

Franks Tract Futures

Information Sheet



Delta
Science
Program

DELTA STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

- Franks Tract is a 3000-acre recreational hub and open water area in the central Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Its unique location, where the San Joaquin River connects with the Old River, is critical to controlling ocean-driven salinity intrusion in the Delta.
- Both traditional engineering and nature-based solutions have been proposed to manage salinity intrusion into Franks Tract.
- Franks Tract Futures is a “co-designed” nature-based approach to achieving multiple goals such as addressing saltwater intrusion, improving habitat for native fish species like salmon and Delta smelt, preserving and enhancing recreational opportunities, and reducing nuisance aquatic vegetation.

Background

In severe drought conditions, hydrodynamic models predict that tides could pump salt water into Franks Tract, but not out again, trapping salty water in the central Delta. Because of Franks Tract’s position near waterways used to convey fresh water, close evaluation and management are required to protect freshwater supplies from salinity intrusion. As droughts in California become longer and more frequent due to climate change, countering ocean salinity intrusion has required expensive and disruptive management measures such as the emergency drought barrier placed in False River outside of Franks Tract in 2015 and 2021 (see Emergency Drought Barrier fact sheet for more information).

In addition to salinity intrusion concerns, dense mats of aquatic weeds in Franks Tract degrade fish and wildlife habitat and impede boating. If no action is taken to improve the circumstances, these conditions might worsen.

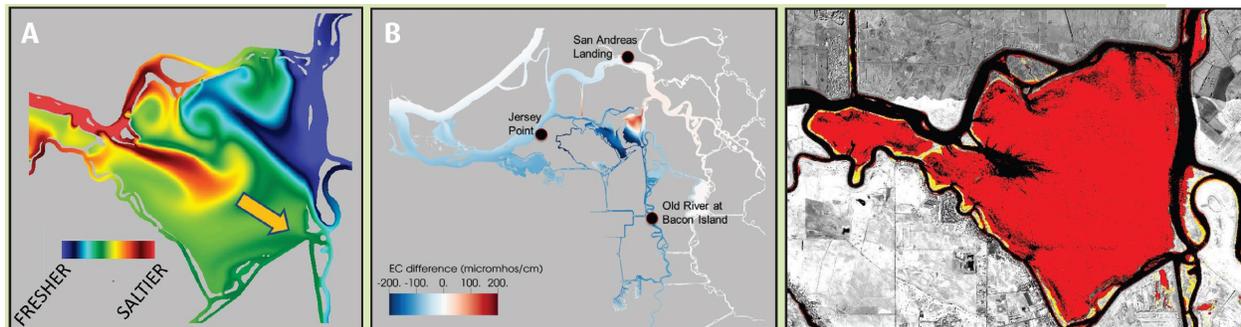


Figure 1. Image from Franks Tract Futures Report showing (A) current tidal conditions pump salt water into the Tract but don't let it out again; (B) Modeling suggests a reduction in these conditions in a reconfigured landscape; (C) Conditions under a project would be less favorable to submerged aquatic vegetation (fall 2019 extent of vegetation shown in red). Sources: DWR & Khanna, CSTARS, UCD

Public Outreach and Workshops

To develop and evaluate potential nature-based solutions for managing current and future challenges at Franks Tract, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Parks, and the Department of Water Resources commissioned a co-design process. **“Co-design” meant that diverse groups and experts, including designers, engineers, scientists, public agency representatives, boaters, fishers, hunters, residents, and business owners worked together to contribute ideas and values to develop and evaluate alternative futures.** An Advisory Committee made up of Delta residents and business owners who would be affected by changes to Franks Tract partnered with a Steering Committee of representatives from several State agencies.

A set of twelve prospective restoration designs, including a No Action Alternative, described as “Concepts” were evaluated by the Advisory and Steering Committees and refined over a series of public meetings until a preferred Concept was decided on. Broad outreach to and engagement with community members provided an opportunity for participants to share their primary objectives for the restoration of Franks Tract and allowed for open discussion about outcomes and tradeoffs associated with different Concepts.

Preferred Alternative and Future Outlook

In spring 2020, the Advisory and Steering Committees selected a final Concept that offered the best balance between project objectives and the opportunity to improve local conditions. This Concept has an estimated cost of \$500 million and is currently unfunded.

The proposed Franks Tract restoration concept seeks to find a balance of benefits across multiple objectives including salinity control, flood protection, ecological restoration, and recreational enhancement in a way that will be sustainable over time.

