

Reilly testifies about Great Lakes water in Michigan

Mayor reiterated that city's plan is well researched, meets legal requirements

By Katherine Michalets

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WAUKESHA — During his testimony Tuesday at a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality hearing, Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly acknowledged concerns surrounding his city's quest for Lake Michigan water, but said the plan is well researched and meets the legal requirements.

"The decision on Waukesha's application is not a choice between protecting the Great Lakes and providing safe drinking water for Waukesha," Reilly wrote in his planned testimony. "By establishing a clear wall at the borders of straddling counties, and by requiring return flow, the (Great Lakes) Compact ensures that both goals can be met."

Waukesha's application is pending before the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Council, of which Michigan is a member. Under the Great Lakes Compact, the governors and premiers of the Great Lakes states and provinces will consider the application later this spring.

Waukesha is seeking a new source of water due to its wells being contaminated with radium and being under a federal mandate to find a permanent solution. Currently, the water is safe to drink due to blending of water from different sources. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources reviewed the application for more than five years and determined Waukesha has no reasonable water supply alternative to Lake Michigan.

Dan Duchniak, general manager of the **Waukesha Water Utility**, also testified at the hearing.

"As someone who has spent their career working to ensure the availability of healthy drinking water, I understand the importance of the unique resource of the Great Lakes, and the need to protect it," Duchniak wrote in his prepared testimony. "And I know that is why so many people are here today to share their thoughts on our application to borrow and return Lake Michigan water.

"Waukesha supported and helped pass the Great Lakes Compact in Wisconsin, and our application is in no way a threat to it. Just as importantly, our application is not a threat to the Great Lakes. We will borrow 1/1,000,000 of 1 percent of Great Lakes water and return the same amount of water, after use and very high levels of treatment. This will set a high standard for any future diversion requests — that the same volume of water borrowed is returned."

Reilly disputed the claim that the Compact calls for municipalities to use Great Lakes water only as a "last resort" or after "exhausting all alternatives." He said the language specifies that Great Lakes water can be used when it is the "only reasonable

alternative.” He also said that by ensuring return flow of the water, there will be no negative effects on lake levels.

“For the very few straws that may ever go into the basin to meet local needs, just as many straws must go back. The precedent we will set is that any diversion of Great Lakes water is restricted to the Compact boundary, with no net loss of water and no adverse impact on Great Lakes levels,” Reilly wrote.

Duchniak said some detractors of Waukesha’s Lake Michigan water plan have said the city could provide an adequate and healthy water source if it reduced its service area.

“During its extensive analysis, the DNR also determined that water conservation cannot prevent the need for a Lake Michigan water supply for Waukesha,” Duchniak said in his testimony. “Waukesha is already a leader in water conservation, including the adoption of a daytime sprinkling ban, conservation rates that go up with increased use, toilet rebates, public education, industrial incentives and outreach, and more. Waukesha is ahead of schedule on its goal to achieve 10 percent measurable water savings, in compliance with Wisconsin Compact implementation rules. But continued use of local groundwater is not environmentally sustainable.”

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Reilly