RED HILL BAY

Reduced inflows to the Salton Sea are projected to result in 90,000 acres of exposed playa by 2078.

Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge is undertaking a 420-acre restoration project in Red Hill Bay – a dry playa in the footprint of the shrinking Salton Sea.

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Red Hill Bay Restoration Project

Salton Sea, California

The purpose of the Red Hill Bay Restoration Project is to restore and improve the quality of wetland habitat to conditions similar to the Salton Sea shoreline from many decades ago. The primary objectives are to reestablish the Red Hill Bay area as an important saline shallow-water habitat for migratory waterbirds and to cover the newly exposed playa with saline water in order to decrease fugitive dust released during wind events. The results of this efforts will also be extremely valuable in guiding future Salton Sea restoration. Projects of similar design are currently being planned by state and local agencies.

To achieve restoration of Red Hill Bay, water will be pumped from the Alamo River and the Salton Sea and allowed to flow through two 210-acre impoundments. The water will be blended to achieve a target salinity of 20 ppt salt in the first cell and this concentration will increase via evaporation as water flows through the system.

By design, this project utilizes agricultural drain water to create wildlife habitat – a practice that was considered not viable on managed refuge habitats due to contaminant (namely selenium) concerns. However, this concept,

developed and studied by U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Reclamation at the Salton Sea, has potential to provide much needed water for habitat creation. By blending the agricultural drain-water with hyper-saline Salton Sea water, the undesirable features of each are diluted and the resulting water can be made suitable for maintaining wetland habitat. It takes two sources of water – each of reduced value in their current state – and blends them to create an improved water supply. The resulting habitat and biota will be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure biological integrity is maintained. This informed approach to habitat creation may serve as a model for sound reuse of water in the arid west.

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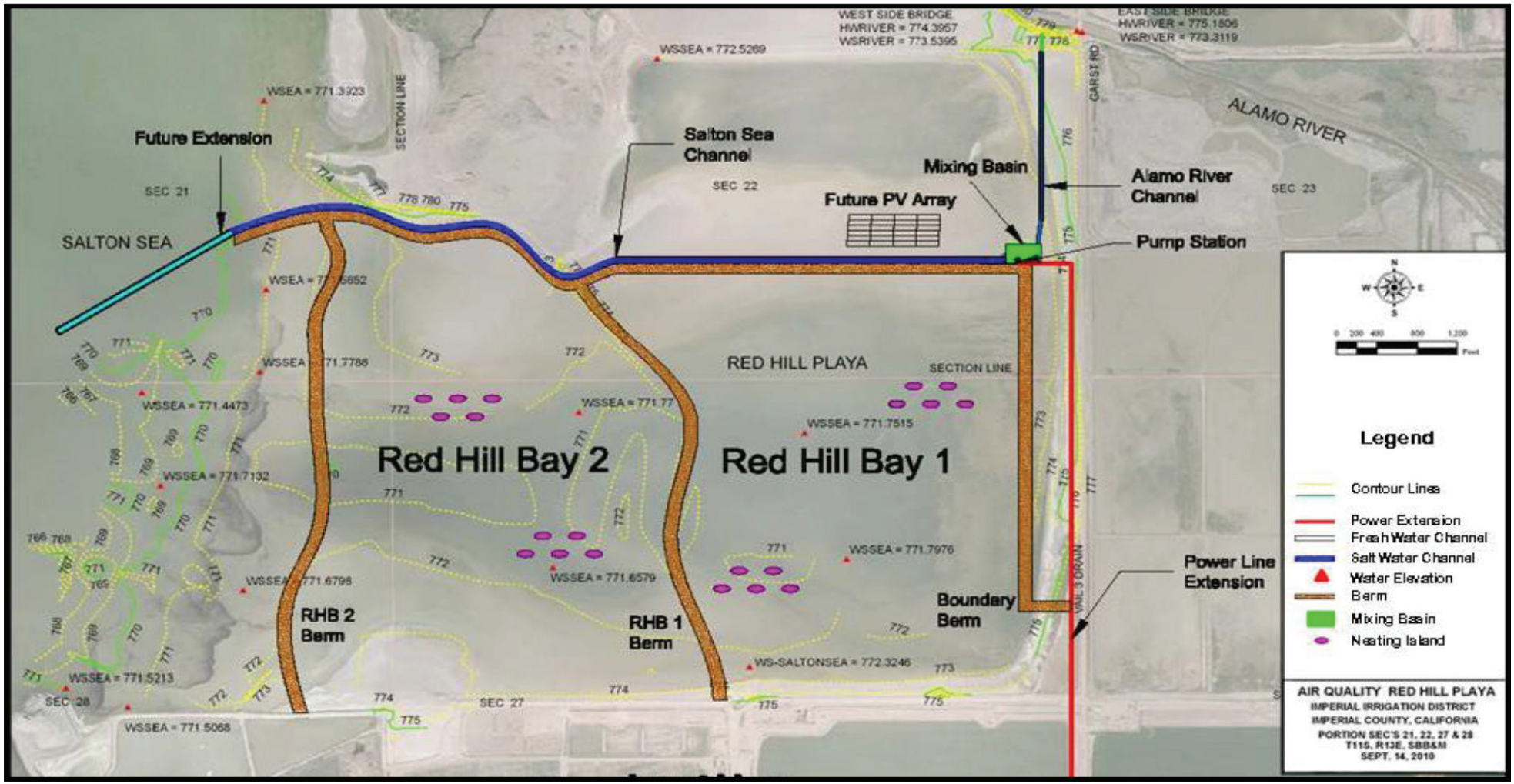

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