

High-capacity well bill clears Senate, heads to Assembly

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The state Senate this morning signed off on legislation 19-13 loosening regulations of high-capacity wells over Dem protests it would privatize the state's waters and give farmers preference over their neighbors.

Under the bill, the Department of Natural Resources would not review the impact of the wells, which draw more than 100,000 gallons a day, when they are replaced or the property is sold.

Dems sought several changes to the bill, including a review every 10 years. But Republicans shot down the amendments as the bill passed along party lines.

Sen. Janet Bewley, D-Ashland, said the bill would allow some to "successfully steal the water of their neighbor" in perpetuity.

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"Why should one group of people be given certainty when the average Wisconsin citizen does not?" Bewley asked.

But Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, one of the bill co-authors, called the legislation measured and pro-agriculture. He said agriculture has changed and lawmakers can no longer view a farm as 40 acres and 40 cows. Instead, the Legislature needs to find solutions that fit an industry that has grown in size of operation, but remains a major component in Wisconsin industry. He also said it needs certainty.

"That's what we do in Wisconsin. We farm," Fitzgerald said.

The Senate came back at 8 a.m. Wednesday for a final vote after Dems objected to

third reading Tuesday, a procedural move that put off passage.

After the bill cleared the Senate, Sen. Tim Carpenter, D-Milwaukee, objected to sending it to the Assembly in another attempt to delay it.

But Fitzgerald then moved reconsideration of the bill, which failed along party lines. According to Fitzgerald's office, that automatically sent the bill to the Assembly because the only purpose of holding off messaging the legislation is for the purpose of reconsideration.