

Visitor Survey Summary Salton Sea State Recreation Area General Plan



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1 INTRODUCTION

California State Parks (State Parks) is preparing a General Plan for Salton Sea State Recreation Area (the park). The plan will serve as the park's primary management document and will provide long-range direction for the park's management, operations, and future recreational development. The General Plan planning process will identify a park vision with supporting goals and guidelines, and will guide park staff and managers in making decisions about future recreation infrastructure and resource management.

State Parks and their consultant, Ascent, conducted an online visitor survey from October 11 through March 16, 2026, to gather information on existing park use and solicit input on opportunities relating to facilities, trails, camping, programs, and resource management. The results of the survey are one of many sources of information that will be used to inform preparation of the General Plan. In addition to these survey results, preparation of the General Plan will be informed by input gathered through public meetings and additional online activities, written public comments, comments from California Native American Tribes and other public agencies, and other technical data. This document contains the following sections:

- ▶ **Survey Design** – Description of the survey instrument used to gather responses.
- ▶ **Key Findings** – Key themes and takeaways from the collected responses.
- ▶ **Public Outreach** – A description of associated outreach used to advertise and capture survey responses.
- ▶ **Survey Responses** – Responses to each survey question summarized in graph or bullet format.

2 SURVEY DESIGN

The visitor survey was conducted as part of the public outreach effort and was developed to identify key issues of public interest for consideration in development of the General Plan. The survey asked a series of 15 questions to gain an understanding of public perceptions concerning current and desired recreational opportunities, current park conditions, and opportunities to enhance park facilities and programs. This “opt-in” survey was conducted through the digital platform Social Pinpoint . Survey participants were given the option to provide their name, email address and demographic information through a separate survey link on the homepage. As an opt-in survey, where respondents were not randomly selected, the survey results represent a non-probability sample. Therefore, they reflect the perceptions of individuals that chose to participate in the survey and are not intended to provide a representative sample of the entire population of park visitors.

3 KEY FINDINGS

The following key findings were established from the results of responses to the survey's multiple-choice and open-ended questions, which were provided by 170 survey respondents:

- ▶ **43 percent of respondents** indicated they visit Salton Sea State Recreation Area a few times a year.
- ▶ The most common time of year for visitation is **Winter (Dec-Feb)**, with **45 percent of respondents** visiting during this period.
- ▶ The largest percentage of respondents use the park for **RV Camping (44 percent)**, while a slightly smaller group use the park for **relaxing/enjoying nature (38 percent)**.
- ▶ **66 percent of respondents** that visit Salton Sea State Recreation Area are in groups of one to two people.
- ▶ The top factors preventing more frequent visitation include **water concerns (29 percent)** and **air quality concerns (27 percent)**.

Key themes that emerged from the open-ended answers include:

- Strong interest in improved day-use facilities and shade structures,
- Desire for expanded and better-maintained trail systems,
- Concerns regarding air quality and water quality,
- Interest in more interpretive and educational programming,
- Requests for improved camping facilities, and
- Support for habitat restoration and climate resilience efforts.

4 PUBLIC OUTREACH

The following strategies were used in advertising the visitor survey to encourage a wide range of participation, from those who use the park frequently to those who may visit the park more frequently if other opportunities were available.

4.1 PROJECT WEBSITE

The project website (saltonseasrapp.com) provides general information on the park and its existing recreational facilities, the planning process, and opportunities for public engagement, including links to public surveys. Website visitors can join the project contact list to receive email notifications on planning updates and public engagement opportunities.

4.2 PROJECT CONTACT LIST

An initial eblast announcing opportunities to participate in the survey was sent to 2,267 emails with an opt-in to join the project contact list. The project contact list included email addresses

of individuals who reserved campsites at Salton Sea SRA from October 1, 2022 to October 15, 2025. Anyone wishing to receive email notifications on planning updates and future public engagement opportunities can join the project contact list via a link on the project website.

4.3 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media posts shared across State Parks' Ocotillo Wells District Instagram and Facebook accounts, encouraging the public to participate in the visitor survey by visiting the project webpage.

4.4 SIGNAGE/HANDOUTS

Signs and flyers announcing the initiation of the SSSRA General Plan and project webpage were posted at the park entrance and the visitor center, along main thoroughfares, and at restroom areas throughout the park. Signs included a QR code to connect participants to the project website. Postcards containing the QR code and project website URL were also posted on bulletin boards and distributed at local events.

