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Wisconsin DNR Prepares to Advance Waukesha Request to Borrow Great Lakes Water

Waukesha, Wisc., December 8, 2015 -- The City of Waukesha's request to borrow Great Lakes water will be forwarded to Great Lakes states and provinces for review early next year. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provided an official notice today that it will forward Waukesha's request under the Great Lakes Compact within 30 to 60 days. The DNR had issued a draft document in June that said Waukesha meets the requirements of the Compact. Waukesha must find a new water supply to meet its current needs because the aquifer it has used to provide water has become tainted with naturally-occurring contaminants and is subject to unique geological features that have led to a severe drawdown of its aquifer. It is under a court order to provide a water supply that meets drinking water standards for the carcinogen radium.

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

Waukesha's request to borrow Great Lakes Water comes after the city considered 13 other water sources and five other water supply alternatives to requesting Lake Michigan water. Three different entities (City of Waukesha, the Wisconsin DNR and regional planning officials) independently found that none of the alternatives proved to be sufficient, cost-effective or environmentally sound.

According to the draft Technical Review released by the DNR in June, Waukesha "does not have a reasonable water supply alternative" to Lake Michigan water. The DNR draft says other water supplies "are likely to have greater adverse environmental impacts due to projected impacts on wetlands and lakes" and that its analysis "demonstrates that the Applicant cannot meet water supply needs through conservation of existing supplies."

Waukesha's plan would withdraw no more than an annual average of 10.1 million gallons per day from Lake Michigan via pipeline. The total amount withdrawn will equal just 1/1,000,000th of one percent of Great Lakes volume. Waukesha will return the same volume of water to Lake Michigan. "Waukesha's request will have no impact on lake levels," Reilly said.

The request is being made under the requirements of the Great Lakes Compact, which was approved by the U.S. Congress and signed into law by the President in 2008. Under the Compact, Waukesha needs the approval of the Governors of the eight Great Lakes states with input from the Premiers of the two Canadian Great Lakes Provinces.

The Compact was designed to meet long-term water needs for communities like Waukesha, but only if they have no reasonable alternative, are in counties that straddle the Great Lakes Basin divide, and return the water to the Lakes after use and treatment. Waukesha sits just 1.5 miles west of the Great Lakes surface water divide.

“Approval of Waukesha’s request would not set a precedent for water to go to faraway places like California,” Reilly said. “The Compact strictly forbids water from being pumped beyond counties that straddle the Great Lakes Basin divide. It also requires that the water we borrow be returned, ensuring no harm to the Lakes. This is not a question of choosing between protection of the Great Lakes and safe drinking water for Waukesha. The Compact provides for both.”

“We believe an unbiased and science based Compact regional review will show our application should be approved. We look forward to that process beginning early next year,” he said.

For more information on Waukesha’s application to borrow Great Lakes Water, please visit <http://www.WaukeshaApplication.com/>.

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