

# A predator fish in California has lost its White House support

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A still-controversial 1992 law intended to boost California's striped-bass population can be scaled back, the Obama administration now believes.

In a modest softening of the state's polarized water debate, a top Interior Department official voiced sympathy Wednesday for a Republican-authored bill that would end the 1992 law's stated goal of doubling the number of striped bass living in and around the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

"It makes sense to remove the striped bass from the doubling goals," said Tom Iseman, deputy assistant secretary for water and science, adding that "the striped bass is a predator of native species."

Maintaining the goal of doubling the predatory striped-bass population potentially undermines the 1992 law's accompanying goals of doubling the populations of other fish that ascend the Delta and Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. Striped bass forage on juvenile salmon, fisheries expert Charles H. Hanson told lawmakers Wednesday.

"This is bipartisan and common-sense legislation that means less money, time and water wasted," said Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Calif.

Denham's striped-bass bill, in turn, marks the latest effort by California lawmakers to reconsider portions of the 1992 Central Valley Project Improvement Act that steered more water from farms toward protection of rivers and the Delta.

Another bill, by Rep. Doris Matsui, D-Calif., to revise a water-recycling grant program established in the 1992 law likewise secured administration support Wednesday. Matsui's bill would remove a requirement that grant applicants first secure a hard-to-get congressional authorization.

Taken together, the administration's moves might be interpreted as a greater willingness to reopen deliberations about updating a wide-ranging law that's been on the books longer than any of the Central Valley's House members have been in Congress.

"We would be willing to have that discussion," Iseman said, adding, "it's appropriate that that conversation include many other stakeholders" as well.

Still, serious obstacles remain, and the prospects for any kind of California water deal, at any level, are uncertain at best.

While Matsui, for instance, said her water recycling grant bill "prioritizes projects in drought-stricken areas, which is critical given the current challenges facing the West," the Republican chairman of the House water, power and oceans subcommittee, Rep. John Fleming of Louisiana, asserted it would "allow the (grant) program to spiral even further out of control."

Denham's striped-bass bill, while it also has the backing of several House Democrats, has raised the hackles of some sport-fishing enthusiasts and was dismissed by Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., as an "enormous straw man" that would do little for salmon.

Pressed by Huffman, Iseman said the Interior Department has not implemented any specific programs intended to double the [striped-bass](#) population. Iseman also noted the administration wants some "technical

changes" in Denham's bill.

And soon, the full House will wrangle anew over California provisions added by Rep. David Valadao, R-Calif., to an energy and water appropriations bill for 2017. The House Appropriations Committee approved the \$37.4 billion package Tuesday, including language to mandate more Delta water pumping and block spending on San Joaquin River restoration.

"I am continuing to pursue all available avenues until my constituents have the water they so desperately need," Valadao said Tuesday.

Huffman, the senior Democrat on the House [water](#), power and oceans panel, remains skeptical, as do other Northern California Democrats.

"I don't know where they come up with these ideas," Huffman said in an interview. "None of these overreaching, over-the-top tactics have ever worked for these guys."

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