

GREAT LAKES WATER PROJECT

DNR approves Lake Michigan diversion

Utility has all permits needed to pump water from Milwaukee to Waukesha

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WAUKESHA — The state Department of Natural Resources has issued the Waukesha Water Utility the final approval it needs to officially divert water from Lake Michigan.

“The DNR’s action implements the approval decisions made by the Great Lakes governors and premiers in June of 2016,” Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly said Wednesday, marking the milestone with a press release.

“At the time (of the Compact’s decision), the DNR said it would not actually

authorize the start of pumping water from Milwaukee until we had obtained the additional federal, state and local permits we needed to build and operate the program,” Reilly noted.

With all such permits now in hand, and construction well underway on both the utility’s supply and return-flow pipelines, the city will be ready to get the water flowing when all infrastructure has been completed and tested, something officials expect to happen by late 2023.

“It has taken five years to get the more than 80 permits we need (for the project),” Reilly added. “I want to thank all the utility employees and contractors whose

hard work made that possible, as well as the cooperation of our neighboring municipalities, state regulators and federal agencies.”

As part of the project, which has been dubbed the Great Water Alliance, lake water will be piped from the Milwaukee Water Works to Waukesha. After use and treatment, the water will be returned to the lake via the Root River.

The DNR action governs the volumes of water flowing to and from Waukesha, regulates the water quality monitoring plan for the Root River, and addresses other issues, according to the press release.

The project marks the cul-

mination of 20 years of work for the city of Waukesha, which lobbied for years to find a safe alternative to its radium-plagued wells.

Contractors are continuing to install both the 14-mile water supply pipeline, which is being constructed through West Allis, Greenfield, New Berlin and Waukesha, and the 22-mile return flow line, which begins at the Clean Water Plant in Waukesha and will head through New Berlin, Muskego, and Franklin.

Those interested in tracking the process of the pipeline construction, or other elements of the project, can do so at greatwateralliance.com.