

Symposium 2002

Crossroads Bridged

...the Salton Sea...
...will do so...

Congressman
BOB FILNER



Bono

Filner



Wyatt and Taylor

Nichols

Photos by B. Keenan/CVWD



Stapleton

Calvert

...the Salton Sea...
...options...

Authority President
ROY WILSON

INDIAN WELLS — The many and sometimes conflicting challenges facing the Salton Sea were aired here January 9 and 10 during the Fourth Biennial Salton Sea Symposium.

The event, sponsored by the Salton Sea Authority, featured presentations by three members of Congress as well as a number of federal and state officials.

"All of the issues were put on the table," said Authority President Roy Wilson, a member of the Riverside County Board of Supervisors.

Mary Nichols, California's Secretary for Resources and Salton Sea Congressional Task Force members Mary Bono (R-44th) and Ken Calvert (R-43rd) made it clear from their presentations that

The Salton Sea

because of the need to complete water transfers, a decision on restoration will be made this year.

The pending water transfer between the San Diego County Water Authority and the Imperial Irrigation District "is forcing us to face the issue many saw coming in the mid 1990s," Nichols said.

"The good news is that there appears to be 'affordable' options for Salton Sea Restoration. By that, I mean \$500 million or less," she said.

"The bad news is that the options with all of the background analysis and pros and cons are not getting to the public," Nichols said.

She added that while the transfer

"Bridging the Crossroads"

By Roy Wilson

President,
Salton Sea Authority Board



At the recent Salton Sea Symposium, the theme was "Bridging the Crossroads."

Judging from the comments I heard at the Symposium as well as subsequent feedback, we did a pretty good job of presenting and discussing the many political, scientific, environmental and economic issues we face in bridging the crossroads and restoring the Salton Sea.

We face some heavy traffic through those crossroads in the next year. The Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) is scheduled for finalization by the end of the year. Because of this timing and the effect of water transfers on the Sea, a good deal of time at the Symposium was spent discussing that historic pact.

The QSA is an important agreement for California and the six other states in the Colorado River Basin as well as the members of the Salton Sea Authority.

Mary Nichols, Director of California's Resources Agency, told the symposium audience that we need to know what the implications of the transfers are for the Sea.

"There are those who say these are two different issues," she said, and she agreed that "the transfer shouldn't be held 'hostage' to the Salton Sea."

However, Nichols also said the State — and the public — wants to know the implications of the transfer on the Salton Sea.

"Can the Sea be restored? What are the options? What are the costs? We don't want to wake up Jan. 1, 2003 and discover we don't even have a reasonable option left to restore the Sea — and then also be stuck with the costs of a dying body of water," Nichols said.

The Salton Sea Authority and the Bureau of Reclamation have been working on the questions raised by Mary Nichols for some time and it is my hope that we can release the findings of that work in the very near future. It is not just Mary Nichols who is raising these points, it is also many individuals, nongovernmental organizations and public agencies.

As I said at the Symposium, the Salton Sea can be the cornerstone of the economies of the Coachella and Imperial Valleys in the future, but we must share the alternatives for the Sea's future with the public for that to occur.

If we do not do this, then our agricultural and recreation economies as well as the environment for the fish and wildlife that depend on the Sea will be put at great risk.

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should not be held hostage to the restoration effort. The state needs to know the implications of the water transfer on the Sea.

"We don't want to wake up Jan. 1, 2003 and discover we don't even have a reasonable option left to restore the sea — and then also be stuck with the costs of a dying body of water."

Bono, who chairs the Salton Sea Congressional Task Force, told a symposium luncheon audience that the restoration effort is a legacy of her late husband, Sonny Bono.

"What an unbelievably politically challenging project this has been," Bono said. Because of the impending implementation of the Colorado River Quantification Agreement and related water transfers, "we are at a crossroads. All of these things are coming to a head."

She said plans need to be developed immediately to deal with the water needs of urban areas in conjunction with the Sea's restoration effort.