5 SURVEY RESPONSES

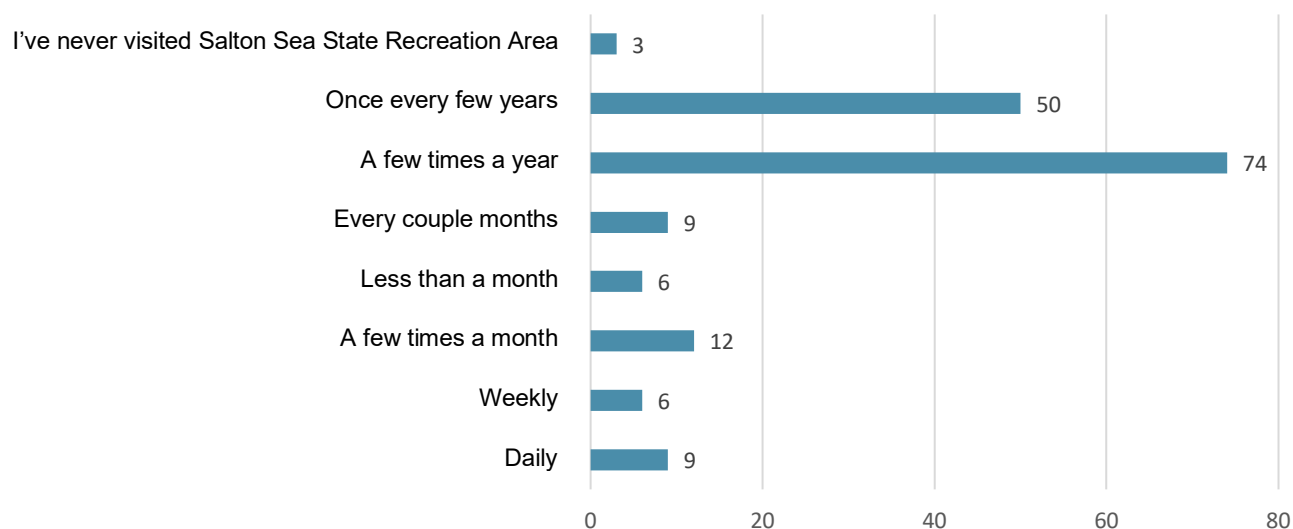
The visitor survey was made available digitally on the project website (saltonseasragp.com) from October 11, 2025, to March 16, 2026. A total of **170 responses** to a series of 15 multiple choice and open-ended survey questions across four broad categories were received, and are detailed below

5.1 STAY INVOLVED

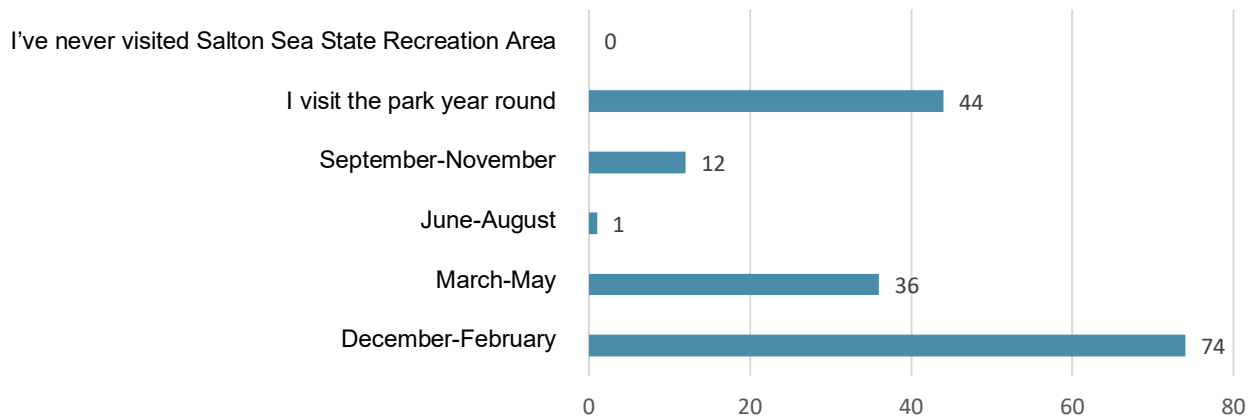
- ▶ **Question 1.** Would you like to stay involved in the Salton Sea State Recreation Area General Plan process?
- ▶ **Question 2.** Please provide your name and email address to receive updates.

