



Public weighs in on City of Waukesha's water request

By Don Behm of the Journal Sentinel
Aug. 17, 2015

State Department of Natural Resources officials listened to more than two hours of conflicting opinions Monday — in front of more than 200 people — on the merits of the City of Waukesha's request for Lake Michigan water.

Officials from the Town of Genesee and Waukesha discussed well contamination problems that could be alleviated if those areas eventually received municipal water from Waukesha under the city's plan.

Even so, representatives of several environmental groups repeatedly said Waukesha's neighbors included in the city's future water service area did not need municipal water.

Equally striking were contradictory statements of the role of water service area planning under a 2008 Great Lakes protection compact and in the city's request.

The compact makes no provision for water service areas, so the city's request does not comply with it, said George Meyer, executive director of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and a former DNR secretary.

Yet, Pat Henderson, a DNR deputy secretary in the administration of Gov. Jim Doyle when the compact was being negotiated, said all of the Great Lakes states were aware of Wisconsin's water service area planning law. The state law implementing the compact includes reference to water applications from municipalities or "the equivalent" to include the state-required service areas, Henderson said.

Environmental groups did not oppose the state's compact implementation law, he said.

Waukesha does not have a reasonable water supply option available to it west of the subcontinental divide separating the Mississippi River and Great Lakes basins, the Department of Natural Resources said in preliminary findings released in June. Two other preliminary findings were announced at the time: The city's request to tap into Lake Michigan complies with a 2008 Great Lakes protection compact; and the city cannot meet its water supply needs through more stringent conservation of its existing sources.

The DNR's findings were discussed at a public hearing Monday in the auditorium at Carroll University's Center for Graduate Studies. Two other hearings are scheduled Tuesday in Milwaukee and Racine.

The Great Lakes compact drew a line through all U.S. counties straddling the lakes' drainage basins and said water from the lakes could not be pumped beyond those counties. Waukesha is the first municipality located entirely outside the basin — but in a straddling county — to request a diversion of water.

Waukesha is requesting a lake water supply to replace its 10 wells, including seven deep wells drawing radium-contaminated water from a depleted sandstone aquifer. Those wells provided 83% of the water distributed throughout the city last year. The city is under a court-ordered deadline of June 2018 to provide radium-safe water.

Waukesha is asking the Great Lakes states for permission to divert up to an average 10.1 million gallons of lake water a day by midcentury. The DNR determined that the city did not have a reasonable water supply alternative when demand reaches 8.5 million gallons a day, said Shaili Pfeiffer, a water use specialist with the department.

In 2014, the city pumped an average 6.6 million gallons of water a day.

Here is a basic summary of the city's plan:

- Water conservation measures will reduce daily demand for water by 1 million gallons a day by 2050, and Waukesha would buy water from Oak Creek.
- Nearly 100% of the volume of water purchased would be returned to the lake as treated wastewater, and this return flow would be discharged into the Root River, a lake tributary, at Franklin.
- The cost of building water pipes from Oak Creek, pumping stations and wastewater discharge pipes to the Root River is estimated at \$207 million.

The DNR will review public comments received this summer and make a final decision on the city's request in December. If the DNR affirms that the city's request complies with the Great Lakes protection compact and that it has no reasonable water supply available to it west of the basin divide, the department will forward the request to the other seven Great Lakes states.

Public comments invited

The state Department of Natural Resources is inviting public comments until Aug. 28 on its [draft documents](#) reviewing Waukesha's request for Lake Michigan water.

Written comments may be submitted to: Ashley Hoekstra, DNR Bureau of Drinking Water and Groundwater, Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707-7921. Comments also can be sent by email to: DNRWaukeshaDiversionApp@wisconsin.gov.

The department has scheduled two public hearings Tuesday:

- Milwaukee: 1 p.m., Zilber School of Public Health, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1240 N. 10th St.
- Racine: 5:30 p.m., Racine Masonic Center, 1012 Main St.

After reviewing comments, the DNR will publish a final decision on Waukesha's diversion request in December.

Find this article at:

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/waukesha/public-weighs-in-on-city-of-waukeshas-water-request-b99558375z1-322120161.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.