

## **DNR to forward Waukesha's Great Lakes water application for regional review**

### **Water**

#### **Will also send technical review, environmental impact statement**

#### **By Matt Masterson**

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WAUKESHA — After years of review at the local and state level, a group of seven other Great Lakes states and two Canadian provinces will finally get their hands on the city of Waukesha's water diversion application.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources announced Tuesday it plans to forward the city's application for Lake Michigan water to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Water Resources Regional Body and Compact Council within the next 30 to 60 days.

The DNR also intends to forward final copies of its technical review and environmental impact statement to the regional body — which is composed of the Great Lakes states along with the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario.

The city has applied to withdraw up to an annual average of 10.1 million gallons of water per day, with a maximum of 16.7 million gallons per day to serve the water supply service area.

Water would be obtained from the Oak Creek Water Utility and treated wastewater would be discharged back into the Root River. Waukesha also remains under a courtordered 2018 deadline to meet radium standards in its drinking water.

“The families of Waukesha need a sustainable and healthy water supply,” Mayor Shawn Reilly said in a statement. “We are ahead of schedule in our aggressive water conservation plan, but water conservation does not alleviate the need for a new water supply.”

New analysis conducted on behalf of the city also found that modest increases in regional water use would result in the deep aquifer dropping 200 feet over the next 50 years in parts of Waukesha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee and Washington counties.

The DNR issued draft copies of the documents this summer and received approximately 3,600 oral and written responses during a 60-day public comment period that included public hearings in Waukesha, Milwaukee and Racine.

“To those who took the time to provide input, thank you,” Eric Ebersberger, deputy division administrator for the DNR's environmental management division, said in a statement. “The feedback demonstrates the public's strong interest in this extensive process and we appreciate the involvement.

“As we work with the other Great Lake states and provinces on a regional review, there will be additional opportunities for input.”

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A Waukesha water tower on Meadowbrook Road.

Charles Auer/Freeman Staff

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### Next steps

Waukesha officials first submitted its application for Lake Michigan water in 2010. An updated proposal was then submitted in 2013, which had been under review by the DNR into this year.

Should its application be approved by the Great Lakes states, the city would then move to obtain required state permits for diverting Lake Michigan water.

Following the DNR's announcement, the Compact Implementation Coalition — a group of regional nonprofits opposed to the city's plan — issued a statement reiterating its claims that the city could avoid a diversion through further treatment of its own wells and conservation efforts.

“The governor of Wisconsin and the WDNR have a right to submit an application for a diversion from the Great Lakes,” CIC attorney Peter McAvoy said in a statement. “But it will have to be demonstrably different than what the state put out a few months ago to meet the requirements of the Great Lakes Compact.”

But the draft edition of the DNR's technical review found the city does not, in fact, “have a reasonable water supply alternative” to Lake Michigan water, adding that other water supplies “are likely to have greater adverse environmental impacts due to projected impacts on wetlands and lakes.”

Department analysis also found Waukesha “cannot meet water supply needs through conservation of existing supplies.”

Final editions of the technical review and EIS are not yet available.

The DNR's formal proposal has not yet been submitted, according to Peter Johnson, deputy director of the Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers, which provides staff support to the Compact Council and Regional Body.

Instead, they received a preliminary notice, saying the DNR intends to send those documents. In preparation of their arrival, Johnson said his organization will hold a conference call and webinar on Jan. 7, which will include an initial briefing from the state of Wisconsin on the proposal.

Following that, the public will again have a chance for input as the regional bodies conduct their review.

“The intention is that the entire process would take approximately six months,” Johnson said, “but we’ll also see how things go.”

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