

Environmentalists sue over California drought management plan

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In a fresh challenge to California's management of the drought, a group of environmentalists has sued state and federal officials, charging that they're harming fish and wildlife in their efforts to deliver more water to farms and cities.

A group led by the [California Sportfishing Protection Alliance](#) announced Thursday it has sued the State Water Resources Control Board, state Department of Water Resources and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, saying they've redirected water to human needs at the expense of Chinook salmon, Delta smelt and other endangered species.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Sacramento, comes less than a week after the water board issued an order [temporarily curbing the flow](#) of water from Lake Shasta to farms and cities. The board decided it needs to keep more water in Shasta to cool the reservoir's temperature and thereby protect the winter-run Chinook salmon, whose population needs cool water to survive.

Andrew Packard, a lawyer for the environmentalists, said it's "too soon to say" if the water board's order will help the fish population. He said the lawsuit represents an effort to put additional pressure on regulators to help the fish.

The suit revolves around the federal and state government's management of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project, the two man-made plumbing networks that bring supplies to farms and cities primarily south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Simply put, water flowing through the Delta is split. Some of it is pumped through an elaborate system to deliver water to CVP and SWP customers. Much of the rest flows out to the ocean and helps protect the fish populations.

Over the past two years, the water board has redirected additional waters to the CVP and SWP. The lawsuit says that must stop. "The CVP and SWP projects rely on the state board to bail them out by relaxing (environmental) standards and reducing water flows crucial to water quality and healthy and reproducible fisheries," the suit says.

The suit says that while some fish species are "on the lip of extinction," agriculture has proved resilient despite cutbacks in water. It noted that crop revenue and [farm employment have stayed high](#) during the drought. "Central Valley agriculture has not experienced impacts comparable to the precipitous declines suffered by the Delta smelt," the suit says.

The federal Bureau of Reclamation, which runs the Central Valley Project, declined comment. Officials with the state agencies couldn't immediately be reached.

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