5.2 CURRENT PARK USE

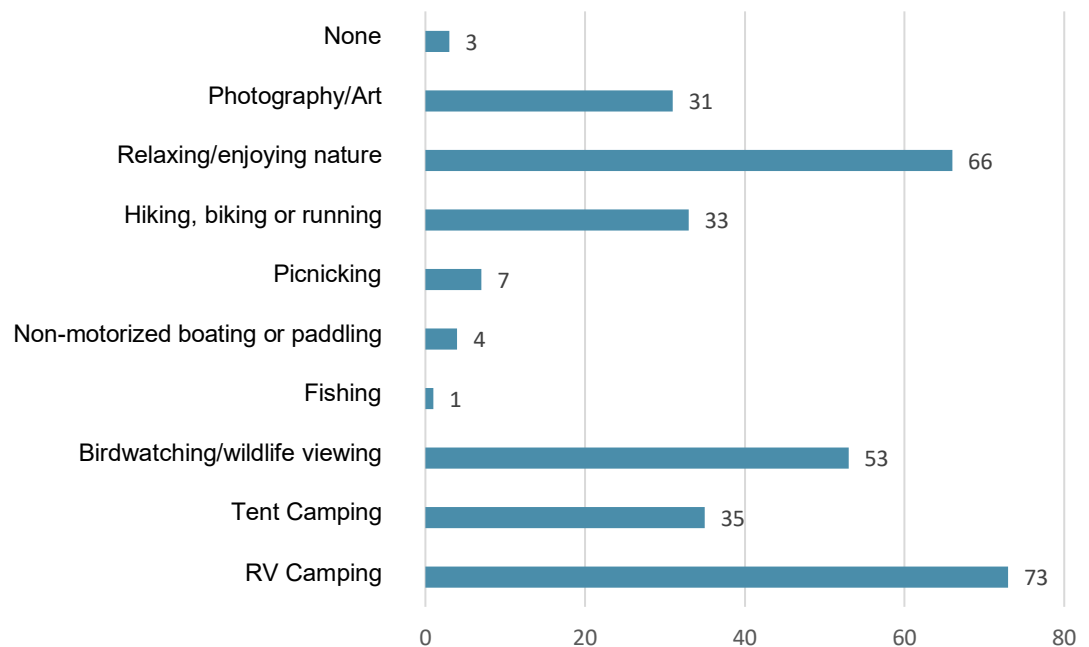
- ▶ **Question 3.** Please indicate how frequently you and/or members of your household visit Salton Sea State Recreation Area:



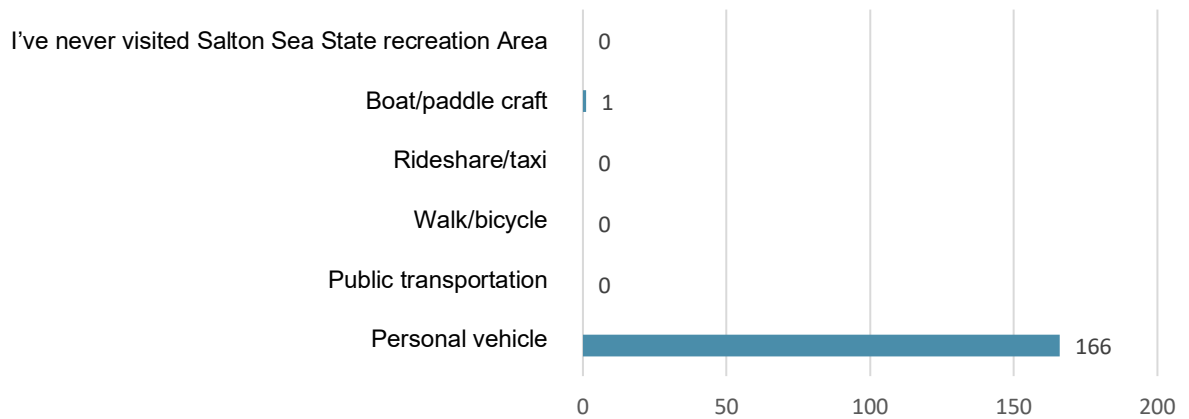
- **Question 4.** What time of year do you most frequently visit Salton Sea State Recreation Area?



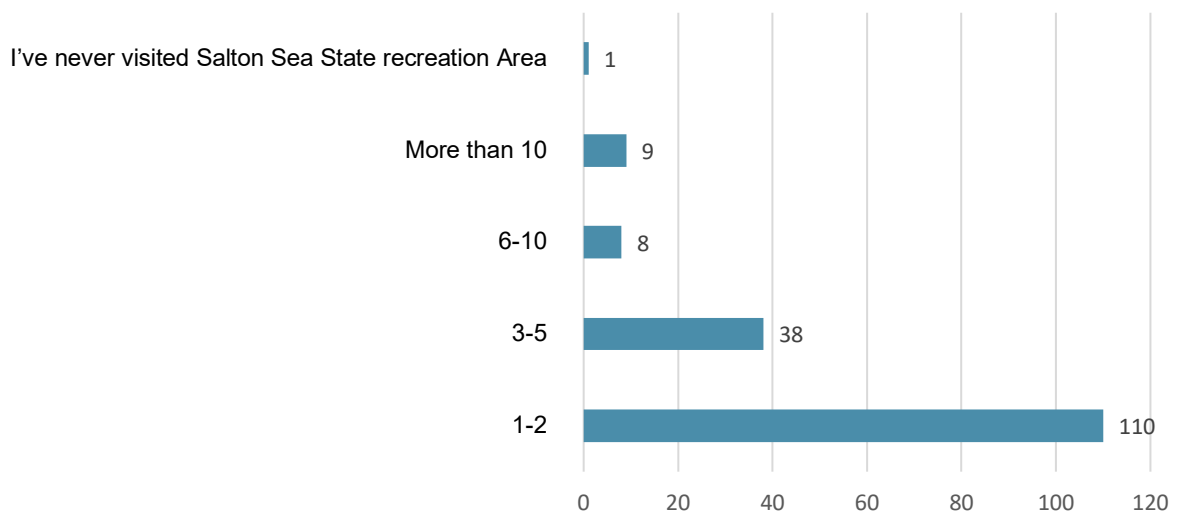
- **Question 5.** What primary activities do you and/or members of your household typically participate in at Salton Sea State Recreation Area? (select up to 2 choices)



