



NEWS RELEASE

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DATE: Tuesday, September 26, 2006
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SUBJECT: Comment Period Opens on New Berlin Proposal
to Use Lake Michigan Water

MADISON – A 60-day public comment period opens today on New Berlin’s proposal to withdraw additional water from Lake Michigan, State water officials announced.

New Berlin has submitted the proposal because wells that serve a part of the city located outside of the Great Lakes Basin are producing groundwater with high levels of radium, a known carcinogen. Through an agreement with the state, New Berlin will shut those wells down to meet a December deadline for bringing its groundwater radium levels into compliance with state and federal standards. However, the shut-down is only a temporary solution and does not account for potential long-range issues such as increased summer water usage or failure of primary wells.

"We look forward to hearing from the public on New Berlin’s application, and on the question of how we should handle proposals for Lake Michigan water until the Great Lakes compact is finalized," said Bruce Baker, deputy of DNR’s Water Division.

The Great Lake-St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement and Compact (the Compact) was signed Dec. 13, 2005, by Gov. Jim Doyle, seven other Great Lakes states governors, and two Canadian prime ministers. The agreement includes a ban on pumping water outside the basin, but includes exceptions for communities like New Berlin that straddle the basin. To become official, Great Lakes states lawmakers must pass legislation carrying out the Compact and Congress must approve it – a process that could take several years.

Under existing federal law, proposals like New Berlin’s could be determined to be non-diversions because no water will be lost from the Lake Michigan basin. The city plans to return all of the water it draws from the lake, plus additional groundwater processed through its wastewater treatment system, back into the Basin.

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“There are significant questions surrounding New Berlin’s proposal that will benefit from public comment, inspection, and discussion,” Baker said. “That is why we decided to go well beyond what is currently required by law and conduct this 60-day comment period. We look forward to reviewing everyone’s assessment of the merits of New Berlin’s application.”

In addition to commenting on the application, people can also comment on whether they think the request should be approved or denied, and whether it should be reviewed under existing practice, or under a new protocol outlined in the previously-negotiated Great Lakes compact.

The DNR will collect and review all public comments. A determination regarding New Berlin’s application is expected to be made in late winter.

A copy of the application is found online at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/environmentprotect/water.html>.

People can submit written comments until Nov. 25, 2006, to : Maureen Connors, Office of the Great Lakes, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Box 7921, Madison, Wisconsin, 53707, or by Email to: dgmailbox@dnr.state.wi.us.