

Congressional bill could tab Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta as National Heritage Area

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The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta's rich history could soon make it a National Heritage Area.

Five local U.S. congressional representatives, along with county supervisors in the Delta region, introduced a bill last week that would establish it as a heritage area. Sen. Dianne Feinstein introduced a similar bill in the U.S. Senate recently.

The legislation would establish the estuary as a National Heritage Area, which would be managed by the Delta Protection Commission. The distinction aims at protecting and promoting the history, resources, and economy of the Delta community. It would not effect water rights or water contracts, nor would it create new regulatory authorities.

There are 49 heritage areas recognized in the country.

"The Delta is the heart of the California water system. The Delta Heritage Act helps local communities sustain and enhance the vitality of this national treasure," Rep. John Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove, said in a news release.

Feinstein adds in the same release: "The Delta is an important resource for California and the largest inland delta in the world -- and we must treat it with the respect it deserves."

The Delta includes about 60 islands protected by 1,100 miles of levees and is home to about 3.5 million residents, including 2,500 family farmers.

The Delta is also known as a recreational haven for boating, fishing, hunting, and viewing wildlife.

By 1492, the area supported North America's largest settlement of Native Americans. Centuries later it was the gateway to the gold fields, and after that became home to Chinese workers that built hundreds of miles of levees that allowed for farming.

Sizable groups of Japanese, Italian, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Greek, South Asian, and other immigrants called the Delta home over the years.

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