

California water settlement may be bad for Nevada

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

What happens in California holds sway over many of Nevada's most important industries: Californians populate the state's casinos, they are the state's best would-be buyers of renewable energy, and now, they may be setting a standard for how Nevada's scarce water resources will be allocated in the future.

Or at least that is what Nevada, along with a host of other Western states, fears will happen if a federal bill to restructure California's system for sharing water among urbanites, farmers and conservation projects passes Congress.

This week, the House of Representatives voted to approve the Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley Water Reliability Act. The bill upends a 2006 settlement on water distribution that ended almost 20 years of lawsuits, as well as five years of planning to implement the settlement to replenish the San Joaquin river – a move California's governor believes will make it a more reliable resource for both wildlife and thirsty Californians.

Farmers have never liked the irrigation restrictions that came with the deal. One influential Republican representative of California's agricultural areas said the water pumping limitations had caused a "man-made drought" hampering the local economy in the San Joaquin Valley.

The particulars of the dispute are localized to California. But some Nevadans believe that if the federal government can successfully intervene to impose a water settlement on California, there's no reason government won't meddle in Nevada's water disputes too.

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