

Opinion: Calif.'s water pollution laws languishing

By Jared Blumenfeld, San Francisco Chronicle

There is nothing more Californian than our ability to swim, surf and fish in clean water. And yet, we have fallen behind Kentucky and Texas when it comes to clean water enforcement. With industry advocates in the federal driver's seat, we need state leaders to step it up by sending a message that in California, when it comes to clean water, the polluter pays.

Two years ago, I hiked the length of California and waded the Kern, Feather and San Joaquin rivers. At their beginnings, these waters are crystal clear, cold, flowing strong and clean. More than 40 years ago, Congress passed the Clean Water Act to protect these national treasures from pollution.

When California's rivers leave the mountain snowmelt behind, they embark on a difficult journey. Many are diverted, drained and pumped dry before they reach the Pacific Ocean. Those that keep flowing are often polluted with heavy metals, pesticides, bacteria, plastic bottles and runoff from industrial operations. In fact, the number of California rivers that failed to meet basic water quality standards for swimming, fishing and drinking shot up 170 percent from 2006 to 2010, (the last time our state undertook this legally required biannual task).

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