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Senators Feinstein and Boxer Introduce Measure to Allow New Water Transfers in California's Drought-Stricken Central Valley

-Would authorize voluntary transfers of up to 250,000 to 300,000 acre-feet per year of water between sellers and buyers; streamline environmental reviews -

Washington, DC – U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer (both D-Calif.) today introduced a measure that would help ease the effects of severe drought in the Central Valley by allowing new voluntary water transfers of up to 250,000 to 300,000 acre-feet of water, depending on rainfall that year, according to the Bureau of Reclamation.

The legislation would grant new authority to the Bureau of Reclamation to approve water transfers between sellers and buyers in the San Joaquin Valley. The measure also would streamline environmental reviews for Central Valley water transfers by ensuring that they occur on a programmatic basis, instead of project-by-project basis as is current practice. The measure should reduce unnecessary delays in water transfers at a time when Central Valley farmers have been hard hit by a three-year drought.

A similar but narrower provision to temporarily authorize Central Valley water transfers between Central Valley Project divisions was included in the conference report for the Fiscal Year 2010 Energy & Water appropriations bill. The conference report was adopted by the House last week and will likely be adopted by the Senate this week.

"Many communities in California's Central Valley are in desperate need of more water as a result of a three-year drought, but there are some parts of the Valley that have surplus water to sell," Senator Feinstein said. **"This bill would grant the Bureau of Reclamation new authority to allow surplus water to be transferred to those who need it on an expedited basis. It is a reasonable and timely solution to the water crisis that would streamline the environmental review process and cut out unnecessary delays. It will allow struggling farmers to access roughly 250,000 to 300,000 more acre-feet of water while ensuring that these transfers comply with critical environmental regulations."**

Senator Boxer said, **"We took a critical step toward addressing the water crisis in the San Joaquin Valley when the Senate passed our amendment enabling water transfers between the east and west sides of the valley. This new legislation will build on that effort by extending the ability to transfer water permanently and expanding the transfer program to include even more water users."**

Companion legislation will be introduced today in the House by Representatives Costa and Cardoza (both D-Calif.).

Specifically, the measure (S.1759) would:

- **Establish new parameters for San Joaquin Valley water transfers that can be authorized by the Bureau of Reclamation.** Previously, the Bureau of Reclamation would not approve water transfers if it was determined that the seller with surplus water could have used the water (i.e., for irrigation or groundwater storage purposes), even if the transfer was proven to have no negative impact on the environment. The legislation introduced today would explicitly grant the Bureau the authority to approve these types of East-West transfers, as long as they qualify under environmental regulations.
- **The Bureau of Reclamation estimates that this section of the bill could yield up to 100,000 or 150,000 acre-feet of water transfers per year.**
- **Direct the Interior Department to streamline the giant garter snake environmental review for water transfers from the Sacramento Valley to the San Joaquin Valley by ensuring that they occur on a programmatic basis rather than on a project-by-project basis, which is the current practice.** This would allow the Bureau of Reclamation to approve North-South water transfers more promptly and ensure that the endangered giant garter snake is protected sufficiently.
- **The Bureau of Reclamation and Central Valley water users estimate that this section of the bill could yield up to 150,000 to 200,000 acre-feet of water transfers per year.**
- **Direct the Bureau of Reclamation to analyze existing transfers and prepare recommendations on whether there are other ways to facilitate future Central Valley transfers more efficiently.** This would include transfers from north to south and from east to west, as well as between California state and federal projects.

The bill is supported by a number of water users across the Central Valley, including:

- Friant Water Users Authority
- San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Authority
- Delta-Mendota Canal Authority
- Westlands Water District
- Metropolitan Water District
- Glen Colusa Irrigation District
- Northern California Water Association
- Banta-Carbona Irrigation District
- Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority
- Association of California Water Agencies
- Placer County Water Agency
- Conaway Preservation Group
- Reclamation District 2035
- San Luis Water District

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