



United States Senate

January 30, 2019

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

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Perdue and Acting Secretary Bernhardt:

I'm writing to ask that you quickly implement the new drought provisions Congress included in the recent Farm Bill and provide a firm federal funding commitment to facilitate Salton Sea conservation efforts. These new drought provisions are vital to protecting public health, natural resources, the environment, wildlife and the agricultural industry in the Coachella and Imperial valleys.

The Salton Sea, California's largest lake, is rapidly declining due to decreased inflows from years of historic drought and necessary agriculture water conservation efforts over the past two decades. Located next to 600,000 acres of prime farm land, the lake's reduced size negatively impacts the entire region.

To address these challenges, I worked with my Senate colleagues to include bipartisan drought provisions in the Farm Bill authorizing the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to help mitigate the damage through multiple conservation programs. The legislation's conference report also directs USDA to use its new authority to reduce the impact of regional drought agreements on agricultural producers and natural resources. The Farm Bill also included an increase in funding for conservation programs to ensure that Salton Sea conservation efforts could be funded without impacting funding for other agricultural conservation efforts.

USDA is already actively engaged in Salton Sea conservation, partnering with Imperial Irrigation District, the state of California, the Salton Sea Authority, the Torres Martinez Tribe and Imperial Valley Vegetable Growers on multiple pilot projects. The Farm Bill drought provisions—supported by these

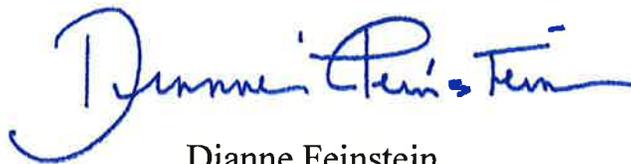
stakeholders—authorize USDA to expand those pilot efforts in order to leverage the \$200 million recently secured by the state of California to implement a 10-year Salton Sea management plan.

The Department of the Interior is also a major landowner at the Salton Sea but still hasn't fulfilled its commitments to better manage the significant air quality challenges associated with decreasing sea inflows. The federal drought contingency plan (DCP) sought by the department aims to secure additional voluntary water use reductions from California agricultural producers, which has raised concerns that inflows to the sea will further decline.

At a recent meeting of Colorado River water users, Commissioner of Reclamation Brenda Burman indicated she would begin the process of regulating agricultural water rights if a DCP agreement is not signed by January 31, 2019. This top-down regulation can be avoided if the Colorado River basin states can reach a voluntary agreement before then. It is important to note that Congress sought to assist in this effort by giving USDA the tools and funding necessary to promote conservation programs in states like California for drought mitigation and resilience projects.

I look forward to working with you to expand USDA's Salton Sea conservation efforts, and to support efforts throughout the state to prepare California for additional challenges associated with climate change.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

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