- **Question 6.** Please indicate your preferred mode of transportation to Salton Sea State Recreation Area:

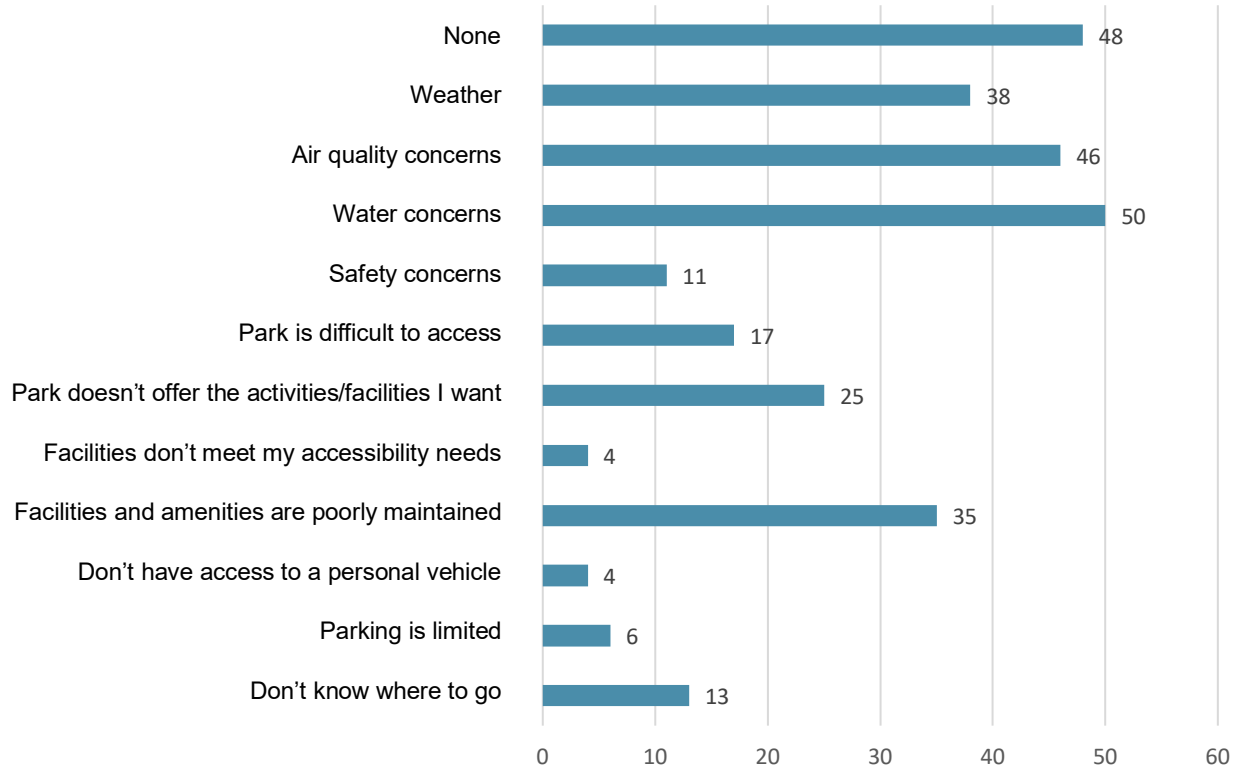


- **Question 7.** What is your typical group size while visiting Salton Sea State Recreation Area?



5.3 FACTORS PREVENTING VISITATION

- **Question 8.** Please check below the reasons that prevent you and/or members of your household from visiting Salton Sea State Recreation Area more frequently: (select all that apply)



- Write-in Responses from 'Other' for Question 8:
- **Park Access & Closures** — Bombay Beach Campground is closed and boat ramps are inaccessible, severely limiting visitors' ability to enjoy the park.
 - **Distance & Infrequent Visitation** — Most visitors live out of state or hundreds of miles away, resulting in only one to two visits per year tied to road trips or holiday travel.
 - **Limited Amenities & Activities** — There is little to do at the park, with the souvenir store frequently closed and few tent camping options available.
 - **Environmental Deterioration** — The smell from the Salton Sea is worsening each year and seasonal fly infestations occur without adequate communication or warning to visitors.
 - **Staffing & Volunteer Program Cuts** — Park staff confirmed they no longer utilize campground host volunteers, reducing visitor services and overall park capacity.
 - **Maintenance & Oversight Concerns** — Visitors perceive the park as increasingly neglected, citing a lack of state oversight, inconsistent operations, and a general decline in upkeep over time.

