

DOCKETED

Docket Number:	20-LITHIUM-01
Project Title:	Lithium Valley Commission
TN #:	243497
Document Title:	Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability Comments - Community Recommendations for Lithium Package
Description:	N/A
Filer:	System
Organization:	Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability
Submitter Role:	Public
Submission Date:	6/9/2022 5:14:26 PM
Docketed Date:	6/9/2022

*Comment Received From: Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability
Submitted On: 6/9/2022
Docket Number: 20-LITHIUM-01*

Community Recommendations for Lithium Package

Additional submitted attachment is included below.



June 9, 2022

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95824

RE: Community-Based Recommendations for the Proposed Lithium Package in the State Budget

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, Sierra Club California, and residents from the Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV) and others, we present the following recommendations in response to the lithium package in the proposed state budget.

While the development of and support for Lithium Valley quickly moves forward, it continues to be unclear how and to what extent lithium extraction and processing will impact the environment, health, and economic well-being of communities throughout the Salton Sea region, which includes all communities around the Sea regardless of county jurisdiction. Given this uncertainty and the range of potential impacts to the entire region, we request that investments for community benefits be inclusive of the ECV.

Community Investments

To ensure an adequate distribution of lithium extraction excise tax funds among communities we suggest the following percentile allocations instead of those currently proposed: 30% for the Salton Sea and 70% for Imperial County. We strongly urge the state to make this allocation accessible to the ECV communities, which are likely to experience impacts from extraction, processing, and the development of a localized supply chain and increased goods movement.

We are grateful that a percentage of the tax revenue will go towards Salton Sea specific investments. With our proposed 30% towards Salton Sea projects, we strongly encourage the state and California Natural Resource Agency to prioritize funding for projects as identified by communities, in addition to projects identified in the Salton Sea Management Program (SSMP).

This will ensure that we continue expanding on the existing Salton Sea restoration efforts as well as include additional recreational and multi-benefit projects at the Sea.

From this 30%, we recommend that 50% be invested in projects that will directly benefit the local communities by addressing public health concerns as well as providing amenities that improve the overall quality of life. The community has continuously advocated for the inclusion and funding of multi-benefit infrastructure projects in the SSMP. A multi-benefit infrastructure project is any development that will provide a variety of benefits to the local community and can include projects like community gardens, trails, gathering areas, educational signage, air monitoring station, lighting, remote hotspot, and locations for local vendors. These are extremely important to the local communities who have experienced the negative impact of extreme weather and the receding Salton Sea on overall public health and quality of life.

Additionally, at least half of that 50% set aside should be used exclusively for community-identified projects not limited to SSMP projects. From ongoing engagement, we have learned that community priorities include water and wastewater infrastructure and connection fees, road and transportation improvements, upgraded and reliable energy infrastructure, enhanced educational and workforce opportunities, affordable housing to meet existing and anticipated population growth, and other projects that will help improve the quality of life of the region's residents and their environment.

In order to ensure that projects meet local community needs, creating “access and inclusion of underserved or underrepresented communities in public processes,” as stated in the Lithium trailer bill, should not be a mere component of these projects “when feasible,” but rather a central piece of all project development and the decision-making processes.¹ We suggest that the \$800,000 allocated towards community-based organizations in Imperial County for public engagement efforts be expanded to include the meaningful engagement of the ECV.

This funding should be used to first develop a community advisory committee with at least one resident from each of the communities that surround the Salton Sea, including those of the ECV. This committee should guide the use of the \$800,000 allocated towards public engagement, guide the participatory budgeting process of all tax revenue funds, and be the lead advisor of community engagement and outreach efforts. Committee members shall not be associated with any organization or agency, should be financially compensated, and should be elected by community residents themselves via a series of accessible community meetings. It is essential for this group to have decision-making authority and regularly report back to the community they directly represent in order to ensure proper representation and accountability.

¹[*2022-23 May Revision Proposed Trailer Bill Lithium Valley Development Disposition of Geothermal Resources: Allocation and Use of Revenues*, n.d. State of California Department of Finance.](#)

Environmental and Public Health Assessments

We ask that the proposed environmental review of related activities and a health impact assessment in Imperial County be extended to encompass the ECV to ensure that there are no potential impacts from lithium extraction and processing on the environment or public health throughout the region. This will align with the proposed preliminary recommendations, adopted by the Lithium Valley Commission, suggesting that the evaluation of impacts associated with lithium extraction and processing includes the areas around the entire Salton Sea.²

Education and Workforce Development

We recommend incorporating additional investments for enhancing the STEM curriculum and programs at the College of the Desert and its satellite campuses to serve Coachella Valley residents. This will help prepare the future workforce for technical, high-paying jobs associated with Lithium Valley.

Similarly, we recommend creating additional opportunities to prepare the existing workforce who are looking to transition to employment connected to Lithium Valley, that is inclusive of both the Eastern Coachella and Imperial Valley. This can include allocating funding towards an accessible workforce preparation program that gives current employees from the local service industry, agriculture, and others the necessary technical skills to transition to employment related to Lithium Valley. These new jobs should be an improvement to employees' current jobs in terms of allowing for financial upward mobility, increased job safety, and job security.

Battery Production Facilities and Localized Supply Chain

One of the greatest community concerns is the development of a localized supply chain, including battery manufacturing and recycling facilities. We, therefore, urge the implementation of robust community outreach and engagement throughout the region to properly inform and collaborate with residents on these issues. To facilitate this, we recommend allocating additional funds to develop a comprehensive environmental and health assessment as well as a community engagement plan specific to development related to the proposed localized supply chain. It is vital for this funding to be allocated now to ensure community engagement moves forward simultaneously with conversations and decision making related to the localized supply chain.

² [Preliminary Adopted Environmental Impact Findings and Recommendations for Discussion and Consideration by the Lithium Valley Commission, 2022. CEC Lithium Docket Log, California Energy Commission, June 1, 2022.](#)

Thank you for your attention and consideration of these recommendations. We look forward to future collaboration to ensure appropriate engagement, representation, and investments for the Eastern Coachella and Imperial Valleys. If you have further questions, please contact Mariela Loera at mloera@leadershipcounsel.org.

Sincerely,

Mariela Loera
Policy Advocate
Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

Erin Woolley
Policy Advocate
Sierra Club California

Ryan Sinclair
Associate Professor
Loma Linda University School of Public Health

Patricia Leal-Gutierrez
North Shore Resident

Elizabeth Jaime
North Shore Resident

Carolina Macknight
North Shore Resident

Carmen Castillo
North Shore Resident

Elena Moro
Coachella Resident

CC:

Karen Douglas
Senior Advisor for Energy
Office of California Governor Gavin Newsom

Lauren Sanchez
Senior Climate Advisor
Office of California Governor Gavin Newsome

Chair Silvia Paz
Lithium Valley Commission

Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia

Lina Vugutsa Malova
Office of Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia

Kourtney Vaccaro
Commissioner
California Energy Commission

Lithium Valley Commission