

E&E News PM

Trump promises California ‘more water than you ever saw’

By Timothy Cama | 09/13/2024 04:09 PM EDT

The former president questioned protections for the delta smelt.

Former President Donald Trump promised Californians unprecedented access to water and reduced protections for a key fish species if he is reelected.

Speaking at a press conference at the golf club he owns near Los Angeles, Trump said farmers in the Golden State have as much as 1,000 acres of “barren and dead and dark” land for every acre of usable land, while houses in wealthy areas get small amounts of water to use.



Donald Trump speaks at a press conference in California. Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump during a press conference in California on Friday. Jae Hong/AP

He blamed it on protections for the delta smelt, a small endangered fish species that lives in the Sacramento–San Joaquin River Delta, and said Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) blocked efforts during his previous time in the White House to ease the smelt’s protections.

Trump said all it would take would be to turn a massive “faucet,” to switch from the water going “aimlessly into the Pacific” to sending it to communities, while also stopping wildfires. And he threatened to withhold federal wildfire money from California if Newsom didn’t cooperate this time.

“You have so much water, and all those fields that are right now barren, the farmers would have all the water they needed. And you could revert water up into the hills, where you have all the dead forests, where the forests are so brittle. ... The land would be damp, and you’d

stop many of these horrible fires that are costing billions and billions of dollars by the federal government,” he said.

“Vote for me, California. I’m going to give you safety, I’m going to give you a great border, and I’m going to give you more water than almost anybody has,” Trump said.

“You’re going to have more water than you ever saw. And the smelt is not making it anyway,” he continued. “You’re going to have water in California at a level that you’ve never seen before. The farmers are going to do great.”

If Newsom doesn’t allow the changes to environmental policies Trump wants, “we won’t give him money to put out all his fires,” he said. “And if we don’t give him the money to put out his fires, he’s got problems.”

Trump’s promises are the latest chapter in California’s decades-long disputes over how to balance the thirst for water with the environmental harms that can come from redirecting it from some parts of the state to others.

Republicans and some other leaders have long fought for more water to go to agriculture, other industries and homes, while conservationists have sought to limit those movements.

The former president went to California, the home state of his opponent Vice President Kamala Harris, to criticize her and other Democrats in the state, days after the two met for their only debate of the election cycle.

Trump lost by about 30 percentage points in California in both the 2016 and 2020 elections. But he argued, contrary to evidence from those elections, that the Golden State conducts “dishonest” elections and sends some people multiple absentee ballots.

“If I ran with an honest vote counter in California, I would win California,” he said. “But the votes are not counted honestly. It’s a very dishonest system that you have in California.”

The answers on water supply came in response to a question over what Trump would do about recent landslides in Rancho Palos Verdes, near his golf club. Before speaking, Trump invited Mayor John Cruikshank to the lectern to plead for additional state and federal relief for the city.

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