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Great Lakes Cities Initiative drops challenge to Waukesha water diversion

Will collaborate on review of future water diversion applications

by Andrew Weiland | August 02, 2017, 4:27 PM

<https://www.biztimes.com/2017/industries/energy-environment/great-lakes-cities-initiative-drops-challenge-to-waukesha-water-diversion/>

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative announced Wednesday that it is settling its challenge to the city of Waukesha's plans to tap Lake Michigan water.

The Great Lakes Cities Initiative said it has reached an agreement to collaborate with the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Council on improving the review of Great Lakes water diversion applications in the future.

"This agreement will help protect the long term integrity of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River for future generations," said Régis Labeaume, president of the Québec Metropolitan Community and secretary of the Cities Initiative. "As governors and mayors, we must be held accountable and work together for the protection of our region's most cherished resource."

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative represents more than 130 cities around the Great Lakes.

Last year the group **challenged the approval** (<https://www.biztimes.com/2016/ideas/government-politics/great-lakes-cities-initiative-challenging-waukesha-water-diversion/>) of Waukesha's request to divert Lake Michigan water.

The 2008 Great Lakes Compact bans diversions of water from the Great Lakes, but makes exceptions for cities (like Waukesha) that are in counties that straddle the boundary of the Great Lakes basin that meet certain exceptions.

Waukesha is under a court order to bring its drinking water within federal standards for radium by 2018.

The city sought and was granted an exception to divert up to 8.2 million gallons per day, although the final approval was scaled back from the initial request.

Earlier this year the Great Lakes Compact Council **unanimously voted against** (<https://www.biztimes.com/2017/ideas/government-politics/challenge-to-waukesha-diversion-rejected-by-great-lakes-council/>) opening or modifying its final decision allowing Waukesha access to Lake Michigan water, rejecting an effort by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative to block the diversion.

A legal challenge to that decision was possible, especially given the case is the first test of the ban on diversions under the Great Lakes Compact.

"Our challenge has always been about improving the (Great Lakes) Compact to ensure the protection of our water resources," said Paul Dyster, Mayor of Niagara Falls and chair of the Cities Initiative. "We want to make sure future applications for diversion are subject to robust and detailed standards of evaluation and a thorough process allowing input from impacted stakeholders."

Meanwhile, Waukesha continues to move forward with its plans to tap Lake Michigan water. The source of the water has yet to be determined. For years Waukesha had agreed to negotiate exclusively with Oak Creek after signing a letter of intent in November 2012. The agreement expired at the end of November last year and **an extension** (<https://www.biztimes.com/2016/industries/energy-environment/waukesha-oak-creek-to-extend-water-deal-deadline/>) was approved in February setting a new deadline of May 31. Waukesha officials are now **analyzing a proposal** (<https://www.biztimes.com/2017/ideas/government-politics/waukesha-considering-milwaukee-water-proposal/>) for the city of Milwaukee to supply Lake Michigan water, but negotiations with Oak Creek are still continuing.



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