

5 Things You Need to Know about the Waukesha Lake Michigan Diversion

- 1) **Diverting Great Lakes Water is a Last Resort:** The Great Lakes –St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact bans water diversions outside of the Great Lakes basin. Only under the Compact’s exception standard can a community apply for a diversion. Anyone applying for a diversion must demonstrate that it has exhausted all available options for getting water. In essence, a diversion must be a last resort.
- 2) **Waukesha Failed to Demonstrate that it Needs Great Lakes Water:** The Compact is clear that a need for water must exist in the community for it to be eligible for a diversion. However, the city failed to justify why it needs the water it seeks to divert. According to Jim Nicholas, a scientist and retired director of the U.S. Geological Survey’s Michigan Water Science Center, Waukesha’s demand for water has been decreasing since the late 1980s. However, in its diversion application, the city projects a much higher demand that is inconsistent with historical trends.
- 3) **Waukesha Wants to Divert Great Lakes Water for Towns that Don’t Need It and Have Not Requested Water:** The city’s application included towns in Waukesha County (Pewaukee and the Towns of Delafield and Waukesha, among others) that may not need water. To date, none of the communities in this “extended service area” has demonstrated that it is without adequate supplies of safe drinking water. In fact, some officials in these areas have indicated that they do not need any water either now or in the foreseeable future. Including these communities in the application is not consistent with the Great Lakes Compact.
- 4) **Waukesha has a Feasible Alternative to meet its Water Needs:** In recent years, regional groundwater levels in Southeast Wisconsin have been stabilizing or are rising. Under the Compact, an applicant for a diversion must demonstrate that “There is no reasonable water supply alternative within the basin in which the community is located, including conservation of existing water supplies.” A July 2015 report by two independent engineering firms found that Waukesha does in fact have a feasible water supply alternative. The report concluded that Waukesha can use its existing deep and shallow water wells to provide ample clean and healthy water to its residents now and in the future if it invests in additional water treatment infrastructure to ensure the water supply meets state and federal standards going forward. This alternative costs much less than a diversion, secures water independence for Waukesha residents, protects public health, and minimizes adverse resource impacts.
- 5) **Waukesha’s Plan to Return Water to Great Lakes Raises Concerns:** Waukesha proposes to return its water to the Great Lakes basin via the Root River. The Root River has high levels of phosphorus and is officially designated as an impaired river because of this pollution. Although treated, Waukesha’s returned water could add additional phosphorus pollution to the already impaired Root River. In addition, given the amount of water the city needs to return, the plan could result in mixing of Great Lakes Basin water and Mississippi River Basin water – which is inconsistent with the Great Lakes Compact.

Tell Your Governor to Deny Waukesha's Request for Great Lakes Water

QUICK POINTS

- Waukesha, Wisconsin, located a few miles west of Milwaukee, is a town located in a county that straddles the Great Lakes basin.
- Waukesha is requesting an exception to the ban on diversions of Great Lakes water under the Great Lakes Compact. The city's request is the first of its kind since the Compact was ratified in 2008.
- Waukesha's demand for water has been decreasing since the late 1980's.
- Waukesha's proposal projects a much higher demand for water that is inconsistent with historical trends.
- Waukesha's current water use is approximately 6 million gallons per day.
- Waukesha is requesting 16.7 million gallons per day maximum capacity from Lake Michigan.
- Waukesha proposes to use 10.1 million gallons per day on average.
- Waukesha does not justify why it needs so much water.
- Waukesha has a feasible water supply alternative if they simply treat their water for radium. Independent research shows the city can meet current demand and provide safe drinking water for less than it would cost to divert water from Lake Michigan.
- Waukesha proposes to divert Great Lakes water to communities who don't have a problem and don't want the water.
- The Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Water Resources Compact was ratified in 2008, after years of research and negotiation, vast support from Great Lakes residents, and approval by all of the Great Lakes states and provinces, and the U.S. Congress.
- Diversion requests must be approved by all eight Great Lakes states and two Canadian provinces. Any state may veto the diversion application.

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