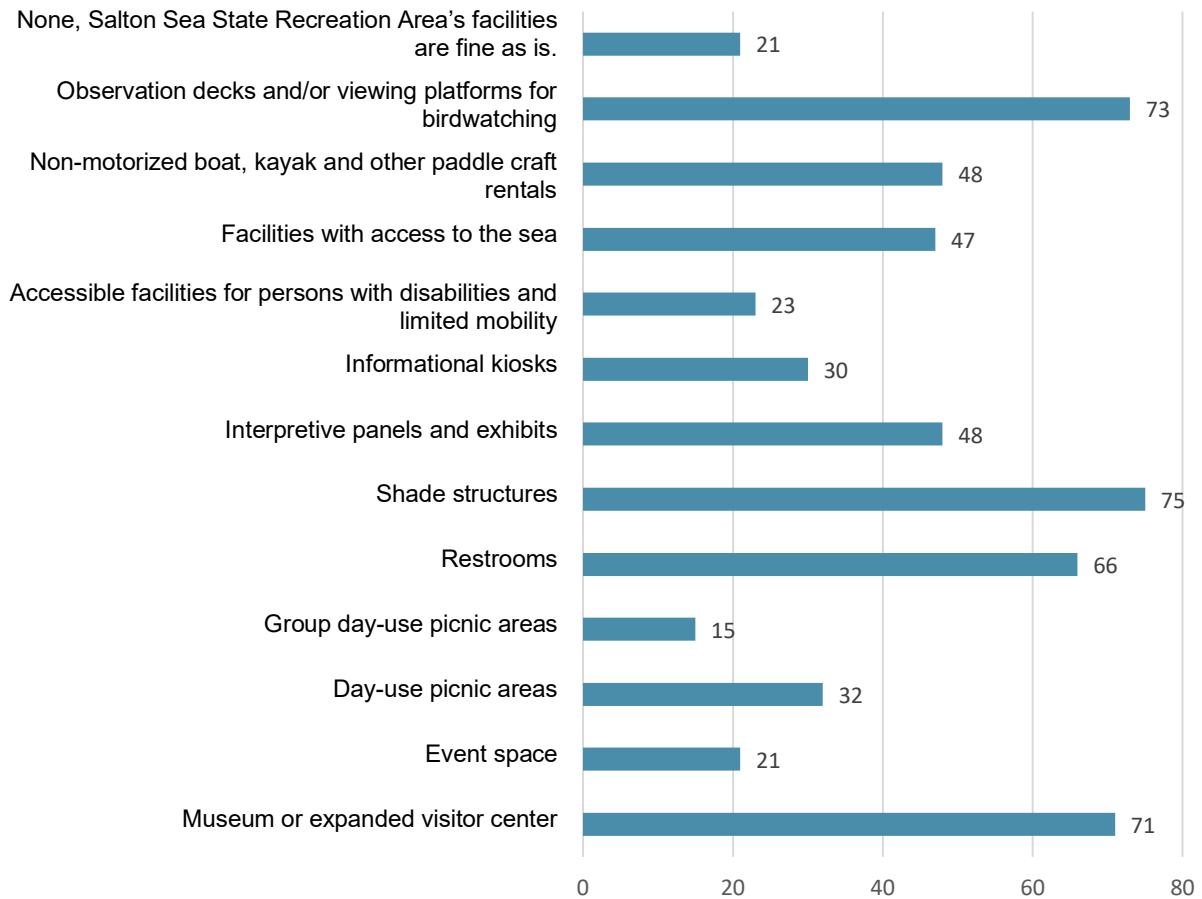
5.4 FUTURE PARK OPPORTUNITIES

- ▶ **Question 9 [write-in response].** Tell us what you love about Salton Sea State Recreation Area. What would you like to see more of?

Responses to Question 9 are summarized as follows:

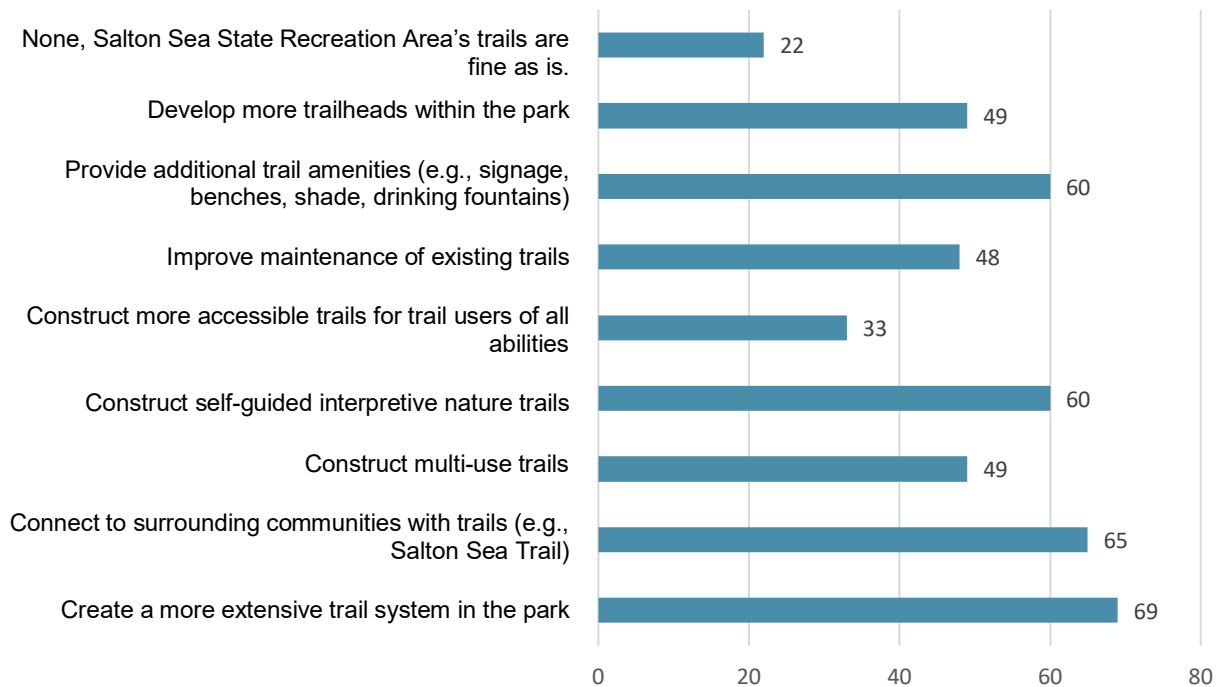
- **Natural beauty and unique landscape** – respondents consistently celebrated the striking desert-water scenery, mountain vistas, and the rare contrast of open water in a desert setting.
- **Birdwatching and wildlife** – one of the most beloved aspects, with many respondents specifically mentioning migratory birds, waterfowl, and the park’s importance on a major flyway.
- **Solitude, quiet, and lack of crowds** – respondents highly value the uncrowded atmosphere and ability to always find a campsite, in contrast to more popular California state parks.
- **Camping and sunsets** – Mecca Beach Campground was frequently cited as a favorite, with many respondents describing themselves as long-time visitors who value the multi-year tradition of visiting the campground. Sunsets and sunrises over the water were widely praised.
- **History, art, and Bombay Beach community** – the cultural identity of the area, including art installations, the Bombay Beach Biennale, and the character of the local community, resonated deeply with visitors.

- **Question 10.** Which of the following day-use facilities and amenities would you like to see more of at Salton Sea State Recreation Area? (select all that apply)



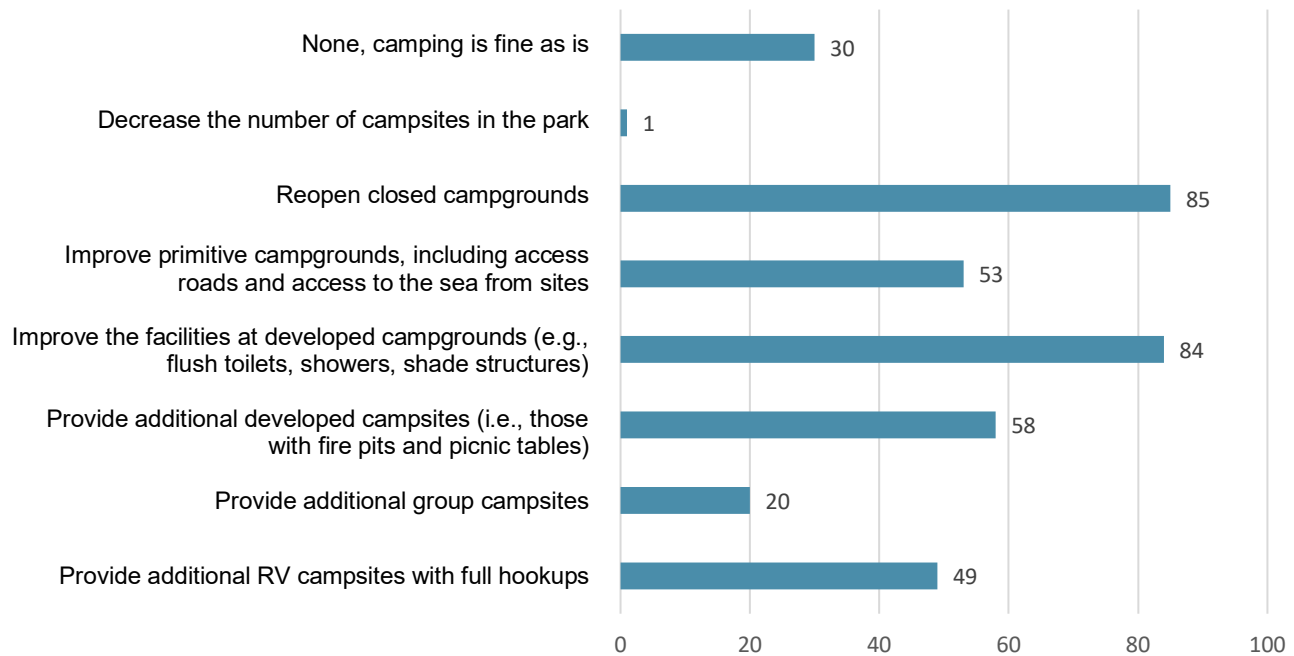
- Write-in Responses from 'Other' for Question 10:
- **Reopen Bombay Beach Campground** – the single most common theme, cited directly in multiple write-in responses.
 - **Docks and water access** – requests for docks and easier direct access to the water.
 - **Bike trails and hiking trails** – several respondents requested dedicated biking infrastructure.
 - **Improved showers and restrooms** – hot water and functional showers specifically mentioned as priorities.
 - **Ranger-led bird talks and naturalist programming** – interest in guided, educational activities.