In 2021, after the release of the final proposed Concept, drought conditions required the installation of another Emergency Drought Barrier in False River to reduce salinity intrusion into Franks Tract. However, the ongoing challenge of managing salinity in the central Delta with emergency actions illustrates the need for a long-term solution. The Franks Tract Futures Project is a nature-based alternative to a proposal for more sustained or frequent operations of the Emergency Drought Barrier. Developing a long-term strategy for salinity management would benefit from a rigorous tradeoff analysis for both types of actions.

New Marsh, New Beaches, New Amenities, Less Weeds, Less Salt

The project proposed for Franks Tract develops three focal points for boat-to access to recreational activities that would attract three different user groups. The design pairs the eastern open water area with the active water sports enthusiasts; the Little Franks Tract with non-motorized boaters and paddlers; and the north end of the western open water area with a mooring for those with larger boats.

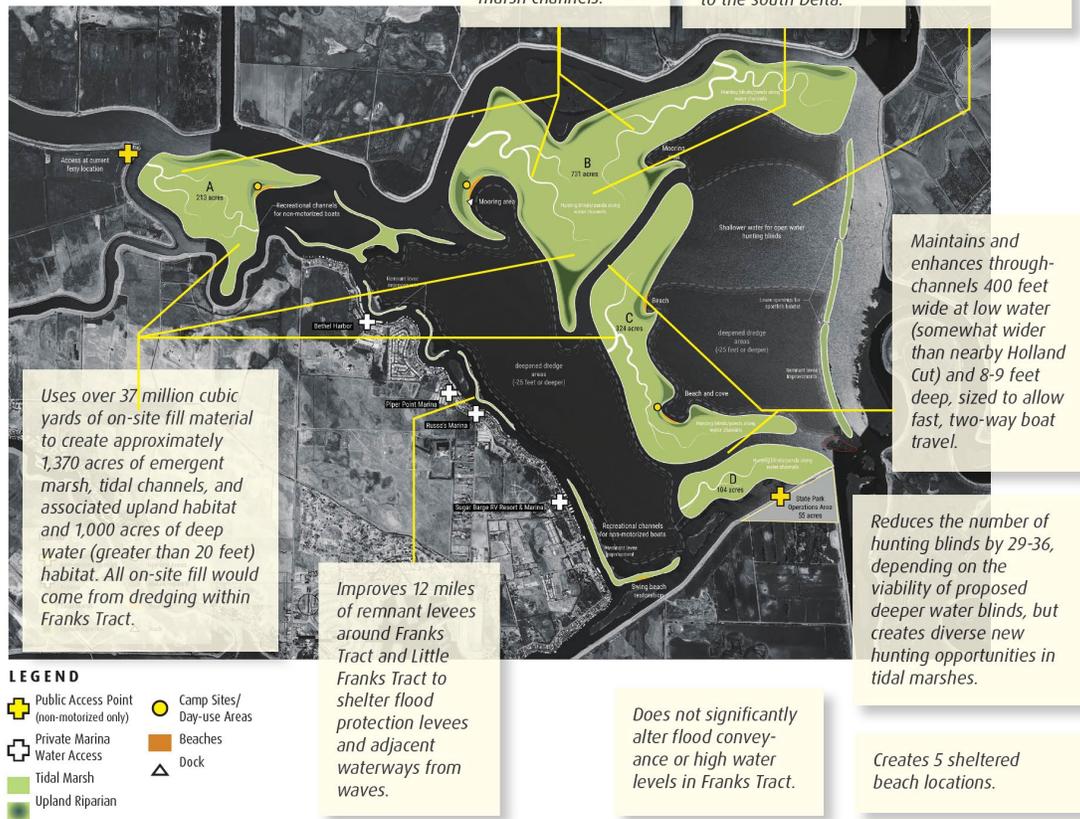


Figure 2. Final selected Concept for a potential restoration effort in Franks Tract

Any restoration action in Franks Tract will come with tradeoffs, but overall the anticipated benefits outweigh the anticipated costs. The following provides the high-level outcomes expected from the restoration of Franks Tract.

Benefits

- Achieve salinity objectives and enhance water supply reliability
- Preserve many popular boating routes
- Create new recreational opportunities, such as kayaking and land-based waterfowl hunting on new islands
- Substantial reduction of nuisance aquatic vegetation
- Benefit native and sport fish by providing habitat and migration corridors
- Improve flood protection
- Provide local economic benefits to the recreational industry.

Costs

- Cost of ~\$500 million for construction
- Disrupts some popular boating routes
- Some reduction in water-based hunting blinds for waterfowl season

Learn More

For more information regarding the Franks Tract Futures project, please visit <https://franks-tract-futures-ucdavis.hub.arcgis.com>.