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## **‘Save Searles’ Campaign Launched to Prevent Arbitrary Increase in Local Water Costs**

*Groundwater Authority Significantly Increasing Water Costs for Local Businesses and Residents During Economic Recession Brought on by COVID-19 Pandemic*

**Trona, CA** – Today, the *Save Searles* campaign was launched to try and save the Searles Valley Minerals company (Searles) – an economic bedrock of the local community for over 140 years – from the devastating economic impacts of a new water fee proposed by the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority (Authority). Today’s *Save Searles* campaign launch comes just days before the Authority’s virtual public hearing at 10 a.m. on Friday, August 21 to discuss the proposed “replenishment fee,” which would increase Searles’ water costs by 7,000% or approximately \$6 million per year, pushing the company and the local community towards extinction.

The campaign represents a growing coalition of Searles’ 700 employees, their families, as well as local residents and businesses from the Town of Trona and nearby City of Ridgecrest – many of whom live in disadvantaged communities already suffering from a combination of economic, health and environmental burdens. *Save Searles* stands in opposition to the Authority’s use of this new ‘fee’, which taps a handful of local businesses and residents to pay for the Authority’s rushed and costly Groundwater Sustainability Plan (Plan) during one of our country’s worst economic recessions – as opposed to spreading that cost equitably among the Valley’s many water pumpers as the law requires.

“Searles has been woven into the fabric of this community since 1873, and the Authority is willing to unravel it all to pay for a conceptual plan that will cost millions of dollars without even identifying how or when the first drop of additional water would make its way into the basin,” **said Burnell Blanchard, Vice President of Operations for Searles.** “If the Authority decides to impose this new water fee, they are sending a clear message to our 700 employees and their families, and countless local businesses who rely on Searles as a pillar of the community: we don’t want you here.”

The Authority has until 2040 to implement a plan to balance the region’s over-drafted groundwater basin. Searles is urging the Authority to use that time to delay imposing this new “replenishment fee” on the community until a more thought-out project is devised and an equitable and fair allocation of costs can be developed – one that will not harm local residents and businesses and respects historic water rights.

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