- **Question 11.** Which of the following actions relating to trails would you like to see at Salton Sea State Recreation Area? (select all that apply)



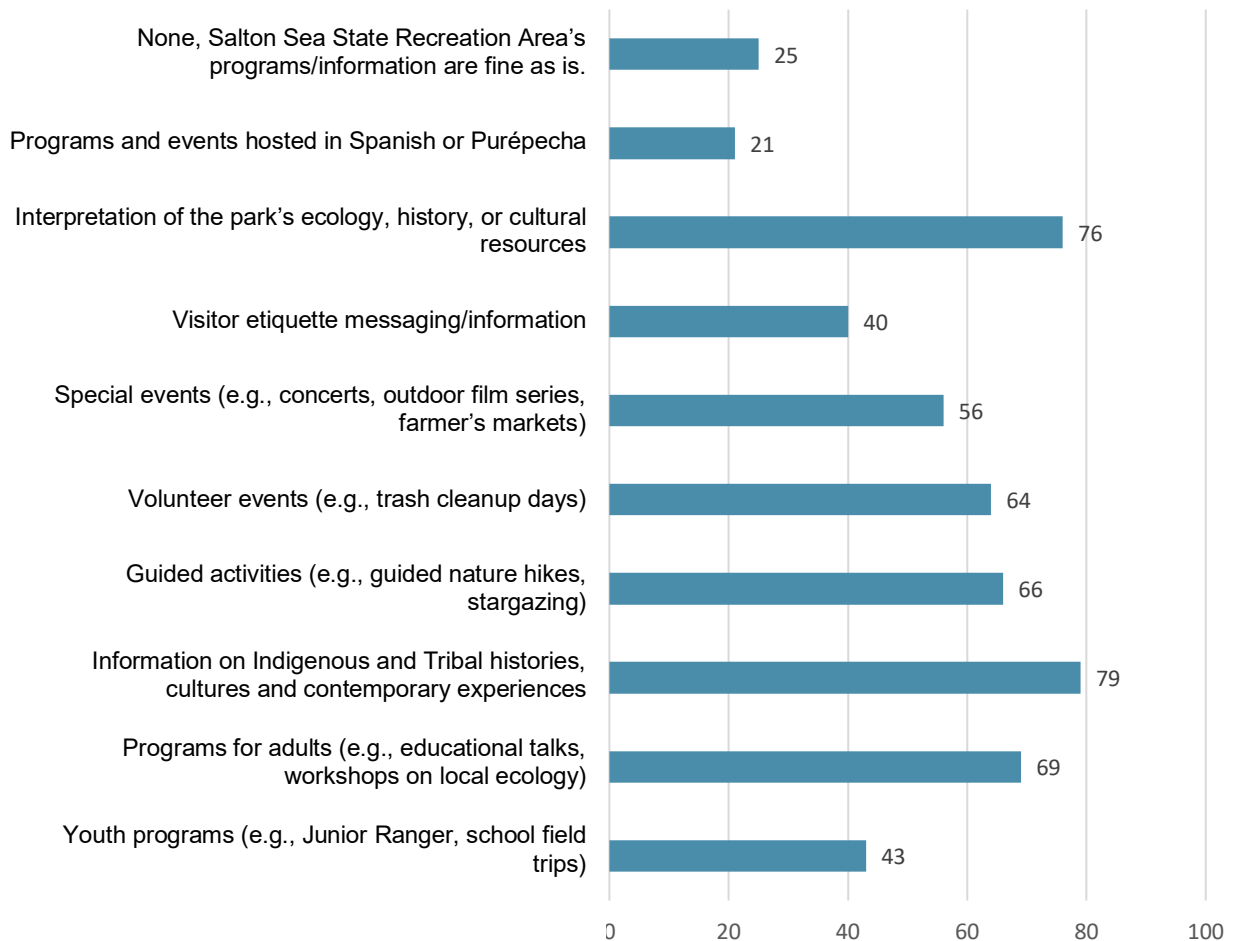
- Write-in Responses from 'Other' for Question 11:
- **Connecting Trails** - a bike trail that goes around the sea connecting the parks to Obsidian Butte and Bombay Beach.
 - **Birding trails** – add birding trails
 - **Beach access** - trails to the east of the Salton Sea beaches.

