

Water standards pact announced

By Steve Geissinger

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — California's environment will get more water, but there will be reliable supplies for farms and cities due to an historic pact unveiled by government officials and water interests.

"Peace has broken out amid the water wars," Gov. Pete Wilson said Thursday, describing the pact as "a landmark agreement."

The accord "is good for economic growth, good for the environment and good for California and the nation," President Clinton said in a prepared statement.

Two Clinton administration officials, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol Browner, joined Wilson at the state Capitol to announce agreement on water quality standards for the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

"Quite simply, the plan meets the needs of families, farmers and fish," Browner said.

The three-year pact dedicates more water to the environment.

The resulting cuts in government waterworks deliveries may not be immediately felt by farms and cities, which have been affected by drought and temporary increased diversions for fish and wildlife.

The agreement was hailed by environmental groups such as the Environmental Defense Fund and the Natural Heritage Institute, and, despite cuts, by farmers and cities.

Representatives of agriculture and urban interests said that they were gaining reliability in deliveries — a key concern.

But farm representatives said the pact would not solve California's water supply shortage.

State Sen. Tom Hayden warned environmentalists to be skeptical about the accord. The Santa Monica Democrat announced that

the Senate Natural Resources and Wildlife Committee, which he chairs, would hold hearings on the environmental adequacy of the pact in January.

Rep. Vic Fazio, a West Sacramento Democrat, said he fears farms and cities will be shortchanged in the accounting of supplies they give up to the environment.

The EPA had to determine water quality standards by a court-set deadline Thursday, but agreed to withdraw the goals early next year in favor of state water quality standards.

Officials completed the accord during marathon talks in recent days. The path to Thursday's announcement has been strewn with lawsuits and broken accords.

The immediate effect of the pact may be slight because deliveries to cities and farms have been reduced temporarily to protect two endangered fish species in the ecologically sensitive delta. Flows also have been cut by continuing drought conditions.