

# **Bombay Beach Wetland Project**

## **Imperial County, California**

### ***Frequently Asked Questions***

#### ***How will the project benefit the environment?***

The project will benefit the environment in several ways. Wetlands developing on the emerging Salton Sea (Sea) playa are important habitat for migrating birds and other aquatic and terrestrial species. These wetlands are vulnerable to damage when they are overwhelmed by runoff from intense storm events, when invasion by water-thirsty Tamarisk outcompetes native vegetation, and when they dry out as groundwater levels drop due to falling water levels in the Sea. The project will protect the existing wetland from these effects, and allow for the expansion of the wetland area as new playa is exposed; and allow for excess water to be used on the playa to facilitate natural recruitment, establishment, and growth of native desert shrub vegetation on the playa for dust mitigation.

#### ***What kinds of habitats occur in the Bombay Beach Wetland and why are they important?***

The Salton Sea is an important stopover on the Pacific Flyway, but the Sea has been shrinking, while salinity is increasing and the habitat areas and food sources it provides have been decreasing. The Bombay Beach Wetland provides several important habitat types, including freshwater emergent wetlands, saline wetlands, shallow freshwater pools, and shallow brine pools. The wetland and pool areas provide habitat and food for a variety of wading birds, migratory waterfowl, and other bird species that thrive in marsh areas. The wetland habitat complex is surrounded by upland areas occupied by desert shrubs that provide additional habitat, cover, and forage for bird species as well as terrestrial reptilian and mammal species; and dust control on the playa.

#### ***What species use the Bombay Beach Wetland habitats?***

Emergent freshwater wetlands support species such as Yuma Ridgway's rails (an endangered species), California black rails, Virginia rails, least bitterns, and common gallinules. Ponded areas within these wetlands support waterfowl, such as northern pintails and northern shovelers. Saline wetlands occur behind beach ridges along the Sea's shoreline and facilitate primary (i.e., algae) production and the invertebrate community. Shallow flooded areas support shorebirds including American avocets, western snowy plovers, marbled godwits, dowitchers, red knots, dunlin, western sandpipers, and least sandpipers. Shallow brackish ponds and channels near the shore of the Sea may also provide habitat for the desert pupfish (an endangered species).

#### ***How will the project prevent dust emissions?***

Water and vegetation are well established measures for effective dust control. Accordingly, maintenance and enhancement of wetland habitat on the playa provides effective dust control. In addition, one of the project's goals is to make irrigation water available to establish native desert shrub vegetation within adjacent playa areas. The project is being developed in collaboration with the Imperial Irrigation District, which owns most of the land on which the project is located, and one of the project goals is to make storm water, that is retained or diverted to protect the wetland, available on the adjacent playa to develop native desert shrub vegetation that would help decrease dust emissions. The project will demonstrate how a multi-purpose water use project can optimize environmental benefits.

#### ***How will the project benefit the local community?***

Audubon is actively seeking to work with local community members and stakeholders to shape the project in a way that helps meet local objectives and provides a variety of community benefits. In addition to providing local recreational opportunities, like hiking and wildlife viewing, it is envisioned that the project

will offer educational and research opportunities for local families, schools, and colleges. The project will also provide an air quality benefit to the local community through the mitigation of dust emissions.

***How will the project area be accessed?***

The project will include a dirt access road extending along the top of an existing shoreline berm about two miles west from the Niland Boat Ramp. An additional access route from Bombay Beach may be developed in the future based on community and stakeholder input, and funding availability. Other project features that may be developed include hiking trails, viewing areas, platforms, and boardwalks, again depending on community input and funding availability.

***Will hunting be allowed?***

At this point hunting will not be allowed because it is not consistent with the core purpose of the project, which is habitat preservation for common and special-status species. There are other wetland areas around the Salton Sea where hunting is allowed.

***How will the public be involved?***

Audubon's vision is to make this a true community project and invites local community members, stakeholders, and other interested parties to participate in the Community Advisory Group. Through the Community Advisory Group, the public can review information about project and design studies, let Audubon know what they think is important and inform project objectives, and review and comment on project documents and designs. The public can also participate by logging onto the project website at <https://ca.audubon.org/salton-sea/bombay-beach-wetland>, where they can review the latest information regarding the project, leave comments or ask questions, and sign up to receive updates and notifications.

***How do you know the project will be successful?***

The project takes advantage of a natural confluence of perennial water discharges, ephemeral stream flows, and groundwater discharge together with topographic features that have resulted in the spontaneous formation of the wetland. The main hydrologic and topographic features for a successful project are already existing, and simply require protection and enhancement. The project objectives include using low-impact designs that leverage these natural processes, which makes the project more compatible with the existing natural system while decreasing construction and operational costs. In addition to community input, the project design will be advised by a Technical Advisory Committee of engineers, scientists, and habitat experts. Early involvement of environmental regulatory agencies, along with community input, are also key to the success of the project.

***What is the project schedule?***

Audubon is currently working under a grant from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to develop the project concept and preliminary 35% design. More detailed project design and permitting is anticipated to start in late 2021 and continue into 2022. At this time, project construction is expected in 2023 or 2024.

***How much will the project cost and who is providing the funding?***

The project cost will depend on the design. An objective of the initial phase of work funded by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is to develop a preliminary construction and operating cost estimate. Based on the low-impact design methods proposed, construction is estimated to cost \$2 to \$4 million. Additional funding by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, state agencies, and other stakeholders is anticipated after preliminary design is completed during the initial phase.