For more information, visit <http://resources.ca.gov/salton-sea/>.

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