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The War Over Water

In Partnership with Comstock's magazine

By Mike Luery

SACRAMENTO (CBS13) — California is looking like a dustbowl in a state that is desperate for water.

"I need water," says Craig Shannon, an almond farmer in the Central Valley, "otherwise next year I'm out of business."

Shannon spoke with CBS13 on a day of massive protests along the delta, with farmers altering the typical protest cry:
"What do we need?"
"Water!"
"When do we want it?"
"Now!"

As many as 80,000 Californians could lose their jobs over water, according a recent UC Davis study. These farmers believe the drought is man made and caused by Congress.

"We want water," says farm worker Sylvia Soto. "We want Obama to turn the pumps on for all our people."

Have your say. Where do you stand on the war on water?

Those pumps are on, technically, but water deliveries for the Central Valley are down dramatically from 85% of normal four years ago to 10% of normal today. The Feds say 3/4 of the missing water is due to the drought while 1/4 is from pumping restrictions to protect endangered species like salmon and the delta smelt.

At the rally, held near Fresno, Central Valley Congressman Devin Nunes worked the crowd, speaking with farmers and workers alike. Nunes feels the real endangered species are those farmers and workers, no the fish.

"This is politics at its worst," said Nunes during a break in his discussions. "This is about radical environmental groups wanting this area to go back to what it was 100 years ago which was just a desert."

But environmentalists like Barbara Barrigan-Parilla say the debate is not about fish versus people. "We also have a fishing economy that's tied to the Delta and commercial salmon fishing is a really important part of the California economy."

Thousands of fishing jobs are also affected by the drought, with a thirsty California demanding more water than the state can provide. California's elected officials have yet to find a solution despite decades of dialogue and caught in the middle are farmers, fishermen and consumers who ultimately may have to pay more for food at the grocery store because of the war over water.

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