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For more information, please contact:

Dan Duchniak, general manager

Waukesha Water Utility

262/409-4440

262/352-5142 (mobile)

[dduchniak@waukesha-water.com](mailto:dduchniak@waukesha-water.com)

[www.WaukeshaApplication.com](http://www.WaukeshaApplication.com)

## **Waukesha bid to borrow Lake Michigan water advances for review by Great Lakes governors and premiers**

### ***Wisconsin finds there is no other sustainable water supply alternative***

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) submitted the City of Waukesha's proposal to borrow Lake Michigan water to the governors and premiers of the other Great Lakes states and provinces today. After more than five years of analysis, the DNR concluded that Waukesha has no reasonable water supply alternative and qualifies for water under the Great Lakes Compact.

"We are pleased that the DNR – after an exhaustive independent analysis – has concluded that borrowing Lake Michigan water is our only sustainable, healthy and cost-effective alternative," said Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly. "We are confident that the governors and premiers, after reviewing the years of comprehensive studies, will agree."

Under the proposal, the DNR could allow Waukesha to withdraw up to an average of 10.1 million gallons per day. "The amount Waukesha would withdraw is equivalent to one one-millionth of one percent of Great Lakes water and we will return the same amount," Reilly said. "There will be no impact on the Great Lakes."

Waukesha's water supply is severely depleted. Geological features that restrict recharge of the aquifer, as well as high demand throughout southeastern Wisconsin and northeastern Illinois have made continued use of the aquifer unsustainable for the city. As the aquifer declines, naturally-occurring contaminants increase, including the carcinogen radium. Waukesha is under a court order to provide a water supply that meets safe drinking water standards.

Under the Great Lakes Compact – an agreement between the Great Lakes states and provinces that became federal law in 2008 – the Great Lakes governors and premiers must review the proposal to determine if it meets the Compact’s requirements. Based on that fact-finding process, the governors will vote on whether to approve the request.

The Compact prohibits water from being pumped beyond counties that straddle the Great Lakes Basin. However, it allows water to be used in straddling counties with the approval of the Great Lakes governors. Waukesha is in a straddling county and is only 1.5 miles outside of the basin divide, or about 17 miles from Lake Michigan. Under the Compact, water must be returned to the Lakes after use and treatment.

“This is not a matter of choosing between protection of the Great Lakes and safe drinking water for Waukesha,” Reilly said. “The Compact agreement provides for both.”

He added, “The Compact prohibits water from being pumped to faraway places, but it allows local needs to be met in straddling counties. And it requires that the water be recycled back to the Lakes, which Waukesha will do.”

According to the DNR, Waukesha “has no reasonable water supply alternative . . . even considering conservation of existing water supplies.” Even if water demand would be far less than projected, all alternatives to Lake Michigan water “are likely to have greater adverse environmental impacts than the proposed Lake Michigan alternative due to projected impacts on wetlands and lakes.”

DNR modeling found that even if withdrawals from the aquifer were limited, there would be unreasonable adverse impacts to 713 to 2,326 acres of wetlands under various groundwater alternatives, in addition to adverse impacts on streams and lakes. Updated modeling for the city in December showed that a short-term increase in the aquifer was temporary and ended in 2010. The 100-year trend that caused water levels to significantly drop will continue under the groundwater alternatives. Predicted increases in regional use, if Waukesha stays on the aquifer, would cause the aquifer to drop 200 to 300 additional feet over the next 50 years, according to the updated modeling.

“The city initially looked at 14 water supply alternatives,” Reilly said. “The most promising six of those were analyzed in depth with exhaustive detail in our 3,000-page application. The DNR also did its own analysis and agreed that a Lake Michigan supply meets the Compact standard of being the only reasonable alternative.”

Waukesha has also been a leader in water conservation. It was the first city in Wisconsin to adopt a daytime ban on sprinkling, the first to adopt conservation rates that increase with residential levels of water use, and the first to adopt a toilet rebate program in the state. It is continuing its conservation efforts, including public education and outreach and conservation incentives for industrial users.

The city is ahead of schedule in meeting its goal of conserving 10% of the water that would otherwise be used. But continuing to use groundwater from the aquifer would require treatment for natural contaminants, creating large volumes of wastewater that would waste more water than conservation will save.

To maximize the return of Lake Michigan water, as required by the Compact, the city’s service area is consistent with the sewer service area that was established more than 30 years ago. Only 15% of the service

area is available for development and population growth is projected at 0.5% per year until build-out in about 2050.

Waukesha would return water to Lake Michigan via the Root River, a tributary that flows to Lake Michigan. “Adding water would improve the river and the fishery, especially during fall spawning runs of salmon and trout,” Reilly said. “It will increase flow at the Root River Steelhead Facility, where eggs are collected from spawning salmon and trout for DNR fish hatcheries.”

“The high quality of our return flow water can help the river meet water quality standards for parameters like phosphorus,” he added.

Waukesha is the second community to seek to borrow Great Lakes water since the Compact became law in 2008. The first, New Berlin, Wisconsin, straddles the Basin divide and only needed approval from Wisconsin. No other straddling community has sought water since New Berlin’s approval in 2009.

Because Waukesha itself does not straddle the divide, but is in a county that does, it can borrow water with the consent of the Great Lakes governors under the Compact.

Reilly said, “Waukesha legally qualifies for water under the good-faith agreement among the Great Lakes states and provinces. It is not a precedent for water to illegally go to California or even to the state capital in Madison.”

The mayor added, “Waukesha’s proposal presents a unique set of facts. The groundwater it uses is actually connected to the Great Lakes. The city is close enough to the Lakes to make using and returning water cost-effective. Its present water supply has limited recharge and naturally-occurring contaminants and the city is under a court order to come into compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act. The water returned to Lake Michigan will improve a tributary and fish egg collection facility in the process. More than a dozen alternatives considered have been thoroughly examined and had extensive public input, including through the Environmental Impact Statement process.”

“Given these facts, and given the agreement under the Compact, we believe we qualify to borrow Lake Michigan water for a healthy and sustainable water supply,” he said.

Links to the DNR documents will be found at the water utility website, [\*\*www.WaukeshaApplication.com\*\*](http://www.WaukeshaApplication.com), which also has Waukesha’s application, answers to frequently asked questions and other information. The DNR web site is at [dnr.wi.gov/topic/wateruse/waukeshadiversionapp.html](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wateruse/waukeshadiversionapp.html).

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