



Optimism high regarding Salton Sea and renewables

By EDWIN DELGADO, Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, March 17, 2017 1:40 am

The release of the state's 10-year plan for the Salton Sea Management Program on Thursday morning led to an extensive discussion regarding the Salton Sea and the future of renewable energy development in Imperial County.

A busy second day of the 10th annual Imperial Valley Renewable Energy and Water Summit concluded with a panel made of state Sen. Ben Hueso, Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia, Imperial Irrigation District Kevin Kelley, County Executive Officer Ralph Cordova and Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency John Laird who for the most part expressed optimism for the future of the receding Salton Sea.

Laird, who was among the dignitaries that toured the Salton Sea a few hours earlier said he was pleased with the turnout and said it was very powerful to be at the site and be able to see the challenges that come with the receding shoreline of the Salton Sea. Despite not having a clear path toward mitigation the recently released plan sets an important path forward.

Laird said the state has the funding for the first five years of the plan and work must continue to find out what can be done to make the second portion of the plan a reality.

"We are moving. There is momentum," Laird said.



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Imperial Irrigation District General Manager Kevin Kelley (center) sits alongside California State Sen. Ben Hueso (left) and Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia (right) and speaks to the audience about the condition of the Salton Sea during the 10th annual Renewable Energy and Water Summit in Holtville on Thursday evening. VINCENT OSUNA PHOTO



Despite the optimism expressed, Kelley along with Garcia said there still remains much to be done.

Kelley said the IID has been pressing the state on the issue for more than 2 years to take swift action to match the rate of the declining sea which poses a great public health risk for the resident of the Imperial Valley.

“This plan is welcomed, it was called for by the IID and we appreciate it a great deal but it’s not going to be enough,” Kevin Kelley said.

He pointed out that a key component missing from the plan is the assurance that it will be funded and carried through in its entirety and not just the initial five years.

Garcia acknowledged all of the stakeholders and groups that have come together to get the current effort up to this point and said he was pleased with the large group that came to the Valley to get more familiar with the issues and is expecting the state to become more engaged.

“The legislative efforts that are carried through this year will tell us how successful this visit really was,” Garcia said.

Renewables

The second part of the conversation dealt with the future of renewable energy in the county and how it can help the state of California meet its ambitious renewable portfolio standard.

Garcia said that geothermal has to be part of the conversation moving forward due to the positive impact it can have in different areas such as helping the state meet its RPS goals, job creation and its place as part of the Salton Sea strategy.

Cordova said that since 2008, the county has permitted more than 20,000 acres dedicated to solar farms and are doing what they can to help the process get streamlined to allow future projects to get deployed a bit quicker.

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President and Chief Executive Officer of the Imperial Valley Economic Development Corporation Tim Kelley talked about the amount of progress that has been made in the county in the renewable energy sector in the 10 years in which the summit has been held which has increased more than what anyone could have imagined a decade ago.

“Imperial County has an exciting 10 years. The goal is to move policy forward that can allow us to take advantage of the resources that we have available here,” Tim Kelley said.

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