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Waukesha begins permitting and planning phase of new water supply project

Waukesha Water Utility staff today met with consultants who will help the Waukesha Water Utility with permits, construction and public outreach for its switch to a Lake Michigan water supply.

“This was really a kickoff meeting for the permitting and planning stage of our water supply project,” according to utility general manager Dan Duchniak. “It was a chance for about 30 consultants, including sub consultants, to meet each other and discuss projects goals and their roles.”

The meeting was led by Greeley and Hansen, an engineering firm that was hired this month to manage the project, which is expected to take about five years to complete. The firm will oversee permitting, design and construction of the project, as well as route studies, land and easement acquisitions, and public outreach.

In June, Waukesha’s application to borrow Lake Michigan water under the Great Lakes Compact was unanimously approved by the eight Great Lakes governors. The approval followed six years of review by regulators in Wisconsin and the other Great Lakes states and provinces.

Waukesha received approval under the Compact to withdraw up to an average of 8.2 million gallons per day of Lake Michigan water, but it will return approximately 100% of that volume back to the Great Lakes after use and high levels of treatment. The amount that will be borrowed and returned is less than 1/1,000,000th of 1% of Great Lakes water.

Waukesha’s current water supply is contaminated with radium, a human carcinogen. Long-term use of the its current deep-aquifer water supply is also environmentally unsustainable, due to a layer of shale rock that restricts recharge of the groundwater.