



I would like to thank the committee for holding this hearing and allowing the local community to comment on this extremely important and time-sensitive issue.

In starting, I would like to reiterate how the Salton Sea is a destination for both people and birds. It really is one of California's crown jewels.

It has been designated by the National Audubon Society as a global Important Bird Area and is vital habitat for birds of the Pacific Flyway.

The Sea serves as a kind of a replacement habitat for much of the habitat lost in the Colorado River delta system. Just to remind you, here in CA we have lost 90-95% of our wetland/riparian habitats which are areas these birds would rely on if the Salton Sea was not there.

As we heard earlier, as the Sea dries, the salinity and selenium levels increase, which significantly depletes food resources and poses health risks to birds.

We have seen these grim consequences in several major die-offs of birds there...bones and feathers can still be found decaying along the receding shores.

The sea is arguably most critical for the wintering and migratory species that spend anywhere from a few days to most of the year here.

Over 450 species and sub-species of birds have been identified at the Salton Sea. A few examples include:

- 90% of the North American population of Eared Grebe population winter at the Sea
- 50% of the Pacific Flyway population of Ruddy Ducks winter there which is close to 232,000 birds.
- And perhaps the most iconic bird, the American White Pelican, has 30% of its North American breeding population at the Sea.
- Several other important bird populations at or around the Sea include Western Snowy Plovers, Burrowing Owls, and Double-Crested Cormorants.

All of these birds are not only threatened by a shrinking Sea but each have also been identified by the National Audubon Society as being threatened by climate change. This means that in the next 50 years these birds will lose most if not all of their current ranges.

This is why it is vital to maintain strongholds for management of these species such as the Salton Sea.

There are lessons out there already on how to balance dust mitigation and habitat creation/restoration efforts. For example, at Owen's Lake up in Inyo County we worked to reduce particulate air pollution by 95% using 50% less water than original plans which resulted in the creation of shallow and deep water habitat used by birds.

In closing, I would just like to emphasize that what is bad for birds is also bad for people. We must be driven by what is good for the local communities. This means taking a holistic approach that supports vital wildlife habitats and the mosaic of agricultural and other lands/activities at the Salton Sea.



Birds are truly important indicators of the health of an ecosystem.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Travis Abeyta

Audubon California

Chapter Network Manager – Southern California