
California moves to pre-empt Trump on environment, endangered species

By **DAVID SIDERS** | 02/23/17 05:13 AM EST

Needling President Donald Trump and bracing for a rollback of Obama-era environmental protections, Democrats in the nation's most populous state are launching a preemptive strike.

California lawmakers are expected Thursday to propose legislation to fold existing federal air, water and endangered species standards into state law, sources said, enshrining pre-Trump levels of protection in California regardless of any reversal at the federal level.

The legislation, to be introduced by Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de León and other Democratic senators, would require state air and water pollution regulators to maintain environmental standards at least as stringent as federal law required before Trump took office. And it would add state-level protections for species currently listed as endangered or threatened on the federal Endangered Species Act.

In an effort to impede the Trump administration from transferring federal lands to private developers for oil drilling or other purposes, Democratic lawmakers are also expected to propose a bill to give the State Lands Commission right of first refusal on such transactions.

The legislation marks the latest in an ongoing feud between the president and heavily Democratic California, where Gov. Jerry Brown and Democratic lawmakers are bracing for conflict with Washington on issues ranging from health care to immigration and climate change.

Trump criticized California environmental policies during the campaign and threatened after taking office to withhold funding from California if it moves forward with additional protections for undocumented immigrants.

"California," he told Fox News' Bill O'Reilly, "in many ways is out of control."

One EPA employee has told POLITICO that workers are awaiting expected orders from Trump to repeal the Obama-era Clean Power Plan and Waters of the U.S. rule.

Trump is deeply unpopular in California, where Democrats control super-majorities in both houses of the Legislature and a poll this month showed nearly two-thirds of adults want California to pursue its own policies on immigration and climate change.

Yet California's stringent climate program could be undermined by a president who has described global warming as a hoax. While California has relied for years on federal waivers from the Clean Air Act to set its own, stricter, clean air standards, Trump's Environmental Protection Agency administrator, Scott Pruitt, has left open the possibility that the administration could revoke the state's authority.

Pruitt, one of Trump's most controversial Cabinet members, has drawn intense criticism from California lawmakers. Following his confirmation last week, de León said in a prepared statement that "California will not follow Trump's destructive path."