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Waukesha might send lake water beyond its boundaries

By [Don Behm](#) of the Journal SentinelPosted: March 3, 2010 | [\(18\) Comments](#)

Waukesha - The city's bid for Lake Michigan water includes a map of a future service area that would allow Waukesha to deliver lake water miles beyond its boundaries.

The city ultimately could distribute lake water throughout a 39-square-mile service area - nearly double its current size of 21.7 square miles - extending from I-94 south to the Vernon Marsh and the Town of Vernon, pushing east to the border with New Berlin and west to the Town of Genesee.

As part of an application to divert lake water to Waukesha, a Great Lakes protection compact requires the city to show the area to be served with the water in the future, said Dan Duchniak, water utility general manager. To comply with the compact, the area must be designated by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, not the city or its consultants.

Waukesha is seeking lake water as a substitute for radium-contaminated water pumped out of the city's deep sandstone wells. It expects to distribute about 10.9 million gallons a day after 2035 to meet the average daily demand of customers within the revised service area, Duchniak said. In 2009, the city's average daily demand was 6.8 million gallons.

Waukesha is under a state order to provide safe water by June 2018. Wisconsin, and each of the other seven Great Lakes states must approve the city's diversion application before the city could buy water from Milwaukee, its preferred supplier, or Oak Creek or Racine.

On the revised map, one-fourth of the new territory extends southwest along state Highway 59 into Genesee. The map includes 4.4 square miles of rural subdivisions where private wells tap into a shallow aquifer contaminated with fecal bacteria and nitrates, said Robert Biebel, a special projects senior engineer with the regional planning commission.

The state Department of Natural Resources asked regional planners to include that portion of the town in Waukesha's future water service area as an option for homeowners there, Biebel said. Hooking up to a city water line would enable them to stop using their contaminated wells.

Bacteria and the other pollutants are coming from private septic systems on top of fractured bedrock close to the surface. As household wastewater seeps down from septic fields, fractures in the rock allow it to reach the aquifer.

"The town could create its own water utility, but that would be more costly" than connecting to the city's supply lines in the future, Biebel said.

Genesee Administrator Jeff Herrmann said Friday he had not seen the revised map and was not aware that such a large area of the town had been included.

City expansion questioned

A few Waukesha County residents at a public meeting Thursday questioned the need for large-scale city expansion to the south and west, and regional environmental groups have complained that Waukesha's application will fuel growth there.

But nearly 60% of the 17.4 square miles added to the map already is developed with subdivisions, Biebel said.

The revised map's purpose is to help alleviate possible problems with private wells in those areas in the future, rather than encouraging new development, he said.

The planning commission estimates that 25% of the new area likely will be developed.

"But even that much will not be developed for a very long time," Biebel said in an interview before Thursday's public meeting.

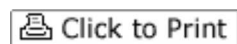
One example is the Town of Waukesha, south of the city.

Much of this area on the revised map is being developed with homes on large lots of two or more acres, Biebel said.

"Those large lots likely would remain in the town, and it is doubtful the city would provide water without annexation," he said. "But if homeowners in subdivisions have failing septic systems or contaminated wells, then they could seek annexation" and obtain a new water source.

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