

# Suit challenges Delta pumping restrictions

**Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee, 7-8-16**

In a failed effort to protect endangered fish, the federal government decided without proper study to default to restricting the giant pumps at the bottom of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

So argues a lawsuit filed Friday in U.S. District Court in Sacramento by a powerful consortium of water agencies. They're hoping for a larger share of Delta water. It's the latest salvo in a political and legal dispute over how to manage the competing demands on the fragile estuary.

Friday's suit, filed by the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority, alleges that the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation failed to seek alternatives other than cutting water supplies to people when it adopted its operations plans for the massive Central Valley Project in 2008 and 2009.

Jason Peltier, the authority's executive director, said in an interview Friday that in spite of the pumping restrictions, fish populations continue on a precipitous decline.

Peltier said that before that happened, Reclamation failed to ask a critical question: "Are there actually going to be benefits to the dramatic cuts in water supply?"

Reclamation spokesman Shane Hunt said his agency doesn't comment on pending litigation.

The Central Valley Project includes Shasta and Folsom lakes and a massive federal pumping station near Tracy. From there, Delta water is channeled along canals to 2.1 million acres of farmland in the western San Joaquin Valley, and to urban water districts in San Benito and Santa Clara counties.

San Joaquin Valley farmers say they've had to let tens of thousands of acres of farmland go fallow in recent years due to the pumping restrictions. But environmental groups counter that recent economic analyses shows the state's farming economy continues to do well – even adding 30,000 new jobs last year – in spite of the ongoing drought.

Environmentalists have long argued that excessive human demand for Delta water is the primary reason why native Delta fish are dying. Two species in particular, Delta smelt and winter-run Chinook salmon, are hovering on the edge of extinction.

In April, a trio of environmental groups sued in federal court alleging that regulators repeatedly relaxed water quality standards that would have protected the fish to keep Central Valley water flowing to farms and cities.