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Regional plan stresses water conservation

Comments

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By **STEVE LORD** slord@stmedianetwork.com

The first regional plan to conserve clean water in 11 northeastern Illinois counties, patterned after an effort initiated in Kane County, has been completed.

The Regional Water Supply Planning Group, commissioned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and administered by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, or CMAP, acted this week to approve the plan meant to ensure availability of clean water for household and commercial use for decades to come.

The IDNR commissioned the study in 2007, when data began showing that rapid growth in the Chicago region could lead to water shortages in a few years.

The plan stresses conservation and resource management; looks ahead to 2050; and includes the counties of Boone, Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will.

The plan's main strategy is to improve how water demand is managed, by emphasizing conservation, pricing and the reuse of "graywater" – which is the residue of household activities such as dish washing, laundry and bathing – and wastewater.

It advocates a number of local conservation measures for municipalities, businesses and households, including replacing old toilets and clothes washers with new, high-efficiency models; prohibiting practices that waste water; metering water use; auditing water systems to detect leaks and other inefficiencies; and updating residential plumbing.

It also recommends using alternates to road salt to de-ice roads, because they are harming the region's shallow water aquifers.

It advocates "full-cost pricing" as a conservation method, which would have residences and business pay for the entire cost of water – delivering it as well as the water itself.

CMAP and the water supply planning group patterned its effort after a five-year groundwater and water resources study that Kane County did with the state, culminating in 2008.

"Based on the data, it is clear that continued rapid population growth and economic activity will put a strain on the region's current supply," said Bonnie Thomson Carter, chairman of the Regional Water Supply Planning Group and a Lake County Board member.

"... Significant shortages could result without coordinated action to implement this new water plan "

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