



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 26, 2015

Contact:

Doug Carlson, Information Officer

(916) 653-5114

Paul.Carlson@water.ca.gov

Ted Thomas, Information Officer

(916) 653-9712

Ted.Thomas@water.ca.gov

DWR Plans for Possible Need of Delta Salinity Control Barriers

SACRAMENTO – It may be necessary to install emergency salinity control barriers across three channels in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta if the weather stays exceedingly dry through spring. In order to prepare for worst-case drought conditions, and after an extensive environmental analysis and more than nine months of discussion with Delta residents and local water district managers, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) is seeking a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that would allow for the temporary installation of rock barriers at intervals over the next 10 years when saltwater threatens deep intrusion into the Delta.

The emergency drought barriers would limit saltwater intrusion, minimizing the amount of water that must be released from upstream reservoirs to repel the salt. Too much saltwater too deep in the Delta can contaminate water supplies for Contra Costa, Alameda and Santa Clara county residents, Delta residents and the 25 million Californians who rely on the Delta-based federal and state water projects.

On January 16, DWR submitted an application to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a programmatic permit to allow the installation of rock barriers for no more than eight months in a single year across three Delta channels. DWR does not seek to build such barriers soon, if ever. The Department's permit application seeks to allow DWR to use emergency barriers as a drought management tool up to three times over the next 10 years in the event drought gets so severe barriers are necessary to conserve water needed to maintain public health and safety.

Extensive environmental analysis and months of conversations with Delta residents and water district managers have led DWR to conclude that the potential installation of emergency drought barriers does not require a full environmental impact report under the California Environmental Quality Act. DWR's Initial Study/Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration, available here

http://www.water.ca.gov/waterconditions/docs/Emergency_Drought_Barriers_Initial_Study_and_Proposed_Mitigated_Negative_Declaration.pdf describes the project, an assessment of potentially significant or significant environmental effects, and the commitments DWR proposes to incorporate into the project to either eliminate potentially significant or significant effects or reduce them to less than significant.

The public is invited to comment on the Initial Study/Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration during a 30-day comment period that begins January 23, 2015. Comments may be emailed to DWREDBCOMMENTS@water.ca.gov or mailed to Jacob McQuirk, Supervising Engineer, Bay-Delta Office, California Department of Water Resources, P.O. Box 942836, Sacramento, CA 94236. Fax to (916) 653-6077. Comments must be submitted by 5 p.m. on February 25, 2015.

A decision to install emergency drought barriers in 2015 would be made through the multi-agency Real-Time Drought Operations Team and would require a temporary urgency change petition to the State Water Resources Control Board, consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service and a determination by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

In the short but intense drought of 1976-77, DWR placed rock barriers temporarily across several Delta channels to help physically limit saltwater intrusion into the Delta. On January 17, 2014, Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. issued a [Proclamation of a State of Emergency](#) directing state officials to take all necessary actions to prepare for drought conditions. Within the proclamation, the Governor directed DWR "to take necessary actions to protect water quality and water supply in the Delta, including installation of temporary barriers or temporary water supply connections as needed." The Governor's proclamation also directed DWR to coordinate with the Department of Fish and Wildlife to minimize impacts to affected aquatic species.

Planning for emergency drought barriers across Sutter Slough, Steamboat Slough, and West False River began in the spring of 2014. Storms in February and March improved water supply conditions, and in late May 2014, DWR determined that installation of emergency drought barriers would not be necessary to preserve water quality in the Delta during 2014. Planning for future emergency drought barriers continued.

Emergency drought barriers can help maintain water quality for much of the Delta, but they also have the potential to degrade water quality conditions for some areas in the

western Delta, adversely affect Delta fisheries and interfere with Delta boating and recreation. Through the incorporation of mitigation measures, including monitoring of fish and turbidity at the construction site, all potential impacts associated with the project are reduced to less than significant levels. Details on each of these mitigation measures are included in the Initial Study/Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration.

The three-year period from 2012 through 2014 has been the driest three-year period on record in California. The runoff of storms last month gave a modest boost to major reservoir storage, but conditions since then have turned dry. January, typically the wettest month in California, has not seen a single major storm. A drought contingency plan by DWR and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, submitted last week to the State Water Resources Control Board, anticipates the need to install temporary emergency drought barriers across several Delta channels only if conditions remain so dry through spring that the odds of a drier year occurring are only one percent.

When Governor Brown directed DWR a year ago to begin planning for temporary salinity control barriers in the Delta, he also asked all Californians to voluntarily reduce their water use by 20 percent. Conservation – the wise, sparing use of water – remains California’s most reliable drought management tool. Each individual act of conservation – such as letting the lawn go brown or replacing a washer in a faucet to stop a leak – makes a difference over time.

Visit SaveOurWater.com to find out how everyone can do their part, and visit drought.ca.gov to learn more about how California is dealing with the effects of the drought.

More drought information is available at DWR’s Drought web site:

<http://www.water.ca.gov/waterconditions/waterconditions.cfm>

Information about emergency drought barriers is available here:

<http://www.water.ca.gov/waterconditions/emergencybarriers.cfm>

-30-



The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood management and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs.