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Waukesha Mayor Thanks Great Lakes Governors for Approval to Borrow Great Lakes Water

Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly thanked the Great Lakes governors and their representatives for today's approval of the city's application to borrow and return water from Lake Michigan.

"Today's vote is an enormous accomplishment for the people of Waukesha, after more than a decade of work," Reilly said. "The regional commitment to implementing the requirements of the Great Lakes Compact is also a victory for protecting this tremendous resource."

"The same states and provinces that authored the Compact, and who adopted laws to implement it, have determined that the Waukesha application meets the Compact's standards for borrowing Great Lakes water," Reilly said. "We greatly appreciate the good faith they showed in focusing on the facts and science of our application."

The mayor added, "The intensive scrutiny of our application by the Great Lakes states, along with the provinces, shows their dedication to collectively managing and protecting the Great Lakes."

Representatives of the eight Great Lakes states voted today to approve Waukesha's application to withdraw up to an average of 8.2 million gallons per day from Lake Michigan. Waukesha will return approximately 100% of that volume to the lake via the Root River, a tributary, following levels of treatment achieved by only a few utilities in the state.

The city's primary water supply is environmentally unsustainable, due to a layer of shale that restricts recharge from rain and snow. The city is also under a court order to come into compliance with the federal safe drinking water standard for radium.

"The vote today means the City can now move forward in providing a reliable, sustainable, and safe supply of drinking water for its residents," Reilly said. "We fully respect the specific conditions spelled out by the states and provinces as part of this approval and we are committed to compliance."



The Compact Regional Body, consisting of the Great Lakes states and provinces, issued a Declaration of Finding last month that contains the conclusions of their detailed technical review of Waukesha's application. Information on the findings of fact is at <http://www.waukeshadiversion.org/application>.

The Great Lakes Compact, which became federal law in 2008, generally bans the use of lake water outside of the Great Lakes basin. However, it allows communities in counties that straddle the basin divide to receive water if they specifically meet the Compact standards of having "no reasonable water supply alternative," conserving water, and recycling the water back to the lakes after use and treatment.

Waukesha is the first community to apply for the exception since the Compact became law in 2008. But Reilly said, "This approval does not change the law that prohibits diversions to locations like Arizona or California. The Compact strictly prohibits water from going beyond straddling counties."

The mayor said the Regional Body's findings made it clear that the precedent set by Waukesha is very narrow, even in straddling counties. "The findings point out the many ways that our circumstances are unique," he said.

"Probably the most unique aspect about Waukesha is that our current groundwater supply is hydrologically interconnected with the Lake Michigan basin. About 30% of the water we pump from our deep aquifer wells is water that comes from the Lake Michigan watershed, without being returned. The findings of fact concluded that switching from groundwater to surface water will actually result in an *increase* of water in the Great Lakes watershed and eliminate this unintentional diversion of Great Lakes water."

The Mayor said he greatly appreciates the hard work of the staff from all the Great Lakes states and provinces. He said he is especially grateful to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. "Wisconsin had several teams of experts thoroughly scrutinize our application since we submitted it six years ago. The quality and depth of that analysis was critical in persuading the other states and provinces," he said.

The Mayor also praised the Waukesha Common Council, the Waukesha Water Utility Commission and Waukesha Water Utility staff. "Waukesha investigated all our alternatives. We concluded that borrowing Lake Michigan water was the only reasonable alternative. Despite the years of effort it took, the council and the utility never wavered from their commitment to meet the city's needs," he said.

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