California Black Gold Rush?

I'm California dreaming on such a winter's day (even though it's March as I write this …). Unfortunately, however, the state is facing some nightmarish issues. Its crippling drought this past winter, coupled with hydrofracturing activities, have fracking opponents up in arms. According to a Reuters article, California assemblyman Marc Levine declared in February that he is co-authoring a bill that would put a moratorium on fracking in California, using the drought to strengthen his stance.

Levine argued that the issue raises the question: Which is more important—oil or water? "This is the year to make the case that it's water," he told Reuters.

Environmental lobby groups agreed that the state just cannot spare any water for fracking.

According to a Huffington Post article, on March 9, California Democrats almost unanimously approved a progressive platform that included a proposed ban on fracking, in contrast with Gov. Jerry Brown's willingness to explore the practice.

Even though fracking opponents are vehemently outspoken against Brown's stance, it is important to note that he has shown support for limited, regulated fracking in California. In September 2013, he issued the state's first fracking regulations, which went into effect Jan. 1, 2014. The regulations require any company planning fracking to obtain permits and publicly disclose the chemicals it uses. The regulations also require air and water quality monitoring and an independent study of local effects.

The sacred spot at the center of the controversy is California's Monterey Shale deposit, a rock formation that is believed to hold one of the world's largest onshore reserves of shale oil. It covers 1,750 sq miles of central and southern California and has been folded by tectonic shifts over millions of years. It is said to contain organic matter that is rendered into oil through heat and pressure—although just how much oil remains trapped and where exactly it can be found is unclear.

Even though groups on both sides of the fracking debate are heated toward one another, one can admit that this potential modern-day gold rush is a mysterious, suspenseful tale worthy of 1849. Does a new boom await the Golden State? Most importantly, though—what does this controversy mean for the future of California's water supply?

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