

Salton Sea: lost lakes and salt dreams

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Salton Sea Quick Facts

The Salton Sea has the second highest count of different species of wildlife in the nation; the Gulf Coast of Texas holds the number one position.

95 percent of the entire North American population of eared grebes and 80 percent of American white pelicans use the Salton Sea.

Brown pelicans used to be found only on the coast. The breeding presence of this endangered bird at the Salton Sea is its first inland occurrence.

Millions of years ago, the Gulf of California extended north through the Salton Sink to present-day Indio.

3 million or more birds may be found at the Salton Sea on one winter day.

The Salton Sea, with a surface area of 380 square miles, is California's largest lake. Lake Tahoe is 193 square miles, and Mono Lake just 60 square miles.

The fishery at the Salton Sea is one of the most productive in the world.

The Salton Sea is presently 25 percent saltier than the ocean. There are an estimated 500 million tons of salt in the Salton Sea.

Ancient Lake Cahuilla, at its maximum, was the largest freshwater lake in California: 110 miles long, 32 miles wide, and more than 300 feet deep at the center—three times the area and six times the depth of today's Salton Sea.

Fishermen at the Salton Sea judge their spots by the color of the water. Green water means dying algae and fewer fish; brownish water is where to find large schools of fish.

In 2000, more than 580,000 acres of Imperial Valley land produced over \$900 million in crops. Near the Salton Sea itself, about one half of all jobs are tied directly to agriculture.

Today, approximately 1.3 million acre-feet of water flows into the Salton Sea from agricultural lands. This inflow is about the same as the amount of annual evaporation at the Salton Sea, thus maintaining the necessary volume of water to preserve the fishery, wildlife, and recreational resources.

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Land around the Salton Sea is used to raise seasonal crops. Alfalfa, asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, citrus, lettuce, onions, romaine, and summer squash are harvested from January through March. From April through June, alfalfa, artichokes, asparagus, cantaloupes, eggplant, flax, garlic, grapes, honeydew, okra, onions, peppers, sudan grass, sugar beets, summer squash, sweet corn, tomatoes, watermelon, and wheat are harvested. Between July and September is the time for alfalfa, banana squash, casaba, flax, okra, onions, sugar beets, sesbania, sorghums, tomatoes, watermelon, and wheat; broccoli, cabbage, cantaloupes, carrots, casaba, cucumbers, dates, honeydew, lettuce, okra, onions, rapine, romaine, summer squash, and sorghums are crops for October through December.

Before 1985, the Salton Sea's State Park had more visitor days per year than did Yosemite National Park.

Because its salt content causes boats to be more buoyant, surface travel on the Salton Sea is known as the fastest in the nation.

The Salton Sea is a "terminal lake," meaning that it has no outlets. Water flows into it from the Whitewater, Alamo, and New rivers, but the only way water leaves the sea is by evaporation.

At the peak of the floods that formed today's Salton Sea, started by accident in 1905, the newly-created Salton Sea rose 7 inches a day.

The Salton Sea was advertised as a "New Mediterranean" and the "Salton Riviera" was called an "investors dream" in 1958. Opening weekend sales at the Salton City development topped \$4.25 million. Between 1958 and 1964, nearly 32,000 residential lots were sold to buyers.

Few permanent buildings exist around the Salton Sea, in part because of rising salinity, occasional floods, unpleasant fish kills, noxious odors, and water color made the Salton Riviera less than pleasant for constructing homes.

In 1964, there were more than 1,600,000 visitor-days at the Salton Sea, with 61,000 boat launchings.

The Salton Sea 500 boat races, organized by developers, attracted huge crowds in the 1960s.

7.6 million fish died in a massive fish kill on one day: August 4, 1999. Fish bodies blanketed an area 10 miles long and 3 miles wide. Fish kills are caused when dense algae growth consume oxygen in the water.

In 1780, there were 5 million acres of wetlands in California. In 1999, there were just 450,000 acres.

The Salton Sea, at elevation 225 feet below sea level, is the second lowest spot in the United States. Death Valley contains the lowest elevations.

Tilapia can live in waters that contain salinity up to 60 ppm.

The first commercial geothermal well was brought in on January 1, 1964, near Niland at the south end of the Salton Sea.

