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Waukesha to hold public meetings on Great Lakes water application

Four meetings on revised application to be held in southeastern Wisconsin

The City of Waukesha will hold November meetings in Waukesha, Oak Creek, Racine and Milwaukee to brief the public on its revised application for a Great Lakes water supply. The meetings will be from **6 p.m. to 8 p.m.** on the following dates:

Waukesha – Thursday, Nov. 7

Carroll University Center for Graduate Studies, Auditorium (LL14)
2140 Davidson Road, Waukesha

Oak Creek – Wednesday, Nov. 13

Oak Creek Community Center
8580 S. Howell Avenue, Oak Creek

Racine – Thursday, Nov. 14

Gateway Technical College – Racine Campus Conference Center, Great Lakes Room (#116)
1001 S. Main Street, Racine

Milwaukee – Monday, Nov. 18

Zilber School of Public Health - University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, (Triplex Rooms 109, 119 and 129)
1240 N. 10th Street, Milwaukee

Each meeting will start at with a PowerPoint presentation on the application. Following that, members of the public can get more specific information and ask questions at information stands on four topics:

- Water supply alternatives analyses, including environmental impacts and costs;
- The return of water to the Great Lakes via the Root River;
- Water conservation; and
- The water supply service area and forecasts of water needs.

Participants can turn in comments at the meetings, which will be forwarded to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, or submit comments directly to the DNR.

Waukesha is 1.5 miles outside of the Great Lakes Basin. Under the Great Lakes Compact, its request for Great Lakes water requires the approval of the Governors of the eight Great Lakes states. The Governors will also

consider input from the Great Lakes provinces in Canada. The Compact bans diversions of water to areas outside of the Basin, but provides for limited exceptions for communities such as Waukesha that are within counties that straddle the Basin divide.

The DNR will hold public hearings on the application, likely early next year, as part of its review. Subsequent to the DNR review, the Great Lakes Compact Regional Body would have its own public hearing next year.

Waukesha submitted its revised version of its application on Oct. 14. It included Oak Creek as its preference among the previously-identified alternative water suppliers. It also includes a preference for returning water to the Great Lakes via the Root River, which was also among the previously-identified alternatives. The application and other background information is available at www.ci.waukesha.wi.us/web/guest/982.

The positive precedents of Waukesha's application include the return of no less than 100% of the volume of water withdrawn from the Great Lakes, the use of treated wastewater as an environmental resource to improve the water quality and fishery of the Root River, and the thorough analysis of alternatives through the Environmental Impact Statement process. "We will recycle water back to the lake and have no impact on lake levels," said Dan Duchniak, general manager of the Waukesha Water Utility. The volume Waukesha will withdraw - and return - is equivalent to one one-millionth of 1% of the volume of the Great Lakes.

For years, the DNR and regional planners have explored options for supplementing flow in the Root River, which has had its base flow reduced by development in the watershed. However, the costs of augmenting the river's flow were too high. "During the summer and fall, some sections of the river have very low flows. Adding water will improve the river and the fishery, especially during fall spawning runs of salmon and trout," Duchniak said.

The river is also home to the Root River Steelhead Facility, where eggs are collected from spawning salmon and trout for DNR fish hatcheries. Increased flow in the river would improve the DNR's ability to collect eggs because low flows prevent the fish from reaching the facility.

"The high quality of our return flow water will help the river achieve water quality standards for parameters like phosphorus," he added. The return flow water, which would enter the river in Franklin, will be of higher quality and have stricter permit limits than existing wastewater discharges in the area to Lake Michigan tributaries or directly to Lake Michigan.

Waukesha needs a new water supply because the deep aquifer, its primary source, is down 400 to 600 feet, creating problems with both water quantity and quality. That drawdown is due in part to a natural formation (a layer of shale rock) that restricts recharge of the aquifer from rain and snowmelt. Groundwater problems are so significant that the area is one of only two Groundwater Management Areas designated by the Wisconsin State Legislature. Adding shallow groundwater wells would have significant adverse impacts to thousands of acres of wetlands and designated environmental areas with valued brooks and streams. Waukesha is also under a court order to comply with federal drinking water standards for radium, a human carcinogen, by 2018.

Waukesha is a leader in water conservation, but conservation can't eliminate its need for a new water supply. Waukesha was the first city in Wisconsin to adopt a daytime ban on sprinkling, set conservation rates that increase with residential levels of water use, and implement a toilet rebate program. It is continuing and expanding its conservation program, including public education and outreach, with new measures such as an online program that allows residents to compare their use to the neighborhood average and to earn rewards for reducing water use.