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# California State Senate

SENATOR  
**STEPHEN C. PADILLA**  
EIGHTEENTH SENATE DISTRICT



COMMITTEES  
BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE #4 ON  
STATE ADMINISTRATION AND  
GENERAL GOVERNMENT  
CHAIR  
MEMBER  
AGRICULTURE  
BUDGET  
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION  
HOUSING  
NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

## SB 583 – Salton Sea Conservancy

The Salton Sea, located in Riverside and Imperial counties, is California’s largest lake. In the 1950s and ’60s, the Sea was considered a resort destination, “The Miracle in the Desert,” attracting the likes of the Beach Boys, President Eisenhower, Frank Sinatra, among others. Now, the Sea is an ecological and public health crisis because it is highly saline (50% saltier than the Pacific Ocean) and gradually shrinking. This is because the Sea is a terminal lake with no outlet into the ocean, it has no natural inflows and the only way water can depart is through evaporation, leaving behind dust, salt, and other particles. The Lakebed is filled with toxins such as lead, DDT, and chromium, and the evaporating lake leads to more of the toxic lakebed being exposed.

SB 583 would create the Salton Sea Conservancy to manage operations and maintenance of the state’s restoration projects and is contingent upon approval of the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024. The conservancy gives local residents a seat at the table when critical resources are spent to restore the Salton Sea.

The population surrounding the Salton Sea is a predominantly Latino, agricultural community and an Indigenous population who have lived there for a millennium. Most reside in Imperial County, one of the poorest counties in California with an unemployment rate three times the state average. As the sea shrinks, the dust from the lakebed containing toxic elements is exposed and becomes airborne, negatively impacting the local’s health. Approximately 650,000 residents live in the area, and many suffer from headaches, nosebleeds, bronchitis, and asthma. Hospitalization rates for children with asthma in the area are double the state average, and nearly 1 in 4 kids have been diagnosed with asthma by doctors.

In 2018, to address the growing problems around the Sea, the state create the Salton Sea Management Program (SSMP). The SSMP released its 10-year plan, the John J. Benoit Salton Sea Restoration Act, otherwise known as the Salton Sea 10-Year Plan, to signal its commitment to undertake restoration efforts at the Sea. Since then, the state has sought to fully implement the 10-Year Plan.

The ecological decline of the Sea has grown exponentially, and with it, so have the negative impacts on the surrounding communities. These include air quality concerns for residents in a region suffering from the highest childhood asthma hospitalization rate in the state. Funding and implementation have presented challenges, and questions remain about the long-term strategy around the Sea. By creating a Salton Sea Conservancy, California can expedite the construction of new habitat and dust suppression projects while centering the needs of local communities.

### Staff Contact

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## **Support**

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- Desert Healthcare District and Foundation
- Alianza Coachella Valley
- Sierra Club CA
- Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability
- Audubon California
- Pacific Institute
- Kounkuey Design Initiative, Inc.
- Loma Linda University School of Public Policy
- Water Foundation
- City of Brawley
- City of El Centro
- City of Calexico

## **Oppose**

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- Coachella Valley Water District
- County of Riverside Supervisor V. Manuel Perez
- Salton Sea Action Committee
- Salton Sea Authority
- Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians



## Heber Public Utility District

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The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor of California  
1021 O Street Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

### **RE: SB 583 (Padilla): Salton Sea Conservancy – Request for Signature**

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of our community, we are writing to express strong support for SB 583 (Padilla), which would establish the Salton Sea Conservancy. The Salton Sea's decline has had a profound impact on residents, particularly in terms of public health. As the lakebed continues to dry up, toxic dust containing harmful pollutants becomes airborne, contributing to some of the highest rates of childhood asthma in the state. This reality is felt deeply in the surrounding communities where families are increasingly burdened by respiratory illnesses.

It has been over 15 years since the state of California last created a state conservancy. The establishment of the Salton Sea Conservancy would continue the state's leadership in environmental protection, particularly for poor, highly agricultural communities like ours. California has committed more than \$500 million in state funding to date for Salton Sea restoration projects. The creation of the Salton Sea Conservancy would ensure that these significant investments, alongside federal and local resources, are coordinated effectively, driving long-term recovery and sustainable management of the region. This funding has supported critical initiatives, including dust suppression, aquatic habitat restoration, and water conservation efforts. These investments reflect California's dedication to improving public health, restoring the ecosystem, and ensuring the long-term recovery of the region.

SB 583 will empower local agencies to coordinate with state and federal resources—something we have long sought—to expedite dust suppression projects and improve air and water quality. For a region where environmental and health challenges are deeply intertwined, this conservancy represents more than just policy; it represents a chance for real relief and sustainable recovery.

We believe SB 583 will allow the Conservancy to implement much-needed projects that safeguard public health and support the revitalization of the Salton Sea area. We respectfully urge you to sign SB 583, which is essential for creating a healthier future for the communities affected by the Salton Sea's decline.

Thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to California's most vulnerable regions.



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Sincerely,

Delfino Matus,  
Heber Public Utility District  
Board President