

State begins Delta salinity barrier to protect water supplies in drought

OAKLEY -- The state has begun building an emergency salinity barrier in the Delta to keep seawater from fouling drinking water supplies for 25 million people.

The state Department of Water Resources reported Tuesday that shoreline preparation work began recently after the state received environmental permits to build the rock dam across West False River between Jersey and Bradford islands in Contra Costa County.

Some critics complained the barrier would disrupt boating and harm wild fish.

State officials say that because of the drought, they need the temporary barrier this summer to prevent seawater from San Francisco Bay from intruding upstream to degrade drinking and irrigation and drinking water pumped from the Delta.

The barrier also will enable upstream reservoirs to save water that otherwise would have to be released to flow into the Bay to fight salinity intrusion, officials said.

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