Bono said she is concerned with air quality issues that could result from a smaller Salton Sea. "We need to look at the warning signs now," she said.

The Congresswoman also told the audience that all parties need to come to an agreement about how the Sea should be saved.

"We haven't even decided on everyone's definition of what saving the Sea means," she said.

Calvert, who chairs the House Water and Power Subcommittee, noted that the water transfers in Southern California are among several pending in the western United States.

Because of burgeoning growth, water resources have become scarce commodities and the subject of conflicting demands. "We have a shrinking supply of water throughout the West," he said, adding that the upper basin states are very serious about California living within its allocations of Colorado River water.

Calvert said the river and the Salton Sea are "joined together as close as anything can be." But he also noted the Upper Basin states view flows into the Sea "as a waste of water."

"The quantification agreement was developed to help us wean ourselves from (overuse of) the Colorado River," Calvert said. "The Basin states are looking for us to meet that commitment."

Participants at the symposium also included a representative of the Pacific Institute who discussed a proposal to expand the options of restoring the Sea.

Institute Senior Research Assistant Mike Cohen has proposed a plan to allow much of the Sea to become hypersaline, because of reduced inflows, but at the same time preserve some of the fishery and bird habitat. Scientists at a full day workshop before the symposium identified several serious issues with the plan.

I N A P P R E C I A T I O N

Other speakers told the audience that fallowing of Imperial Valley farmland might be the only viable way to maintain necessary flows to the Sea.

However, Imperial Valley farmer George Ray and El Centro Mayor Larry Grogan strongly advised that fallowing not be considered.

Ray expressed the view that the Sea should be allowed to revert back to its natural state.

California Audubon Executive Director Dan Taylor and Bureau of Reclamation Regional Director Bob Johnson said that if fallowing were even to be on the table as a means to restore the Sea, it would have to include financial and other economic incentives to keep the Imperial Valley economy whole.

Taylor was optimistic the Sea could be saved but he said the only solution to the conflicting issues facing the lake is accommodation among the various conflicting interests.

He recounted his experience earlier in his career regarding the successful restoration of another endangered body of water: Mono Lake.

"I have seen this movie before," he said. Success was achieved there because various agencies and interest groups were able to compromise and work together for a common solution.

Congressman Bob Filner told the symposium he is the "new kid on the block." Filner currently represents the San Diego area's 50th Congressional District but his district will become the 51st next January because of redistricting. It will encompass Imperial County and much of Salton Sea.

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Milt Friend Honored by Authority

For his efforts and in behalf of those of us who care about the Salton Sea...

Tom Kirk
Executive Director



Dr. Milton Friend, who retired in January from his position as Chief Scientist for the Salton Sea Project, and his wife Jackie, were recognized for their service to the Salton Sea project during the January 9 Symposium Banquet.

Dr. Friend has been directly responsible for coordinating the scientific research, which has eliminated many of the damaging "myths" surrounding the Salton Sea.

Authority Executive Director Tom Kirk told the banquet audience "Milt Friend came to the Salton Sea four years ago and during his tenure here he has made countless and significant contributions to the restoration of the Salton Sea.

"Milt's contributions have come most importantly in the realm of science. By establishing rigorous and thorough scientific reviews in multiple disciplines, he placed the Restoration Project on sound and credible scientific footing.

"For all of his efforts and in behalf of those of us who care about the Salton Sea, let me say that we are sincerely grateful. Milt has also been a critical part of our restoration project team, offering sage advice and strategic insights.

"I greatly appreciate Milt's personal and professional integrity and will miss his presence as he returns to Madison to be with his wife Jackie, who for the past four years has borne the heavy burden of a "commuter marriage."



Dr. Milt Friend

Engineer, Resident, Student Recognized

An eighth grader from La Quinta's John Glenn School of International Studies joined a West Shores community leader and a representative from the Bureau of Reclamation in receiving service awards from the Salton Sea Authority.



