

Unexpected consequences of ongoing drought

By Lydia O'Connor, Huffington Post

What happens when America's most populous state runs low on its most precious resource for the fourth year in a row?

A lack of rainfall doesn't just result in problems for farmers, the food industry and people with sprawling lawns. It can have serious consequences that aren't so obvious. While there have been concerns about California's relentless drought creating weird-tasting beer and driving a sudden surge in succulent thievery, there are lesser-known side effects that are pretty alarming.

"The proportion of mosquitoes infected with West Nile virus is at the highest level ever detected in California," Ron Chapman, director of the California Department of Public Health announced in September. By the end of 2014, the state had recorded 798 human cases, the most since 2005 and more than five times the number recorded in 2011, when the historic drought began. Of those infected, 29 died.

Rats and other rodents moving into human-populated areas mean even more unwanted animals follow. Sacramento's Len Ramirez, who runs a rattlesnake removal business, told CBS Sacramento that halfway through 2014, it was already one of the busiest years he'd seen in nearly three decades. In just one week in July, he removed 72 rattlesnakes that got too close for people's comfort.

In some cases, less water means a higher likelihood of coming in contact with contaminated water. Californians who rely on private wells for water, often in the state's poor, rural areas, are at particular risk, Reuters reports, because there's a higher concentration of contaminants when there's

less water.

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