

## Republicans' California drought bill triggers debate

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A California water bill easily passed the Republican-controlled House Natural Resources Committee on a near party-line vote after a lengthy, heated debate between the two political parties.

Only one Democrat – Rep. Jim Costa of California – supported the legislation.

The bill is expected to breeze through the full GOP-controlled House of Representatives as well but faces a less certain future in the Senate. Assuming all Republicans vote with their party, the bill would also need six Senate Democrats to cross the aisle.

While the Obama administration has not made any statement on the legislation, [it opposed a similar bill last year](#).

Costa proposed two amendments but withdrew one that would have directed the Army Corps of Engineers to improve reservoirs and prevent future flooding. It was at the urging of Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Calif., with the understanding that they would pursue it at a later time.

The committee does not have jurisdiction over the Army Corps of Engineers.

Costa's second amendment, which passed, would implement control measures on invasive species and predators.

"More than 20,000 invasive predators were captured over two years in nets aimed to capture juvenile protected salmon," he said, quoting a recent scientific study. "The majority of these predators eat salmon."

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Rep. Jim Costa, D-Calif.

The [170-page water bill](#), which was introduced into Congress by Rep. David Valadao, R-Calif., has little in common with a [draft bill suggested by Rep. Jared Huffman](#), D-Calif., a committee member, who strongly opposed the Republican legislation.

"Before we let harmful sections of this bill go into effect, we really should have them certified by an independent fishery management entity, to know that there will be no harmful economic effects," Huffman said.

Huffman offered three amendments to remove parts of the bill that he found most damaging, including one that would replace the San Joaquin River salmon-and-habitat restoration program with a smaller effort.

His arguments failed to move Costa or any of the committee Republicans. All of Huffman's amendments were defeated.

"Do the math on that. That's about \$3 million per fish," Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., one of the water bill's 25 co-sponsors bill, said of the river restoration program. "This bill replaces the absurd mandate to establish year-round cold fishery . . . with a warm water fishery that actually acts in concert with the habitat."

Costa agreed.

"We're trying to restore a river that hasn't run since the late 1940s," he said. "And we're trying to restore salmon that

haven't run since that time as well. I don't know. Maybe we can breed the salmon to crawl through the sand and that will work."

A coalition of international and local environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club, Greenpeace and the Environmental Defense Fund, urged representatives to vote down the bill because of its potential environmental impacts and lack of public input from California residents.

"California's ongoing drought – not federal environmental laws protecting salmon and other native fish and wildlife – is the primary reason for low water supplies across the state," the groups said in a joint statement handed out at the hearing.

The bill, they said, "would permanently override protections for salmon and other native fisheries under the [Endangered Species Act](#), and substitute political judgment for existing scientific determinations."

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