



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, June 30, 2020

Contacts:

Barrett Newkirk, barrett@alianzacv.org

Tim Douglas, tdouglas@leadershipcounsel.org

California Budget Advances Salton Sea Cleanup, Environmental Justice

Riverside County, California — California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Monday signed a \$202.1 billion state budget that includes funding for restoration of the Salton Sea and its surrounding communities. Community leaders celebrated the passage as a sign of meaningful implementation of the Salton Sea Management Program — a plan that lays out actionable steps to restore the Sea and suppress the contaminated dust from its evaporation.

Included in the final budget is:

- \$28 million for the New River Improvement Project, which will address solid waste and pollution exposure challenges in the city of Calexico, and support health, recreation, and economic benefits in the area.
- \$19.3 million in funds to address the air quality and habitat restoration objectives at the Salton Sea, including implementation of the 156-acre North Lake Pilot Project.
- Budget for ten new staff positions within the California Natural Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Wildlife and Department of Water Resources to support more efficient implementation of the Salton Sea Management Program.

*****Community members and leaders are available for interviews in English and Spanish.*****

In response, community leaders near the Salton Sea released the following statements:

“This budget is a promising step forward in achieving environmental justice for Salton Sea communities. We look forward to working as partners with the state to incorporate meaningful community engagement that will address the most urgent public health issues in the East Coachella Valley” ***said Patricia Leal-Gutierrez, Program Manager with Alianza Coachella Valley.*** “Our communities represent a resilient region that has for too long disproportionately suffered environmental and health harms, including those from the Salton Sea. We are hopeful that restoration and cleanup will remain the state’s priority.”

“COVID-19 elevated the dangers and vulnerabilities that communities of color face from environmental degradation. We are hopeful that the Eastern Coachella Valley and the Salton Sea region will benefit from the state’s investment in the Salton Sea,” ***said Rebecca Zaragoza, Senior Policy Advocate with the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability.*** “This can happen, but only if community members most impacted by the present and future of the sea shape the deployment of this investment. We are seeing this leadership in community residents, and I hope that the local and state agencies are paying attention.”



"Governor Newsom must recognize that a large majority of my community is suffering from different diseases because of environmental injustice — particularly the dangers presented by the disappearance of the Salton Sea," **said Juan Manuel Briseño, a resident of the East Coachella Valley.** "The dust particles being exposed around the lagoon are creating different and severe types of respiratory symptoms — allergies, bronchitis, asthma and even higher risk of cancers — that make this site a danger that requires immediate and adequate attention. This funding is a first step, but we need the state to meaningfully follow through with these efforts."

"The state must continue investing in the Salton Sea, because restoration will help not only communities directly next to the Sea, but also the entire East Coachella Valley. This is a step forward, but we must remain vigilant because too many people who live here have asthma and could suffer attacks and hospitalizations if we do not improve our air quality," **said Joel Duarte, a youth participant with the Youth Leadership Institute.**

Background:

The Salton Sea — once a tourist attraction and a critical stop for birds migrating across North America — has been evaporating for years. The Salton Sea's disappearance is creating a public health and environmental crisis in the region. Evaporation of the water and the lack of action to restore the site are exposing nearby communities to harmful dust or "playa" as the Sea continually dries up. Air quality in the Salton Sea does not meet state or federal standards for particulate matter, and many counties surrounding the Sea suffer disproportionately higher asthma-related emergency room hospitalizations and cases of the condition in children across the state.

Community leaders have pushed Governor Newsom for a state budget that adequately funds and expedites implementation of the Salton Sea Management Program. The adopted budget creates new positions in the state's environmental departments to address the issue, and lays out several actionable steps for cleanup and restoration that are critical to protecting the health of 650,000 people that live near the Salton Sea.

###