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For interviews contact:  
Sen. Mark Schoesler (360) 786-7620

## Washington State Senate, Republican Caucus

### Legislature passes Odessa aquifer bill

**OLYMPIA**...Farmers and communities in much of the Columbia Basin received good news when the Legislature tonight passed a bill prime-sponsored by Sen. Mark Schoesler that provides short-term help for those relying on the Odessa aquifer.

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6151 eases water relinquishment rules for the region served by the aquifer.

The House amended and then approved Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6151 on a 96-2 vote Friday. The Senate tonight voted 48-0 to concur with the House changes to the measure, sending it to Gov. Gregoire for final consideration.

Schoesler, R-Ritzville, said the bill is needed to ensure that farmers in the area have the tools to deal with the rapidly declining aquifer.

“Many farmers living in the Columbia Basin need to use the Odessa aquifer for irrigation water,” Schoesler said. “The aquifer is being depleted and there is no other available source of water, so farmers and communities really need help. This bill and the Columbia River water management plan passed into law this year go a long way to save agriculture and the communities in this region.”

Schoesler’s proposal gives irrigators in the Odessa aquifer sub-area (as mapped in state code) a “time out” from the statutory five-year “use-it-or-lose-it” provision in order to encourage maximum water conservation until the surface water resulting from the second half of Columbia Basin Project is delivered. Doing so would save water for municipal water users and domestic wells, Schoesler said.

The bill has a sunset date of July 1, 2021, unless water from the Columbia River management plan reaches those affected by the depleted aquifer before this date.

The bill as amended by the House requires water right holders to notify the Department of Ecology in writing within 180 days of the decision to suspend water use, requires notification for the choice to discontinue nonuse, and specifies that the proposal doesn’t exclude other laws regarding the non-use of water.

The measure includes a broad list of ways water use in the Odessa can be conserved or foregone for an extended period of time without losing the ability to later use the water. The list includes efficiencies, long- or short-term crop decisions, economic hardship, pumping or infrastructure expense, water suitability, water pumping yield, and documented participation in cooperation efforts to optimize aquifer resources.

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*For more information contact Brian Zylstra at (360) 786-7399 or [zylstra.brian@leg.wa.gov](mailto:zylstra.brian@leg.wa.gov)*

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