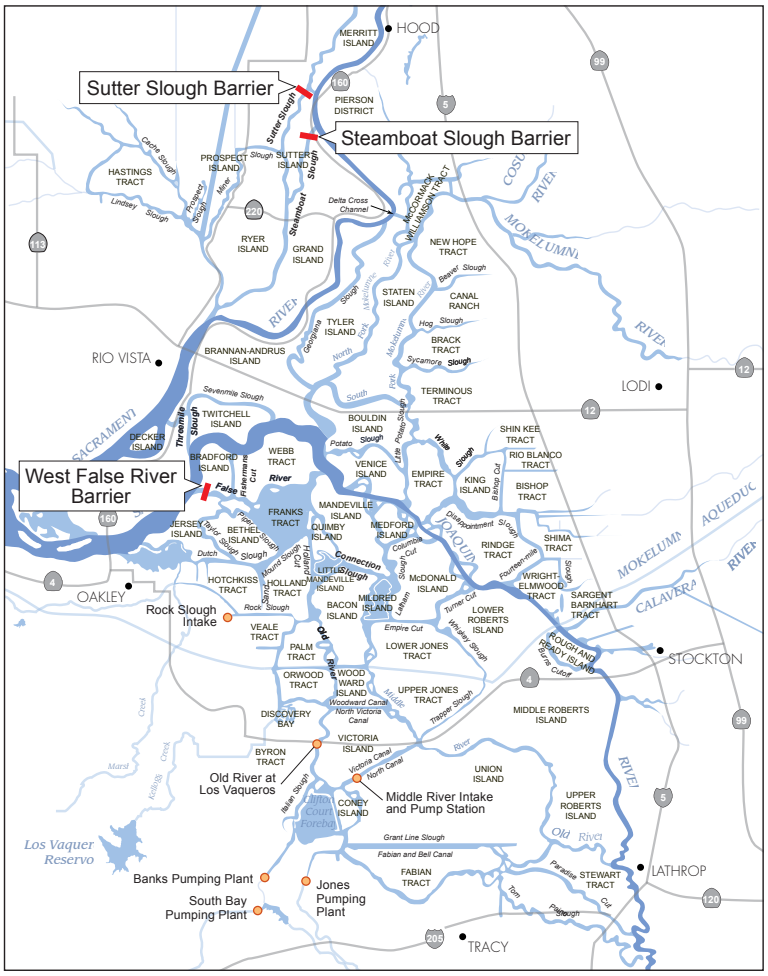
Emergency Drought Barriers Cancelled for 2014

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is an estuary where freshwater from rivers that drain much of California meet with salty ocean water pushing east with the tides. Salt water incursion from San Francisco Bay into Delta channels can make the Delta water unsuitable for drinking, irrigation and other purposes. Normally, outflow from the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers is sufficient to prevent San Francisco Bay's saline water from migrating eastward into the Delta with each tidal pulse.

Potential Barrier Locations on Sutter Slough Steamboat Slough and West False River



Extreme drought conditions have altered the normal pattern of river interaction with the tides. Calendar year 2013 was California's driest on record, and 2014 began with exceptionally low precipitation. Rain and snowfall at eight Northern Sierra stations from October through January was only 16 percent of normal, and precipitation at five stations in the San Joaquin region was 23 percent of normal during that period. As a result, flows from rivers into the Delta were reduced, and salinity levels there could have reached levels unsuitable for drinking or irrigation later this year without improved river flows.

With so little precipitation early in the fall and winter, reservoir levels also were far below their historic averages, even though demands on reservoir water for people, farms and wildlife continued unabated. Water must be released from upstream reservoirs for water supply to reduce salinity in the Delta for fish, irrigation and urban supply purposes, while water also is needed later in the year in rivers upstream for populations of fish growing there. We must manage existing water to ensure that multiple needs are met through the fall or even next year, should conditions stay dry.

Because of the degraded water conditions during the start of 2014, temporary emergency drought barriers at strategic locations were evaluated for their potential to repel and minimize saltwater intrusion into the Delta and thus help conserve limited fresh water resources in upstream reservoirs. However, water conditions improved with the arrival of storms in February and March, and DWR determined in April that installation of emergency drought barriers would not be necessary to preserve water quality in the Delta at that time.

At locations depicted on the map, temporary barriers would have prevented tide-driven salt water from pushing too deeply into the Delta and would have allowed water managers to retain some water in upstream reservoirs for release later in the year. The February and March storms boosted water levels in those reservoirs enough to not require barrier installation in the May-June period. DWR continued its assessment of water supply and demand and in late May determined that the barriers will not be required in 2014.

Planning and permitting for the barriers will continue to prepare for their possible installation if the drought continues into a fourth consecutive year. DWR will work with all stakeholders to ensure they are informed of future planning and decisions regarding the barriers.

For more information and project updates please visit:

http://www.water.ca.gov/waterconditions/emergencybarriers.cfm.
For more information, please contact Ted Thomas, Chief of the Media & Public Information Branch at Ted.Thomas@water.ca.gov, (916) 653-9712, or Doug Carlson, Information Officer, at Paul.Carlson@water.ca.gov, (916) 653-5114. For questions or concerns regarding potential future impacts on parcels, contact Linus Paulus, Sr. Right of Way Agent, at Linus.Paulus@water.ca.gov, (916) 653-3947.