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Stream-protection bill heads to governor

By Staff, wire reports

A years-long standoff over how to protect the state's cleanest waterways could end if Gov. Joe Manchin signs a bill approved by the Legislature.

The Senate endorsed a bill on Thursday that would eliminate the so-called Tier 2.5 designation for state streams. The House approved the bill Wednesday.

Under the measure, the cleanest streams on public lands - including those with naturally reproducing trout - would be granted Tier 3 status, the highest possible protection from pollution. Streams on private land would be given Tier 2 status, but could be moved to Tier 3 under a nomination process.

The state Department of Environmental Protection does not have a final count on how many streams will end up in each tier, but 444 were originally considered for designation under the Tier 2.5 plan.