

Chairwoman Kaptur and Ranking Member Simpson, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on an issue that is of incredible importance to not only my district, but Southern California at large. The Salton Sea is California's largest inland body of water, stretching more than 30 miles across Imperial and Riverside Counties in Southern California. It is also a rapidly unfolding environmental disaster.

The Salton Sea is shrinking and that presents a massive public health crisis for those who call Southern California their home. As the shoreline recedes and the playa becomes exposed, salty, chemical-laden dust becomes airborne and blows across the region of my constituents' communities. This dust is made up of fine microparticles that when inhaled can enter the bloodstream and cause asthma and other respiratory ailments.

The Salton Sea is also critical to the economy of my region. National parks like Joshua Tree, desert habitats, and gorgeous landscapes that can't be found anywhere else in the country draw visitors to our region. All of this is threatened by the disappearance of the Sea. In fact, a 2014 study by the Pacific Institute put the cost of inaction at more than \$70 billion.

Finally, the Salton Sea is an important natural habitat for fish and wildlife. More than 400 species of birds can be found stopping at the Sea as part of the Pacific flyway. However, as the Sea shrinks and the salinity increases, this habitat is at risk of vanishing. Already, most fish species have died and even the tilapia – which can withstand salty water – are succumbing to the pollution.

In 2016, I helped facilitate a Memorandum of Understanding between the State of California and the Department of Interior to work together on the management of the Salton Sea. The MOU was a great step forward that I intend to see through, but it still needs to be funded by Congress.

This Committee has recognized the importance of that MOU and has included report language supporting it. I would encourage the Committee to not only once again include this critical language, but also expand the language to include cooperation from the Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, and Department of Agriculture to further the objectives outlined in the 2016 MOU.

The MOU included a commitment for \$30 million for both operation and maintenance of habitat restoration and dust suppression projects, and additional projects associated with California's Salton Sea Management Plan. I strongly urge the Committee to follow through on the commitments made to the residents of Southern California.

The success of the mitigation of the Salton Sea's decline hinges on the cooperation of all government partners, and it should be noted that the Department of the Interior is the largest landholder at the Salton Sea.

In addition, our counterparts in the Senate have included vital report language under the Army Corps of Engineers' section of the report encouraging the Corps to prioritize permitting for the Salton Sea Management Plan. Expediting these projects is critical. Each day that shovel-ready projects sit idle is detrimental to the health of residents of Southern California.

Finally, I would like to address the impacts of the Drought Contingency Plan (DCP). As you may know, the DCP is a critical plan between seven western basin states to conserve water and keep the Colorado River operational. During the course of DCP negotiations, my constituents expressed concern that the authority granted to the Bureau of Reclamation could result in decreased inflows to the Salton Sea.

I would strongly encourage the Committee to draft report language that reiterates Congress' commitment to both the Salton Sea and the DCP and makes it clear that any actions taken with regard to the DCP should be done so only in a way that does not exacerbate the unfolding public health crisis at the Salton Sea.

The Salton Sea may only cross two Congressional districts, but the public health, environmental, and economic crisis that is unfolding will affect residents far beyond the receding shoreline.

Thank you for inviting me to testify, and I hope the Committee will include these important requests in the FY20 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill.