

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 15, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We are writing in support of the California Department of Water Resources' application for funding through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to support implementation of the Species Conservation Habitat project at the Salton Sea.

California's project will create habitat and suppress dust across approximately 3,770 acres of currently exposed, dry lakebed at the Salton Sea. The California Department of Water Resources' (DWR) proposal represents a significant opportunity to increase the federal-state partnership for this critically important project. This project is also consistent with the intent of Congress in including provisions in the 2018 farm bill (P.L. 115-334) that specifically emphasize the use of RCPP authority to address regional and watershed-wide resource concerns, like those at the Salton Sea. Congress enacted multiple changes to the RCPP in order to facilitate work at places like the Salton Sea, and we have written your Department on several occasions in order to urge you to quickly implement these new flexible authorities to address the problems at the Sea.

For over 100 years, the Salton Sea has served as a major nesting, wintering, and stopover site for millions of birds on the Pacific Flyway. Many of these birds will be left without adequate habitat as the Sea recedes and salinity increases. California's Species Conservation Habitat project (SCH) will provide partial replacement for this loss by constructing habitat ponds that will provide appropriate forage, nesting, and roosting opportunities for resident and migratory birds. The SCH will also benefit surrounding agricultural lands by suppressing dust, providing ambient moisture, and maintaining the micro-climate.

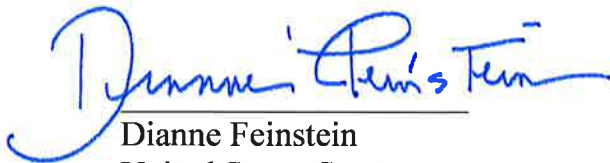
Investment in California's project also provides a unique opportunity to multiply the benefits of Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding. This project will serve as the initial habitat project for the California Natural Resources Agency's Salton Sea Management Program, which plans to construct at least 14,900 acres of habitat projects at the Salton Sea by 2029. Documentation of the outcomes and improvements associated with implementation of this project will be used to inform

development of those future habitat projects, spreading the benefits of funding this particular project across the entire Salton Sea area.

California's application represents a key opportunity to use a state and federal co-investment approach to fund a project that will provide targeted conservation benefits through creation of habitat, benefit surrounding agricultural lands, and influence development of future habitat projects across thousands of acres at the Salton Sea. We believe that the California Department of Water Resources' application is a deserving candidate for the National Resource Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program, as amended by the 2018 farm bill. We support their application and urge you to give it full and fair consideration.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and thank you for your continued conservation efforts at the Salton Sea and throughout California.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress