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Defenders of Wildlife / The Nature Conservancy / Endangered Species Coalition / The Bay Institute / Golden Gate Salmon Association

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Today, the House Subcommittee on Water and Power Resources is holding a hearing in Fresno about the water supply outlook in California. The subcommittee's press release clearly blames the delta smelt for a significant percentage of the water supply shortages being experienced this year. However, there have been no water supply impacts due to protections for delta smelt in 2014.

California faces significant challenges during this unprecedented drought year. Meeting those challenges will require facing the real cause of supply shortages.

The Lack of Rain is Responsible For California's Limited Water Supply.

More than [90 percent of California is in Severe, Extreme or Exceptional drought](#).

As of March 14, the amount of water in the Sierra snowpack is disastrously low – as low as [19% of average in the Northern Sierra](#).

None of the [17 communities that the State of California has found could run out of water](#) during the coming year receive water exported from the Delta.

Currently, the amount of water in storage in Lake Shasta – the state's largest reservoir – is [58% of average](#) for this time of year.

There have been no limits on Delta pumping this winter as a result of ESA protections for delta smelt. The standards currently regulating Delta pumping are designed to prevent the risk of extinction for Winter and Spring run Chinook salmon. Those standards allow rivers in the Delta to run backwards at a rate of 5,000 cubic feet per second.

Delta Pumping and Remaining Bay-Delta Protections:

Far from being turned off, the State Water Project and Central Valley Project Delta pumps are pumping 4,800 cubic feet per second as of March 18.

(<http://www.water.ca.gov/swp/operationscontrol/docs/delta/deltaops.pdf>)

For reference, this is equivalent to nearly [one standard 50' boxcar](#), filled with freshwater, leaving the CVP and SWP pumps in the South Delta every second.

The Environment is Suffering from Drought Conditions, and Environmental Protections for the Bay-Delta Ecosystem Have Already Been Relaxed.

The State Water Resources Control Board has relaxed water quality objectives that protect the Bay-Delta ecosystem. Those standards already reflect a lower level of environmental protection in dry years, in deference to water supply concerns,

(http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/drought/docs/022814_revised_tucp_order.pdf)

If water supply conditions remain extraordinarily dry, [no flows will be released from Friant Dam under the San Joaquin River settlement](#), delaying efforts to restore salmon to the river.

Drought conditions have already [harmed the offspring of salmon that spawned in the fall](#).

Poor in-river flow conditions have forced hatchery managers to [truck salmon](#) to safer waters. Conditions are so poor that lower survival levels are expected for young wild salmon as they attempt to swim to the ocean this spring.

The drought is threatening [coastal Coho](#) as well as Winter and Spring run Chinook salmon with extinction.

During 2013, California commercial fishermen faced a [month long fishing closure](#) to protect the winter run Chinook salmon. Fishermen fear that drought conditions, particularly if paired with further suspension of standards, could return California's salmon industry to the total fishing closures that the industry suffered in 2008 and 2009.

Agriculture Revenues in 2012 Reached an All-Time High.

During 2012, a dry year and the most recent year for which comprehensive data is available, California agriculture set a record, with \$44.7 billion in revenue.

(http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/California/Publications/California_Ag_Statistics/Reports/2012cas-all.pdf)

Some land will be idled in California this growing year. That, however, will be a result of drought conditions, not ESA protections.

