

House OKs Calif. drought bill that faces Obama veto

By Bettina Boxall and Evan Halper, Los Angeles Times

The U.S. House on Tuesday passed a California drought bill, despite a veto threat from the Obama administration and its expected demise in the Senate in the final days before Congress adjourns.

The 230-182 vote was largely a symbolic gesture in the years-long effort by House Republicans to weaken endangered species protections that have restricted water deliveries from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to San Joaquin Valley agribusiness and urban Southern California.

The measure, which was introduced last week after House GOP negotiations with Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) fell apart, was opposed by environmentalists, the White House and Gov. Jerry Brown's administration.

"This is no time to re-ignite water wars, move water policy back into the courts, and try to pit one part of the state against another," California Natural Resources Secretary John Laird wrote in a letter Tuesday to the California congressional delegation.

The 26-page bill focused on water operations in the delta and Northern California, directing federal agencies to take steps that would send more delta water south. Proponents of the measure said that endangered fish restrictions had significantly reduced Delta pumping during storms in late 2012 and early 2013.

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