Nelson and Karlquist

Director Tom Kirk, Authority board member Peter Nelson presented them during the Fourth Biennial Salton Sea Symposium. Nelson is also a member of the Coachella Valley Water District board of directors.

The awards are the first presented by the Authority. They were presented to representatives from education as well as the public and private sectors.

"We instituted these awards as a means to recognize some of the many people who have been working so hard on behalf of the Salton Sea Restoration Project," said Authority Executive

Recipients were Paul Weghorst, a principal hydraulic engineer with the Bureau of Reclamation, representing the public sector; Norm Niver, president of the West Shores Chamber of Commerce, representing the private sector, and eighth grader Casey Karlquist, representing education.

Nelson told the audience that

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a major part of the Salton Sea Authority's outreach program is an effort to reach students and teach them about the importance of the Salton Sea as a resource.

Last year the Salton Sea Authority received a letter from Casey, then a seventh grader, explaining a project she was engaged in to test a method to reduce the salinity of the Sea.

The letter described a system that used, "three naturally occurring forces: gravity, pressure and the water cycle" to evaporate Sea water and return fresh water to the Sea.

"Casey has been involved in science fairs for nine years, two of which she has spent studying and experimenting with a system to clean the Sea," Nelson said. Last year, her Salton Sea project was selected to participate in the State Science Fair, where she won second place.

Casey was joined by her parents David and Robin Karlquist at the awards banquet.

Niver, a Salton City resident, was selected for his activism on behalf of saving the Salton Sea.

In addition to being active in the West Shores Chamber of Commerce, Niver is a member of the Imperial County Planning Commission and has been a primary spokesman on behalf of the Sea.

"When it comes to the Salton Sea Stewardship award for the private sector, the selectee for this award is really a no-brainer," Nelson said.

Nelson said that Niver is a leader among those who are constantly challenging the Authority and other public agencies on behalf of the Sea.

"Norm is constantly challenging us to do better," Nelson said. "He really cares about the Sea and it shows in his words and deeds."

Weghorst, the public sector recipient, has worked for

the Bureau of Reclamation in Denver since 1984 as a hydraulic engineer specializing in the area of water resources planning and management.

He is recognized for his expertise in databases and geographic information systems and has received numerous awards and commendations for his work in this area.

"Paul is known for his 'can do' attitude," Nelson said. "In an era when government employees are sometimes viewed as nine to fivers with little work ethic, Paul is the essence of the opposite," Nelson said. "He is a tireless worker who has spent many an evening and weekend fulfilling and exceeding his commitments to our projects," said Nelson.



Weghorst

Niver

Filner is seeking reelection to the new district.

If reelected, Filner said he would be playing a role in the Salton Sea but he admitted he has a lot to learn.

"My biggest negative feature is that I don't know anything," he said. However, he added he would bring a new, enthusiastic fresh look to the issues.

"I come with lots of optimism," he said. "We are going to save the Salton Sea and we will do so with consensus."

Filner added that economic development must be added to discussions of both the transfer and Salton Sea Restoration.

Authority President Wilson said the symposium, with its theme of "Bridging the Crossroads," achieved its goals.

"The crossroads, which may look more like a round-about, is apparent. What we may be left with, though, is the recognition that we need to make important decisions very soon and that we may need to make them with incomplete information and imperfect processes."

Wilson added that the science, engineering, and other analyses that have made up most of the work to date would help inform the decisions.

"But the decisions will rest on how well all the various interests can be accommodated."



Meetings Schedule

Board of Directors Meeting
2/21/02 - 10 a.m.
Brawley Elks Lodge
161 S. Plaza, Brawley, CA

Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
3/7/02 - 10:30 a.m.
Imperial Irrigation District
81-600 Avenue 58, La Quinta, CA

Board of Directors Meeting
3/21/02 - 10 a.m.
Imperial Irrigation District
81-600 Avenue 58, La Quinta, CA

SALTON SEA



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