

Senate approves wetlands bill, sending it to gov

Posted on Wednesday, Feb 21, 2018

The Senate voted 18-14 along party lines Tuesday to ease permitting requirements for some urban and rural wetlands, sending the bill to the gov.

Dems, all of whom opposed the bill, slammed the legislation as a sop to developers that will come back to bite the state down the line as more wetlands are paved over. They said that's particularly important with the flooding the state has seen in recent years, saying wetlands help absorb the influx of water.

Sen. Chris Larson, D-Milwaukee, warned it would only be the first step in additional rollbacks of wetland protections.

"If you don't say no to the bullies, they're going to come back and ask for more," Larson said.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

But Sen. Tom Tiffany, R-Hazelhurst, downplayed the changes. He said in his eight years in the Legislature, this was about the 22nd "worst bill for the environment" over the past generation. He said the opponents were overstating the bill's impacts, especially compared to past versions of the bill.

"This bill is a modest change," Tiffany said.

The amended bill would set mitigation requirements for the filling of certain urban wetlands. Specifically, it would require developers to mitigate after filling more than 10,000 square feet of an urban wetland — a notable departure from the previous Assembly version of the bill, which would not have required mitigation in urban areas when up to an acre of wetland is filled.

That earlier bill also would have sought to exempt all state wetlands from permitting requirements.

Under the amended legislation, the following state wetlands from permitting requirements: filling up to 1 acre per parcel of wetland in an urban area; filling up to 3 acres per parcel of wetlands in agricultural areas; and filling artificial wetlands.

The amended bill would also would require the Department of Natural Resources to establish a property development grant program for nonprofits to increase public access or awareness of a wetland, or promote habitat in wetland areas; and it would create a nine-member wetland study council housed within the agency.