- **Question 12.** Which of the following actions relating to camping would you like to see at Salton Sea State Recreation Area? (select all that apply)



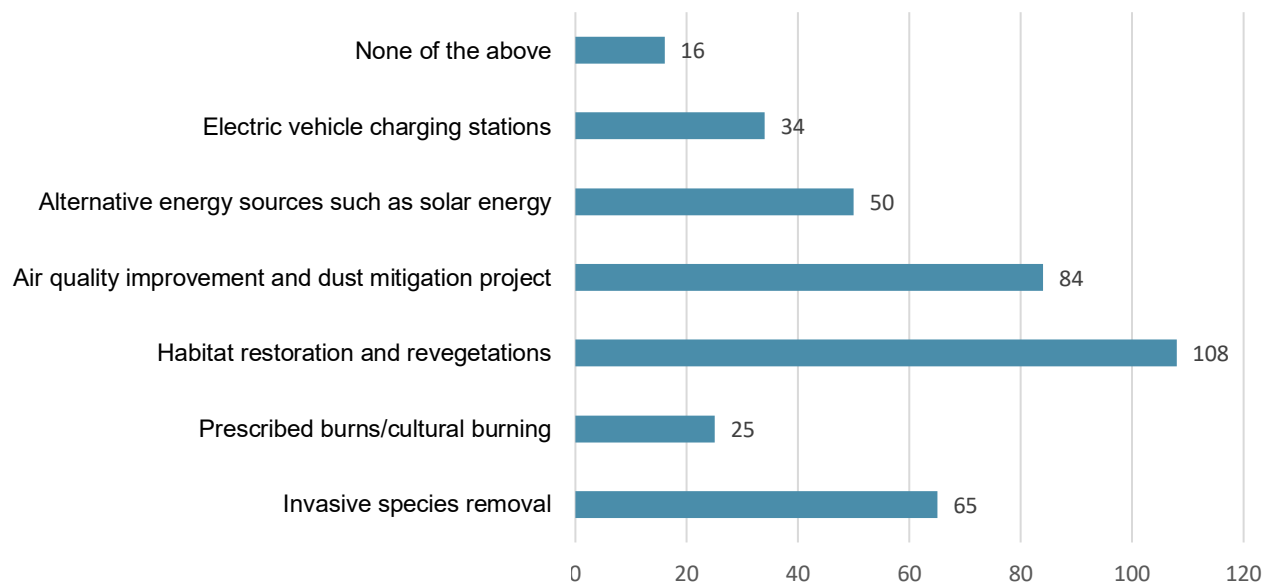
- Write-in Responses from 'Other' for Question 12:
- **Reopen Bombay Beach Campground** – the overwhelmingly dominant theme, cited directly in multiple write-in responses by residents and frequent visitors.
 - **Restore and reopen Mecca Beach restrooms and showers** – respondents specifically referenced deteriorating facilities and the loss of hot water.
 - **Reinstate volunteer campground hosts** – multiple requests to bring back the volunteer host program, which was discontinued.
 - **Improve maintenance of existing group sites** – brush overgrowth and disrepair noted in at least one group campsite.
 - **Night patrol by park rangers** – a safety concern raised by respondents regarding after-dark campground conditions.

- **Question 13.** Which of the following programs, information, and events would you like to see at Salton Sea State Recreation Area? (select all that apply)



- Write-in Responses from 'Other' for Question 13:
 - **Cultural events with community character** – respondents expressed interest in Mariachi Night, Folklorico dancers, and events tied to the cultural roots of the Salton Sea basin.
 - **Art opportunities** – support for art-focused programming connected to the Bombay Beach creative community.

- **Question 14.** Please select the improvements you would like to see at Salton Sea State Recreation Area to promote resource management and climate change resilience: (select all that apply)



- Write-in Responses from ‘Other’ for Question 14:
 - **Address the receding sea level** – respondents emphasized that the shrinking sea is the root cause of most environmental issues and must be tackled directly.
 - **Wetland restoration and irrigation channels** – suggestions for restoration channels with native vegetation to mitigate dust absorption during high-wind events.
- **Question 15:** Is there anything else that you think California State Parks should prioritize in the Salton Sea State Recreation Area General Plan?
 - **Reopen the Bombay Beach Campground (dominant theme)** – dozens of residents, visitors, and community advocates submitted coordinated letters urging immediate reopening. Key concerns included up to 50 vehicles camping illegally on weekends with no sanitation, public health impacts on residents, and the need for managed infrastructure to support local tourism.
 - **Improve and restore existing infrastructure** – respondents emphasized basic maintenance before expansion, including restoring all Mecca Beach restrooms and showers, removing abandoned structures, and addressing erosion damage at campground areas.
 - **Address the declining sea and environmental health** – significant urgency expressed about receding water levels, with requests to find supplemental water sources, prioritize dust mitigation, and plan for potential long-term drying of the sea.

- **Improve the park's image and public awareness** – several respondents noted the park suffers from a public perception problem (smells, toxic associations) and called for better marketing and education to counter this narrative.
- **Expand trails, biking, and active recreation** – multiple calls for more biking trails (including paved loops for e-bikes), improved trailheads, and greater shoreline access beyond main campground areas.
- **Community collaboration and staffing** – interest in partnering with the Bombay Beach artist community, reinstating volunteer campground hosts, hiring more rangers, and improving ranger engagement.
- **Maintain the park's unique, uncrowded character** – a vocal group urged against over-development, valuing the desolation and quiet as core to the experience.