

Trump tells California 'there is no drought'

By Jill Colvin and Ellen Knickmeyer, AP

FRESNO — Presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump told California voters Friday that he can solve their water crisis, declaring, "There is no drought."

California is, in fact, in midst of a drought. Last year capped the state's driest four-year period in its history, with record low rainfall and snow.

Speaking at a rally in Fresno, Trump accused state officials of denying water to Central Valley farmers so they can send it out to sea "to protect a certain kind of three-inch fish."

"We're going to solve your water problem. You have a water problem that is so insane. It is so ridiculous where they're taking the water and shoving it out to sea," Trump said at a rally that drew thousands.

The comments came a day after Trump outlined an energy policy plan that relies heavily on expanding U.S. fossil fuel exploration and reducing environmental regulations.

He held a pair of rallies Friday in Fresno and San Diego as he closed a campaign swing through the west, drawing vocal crowds of protesters, many carrying signs critical of Trump's plan to wall off the U.S. border with Mexico.

About a thousand Trump foes demonstrated outside San Diego's convention center as Trump spoke inside to an enthusiastic crowd of supporters packed in tight. Police said they made about a dozen arrests, including one man who climbed a railing separating protesters from officers. His arrest led protesters to spray water and throw empty plastic bottles at police.

In another tense exchange, police shoved back demonstrators to separate them from Trump supporters when they left the center after the rally.

Officers in riot gear declared the gathering outside the convention center unlawful after shouting matches erupted and people began hurling trash at each other.

Inside, the mood was far less charged, as Trump took repeated jabs at Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton. He also went on defense against negative media stories and an ongoing lawsuit against his now-defunct Trump University.

"I'm getting railroaded by a legal system," Trump complained.

In Fresno, Trump said he'd spent 30 minutes before his rally meeting with more than 50 farmers who complained to him about their struggles.

"They don't understand – nobody understands it," he said, declaring at one point: "There is no drought. They turn the water out into the ocean."

Trump appeared to be referring to disputes over water that runs from the Sacramento River to the San Francisco Bay and then to the ocean. Some farmers want more of that flow captured and diverted to them.

Politically influential rural water districts and well-off corporate farmers in and around California's Central Valley have been pushing back against longstanding federal laws protecting endangered fish and other species, saying federal efforts to make sure endangered native fish have enough water is short-changing farmers of the water they want and need for crops.

Water authorities say they can't do it because of the water rights of those upstream of the farmers, and because of the minimum-water allowances needed by endangered species in the

bay and by wildlife in general.

The 3-inch Delta smelt is a native California fish on the brink of extinction. The smelt has become an emblem in the state's battles over environmental laws and water distribution.

The farm lobby, a heavyweight player in California's water wars, also is seeking federal and state approval for billions of dollars in new water tunnels, dams and other projects.

Trump promised that, if he's elected, he would put their interests first. "If I win, believe me, we're going to start opening up the water so that you can have your farmers survive," he said.

California is the country's No. 1 agriculture producer. The state's drought is raising the stakes in water disputes among farmers, cities and towns, and environmental interests.

A count by the Associated Press found Thursday that Trump has reached the required number of delegates to officially clinch the Republican nomination.

Associated Press writer Scott Smith contributed to this report.