

Senate Approves Groundwater Plan

Katie Orr, Capital Public Radio, 8-28-14

Forty percent of California's water comes from groundwater, yet the state has never had a plan to manage it. That could soon change if a measure approved in the Senate makes it through the rest of the legislative process.

Democratic Senator Fran Pavley says this bill addresses a growing problem.

"There are tensions between property owners competing for a limited supply of water," she says. "It's really a survival of the fittest out there. Whoever can drill the deepest well wins."

The bill would require local governments to set up groundwater management agencies. The agencies would have five years to implement a management plan and 20 years to reach sustainable groundwater levels.

The need for management is widely acknowledged, but Republican Senator Tom Berryhill says this bill has been rushed.

"And I think, to be fair, that we should come back the first of the year, have hearings, completely vet this thing so make sure that we don't make mistakes and do this thing right," he says.

But Democratic Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson says the groundwater bill has been debated for months and it's time to act.

"In California we say we haven't had a groundwater policy for 100 years, why start now? I say we start now," she says. "We should have started a long time ago."

The bill passed 26-11. It must now be taken up by the Assembly.

The legislature also took action on dozens of other bills. The Assembly gave final approval to bills restricting the use of drones by public agencies, limiting the use of campaign funds and limiting political fundraisers. The Assembly also approved a bill banning discrimination based on the use of an undocumented driver license.

The Senate passed a hotly debated measure that would place insurance requirements on ride-sharing companies like Uber and Lyft. That measure now goes back to the Assembly.

Lawmakers and the governor also reached an agreement on a renewal of a film tax credit designed to keep movie and television productions in California.