

# Calif. drought tests strength of water rights

By David Siders and Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

High above a landscape parched by unremitting drought, Meadow Valley Creek courses through the northern Sierra Nevada and pools in a stand of alders behind a tiny, concrete dam.

Robert Forbes draws water from the reservoir through an overturned smokestack and into a ditch that has run west of Quincy for more than 100 years.

He adjusted a piece of plywood at its mouth to restrict the flow one recent morning. In dry years, Forbes said, “I start rationing people along the line.”

Forbes’ family’s access to this water derives from an 1870s claim in Plumas County; and his antiquated management of the ditch – breaking ice with a shovel in the winter, negotiating irrigation schedules among neighbors when the weather warms – has persisted for decades with little intervention.

Earlier this year, the state Water Resources Control Board ordered more than 1,000 property owners to prove their water rights. This month, the board warned claim-holders to expect curtailments of their ability to divert water from rivers and streams.

The actions are significant because they include the state’s most senior water rights holders – those claimed before California established its permitting process in 1914.

**Read the whole story**