

Stockton Record

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In the annals of California water grabbing, Rep. Devin Nunes is out to make a name for himself.

The Visalia Republican wants Central Valley farmers - make that south Valley farmers - to have first and apparently the only dibs on San Joaquin River water.

Think not? One example: The proposal would allow the Westlands Water District to receive 100 percent of its contract water allotment, every year, even in drought years.

Nunes' plan not only would undermine work on a Delta restoration - contentious and incomplete as that is - but it would destroy restoration of a river being slowly brought back to life under a 2006 court-approved settlement between water users and environmentalists.

A 40-mile stretch of the river that was dry for years will be dry again if Nunes and the bill's two co-sponsors, Majority Whip Kevin Mc-Carthy, R-Bakersfield, and Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Merced, have their way. Nunes has pushed the bill through the House Natural Resources Committee.

"This bill is a brazen move by the water contractors and their allies who want to steal water from the Delta," said Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton.

Wednesday, the Obama administration joined the fray, declaring that the bill "would unravel decades of work to forge consensus, solutions, and settlements that equitably address some of California's most complex water challenges."

Just to add a bit of unintentional irony to this thinly-veiled water theft, HB1837 is titled the "Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley Water Reliability Act." It's all in how you define "reliability."

Good luck blocking this in the House, where a vote is expected today. That means it will be up to California's Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer to stop it in the Senate. Or, as a gleeful Nunes said of the two senators: "Now they've got to fight for their environmental wacko friends."

Actually, Nunes is the wacko here because there's nothing wacky about wanting to return a river to health, keep it that way and work toward a reasonable, science-based plan for the protection and restoration of the Delta.