

## House OKs Matheson's water bill

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ST. GEORGE - Pushing to make water conservation and efficiency more of a priority, Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, introduced a bill designed to protect the world's most precious resource.

The Water-Use Efficiency and Conservation Research Act, passed on a voice vote in the U.S. House on Wednesday, authorizes \$100 million over five years to create a research and development program on water-use efficiency and conservation within the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Research and Development.

"Many experts are starting to see water as the 'new oil' in terms of what a precious commodity it is," Matheson said in a statement Tuesday. "The key to avoiding future scarcity is more efficient use, reuse and distribution. We need the best minds tackling the challenge, and then we need to ensure the information is readily available to the public."

For arid western states such as Utah, water conservation has always been a hot topic, and the region's rate of population growth portends more obstacles to come.

"Fast-growing urban areas in arid or drought-stricken regions are looking at water shortages unless we get smarter about using technology to be more efficient," Matheson said. "It will also save money."

A report last year from the Utah Foundation, a statewide nonprofit group, called Utah the second-driest state in the nation, behind neighboring Nevada, from 1971 to 2000, and water issues have long been a hot topic among local leaders.

Paul Van Dam, executive director of Citizens for Dixie's Future, a local coalition concerned with natural resources and conservation, said the bill is a step in the right direction.