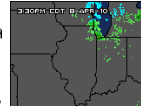


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Guest column: Protecting water resources vital to county's future

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McHenry County is an exciting, diverse and beautiful county known for its rural character, year-round recreational activities, abundant conservation lands, and the Fox River.

These tremendous resources, however, do not indicate an endless supply of water. McHenry County is solely dependent on groundwater for all of its drinking water needs, and this resource is finite.

The groundwater resources of McHenry County are found primarily within two zones of geologic material underlying the county: 1. Shallow aquifers composed of sand and gravel deposits within glacial drift, coupled with dolomitic material in the shallow bedrock immediately underlying the glacial drift; and 2. Deep bedrock aquifers composed of sandstone and dolomite units.

While seemingly abundant, the ability of these sources to meet the county's projected water demand is uncertain as highlighted the Groundwater Resources Management Plan completed in November 2006.

The GRMP concluded that there are several aspects of groundwater concerns in McHenry County. First is the primary impact of increased groundwater pumping on the existing water supply. Second is the potential for groundwater contamination that grows proportionally with population increases and the increased business activity in the area. This threat includes spilling of hazardous materials on the surface and increased discharge of wastewater and wastewater treatment residuals.

Finally is the potential impact on natural wetlands, fens, streams and lakes. These natural areas are dependent on groundwater discharges to the surface, and excessive pumping may reduce or eliminate these flows.

Demographic projections of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) indicate that from 2000 to 2030, McHenry County's population is expected to grow by 190,000, and the number of households is projected to increase by approximately 65,700.

These factors will contribute to growing demands on the county's water sources.

Upon review by Baxter and Woodman Inc., in the year 2000, water use in the county amounted to an annual average of 34.6 million gallons per day. Forecasts indicate that average annual water use will grow to 51.0 mgd by 2020, and to 67.5 mgd by 2030.

The estimated sustainable yield of shallow and deep aquifers in McHenry County is estimated to be about 120 mgd. However, total water use in McHenry County could grow to as much as 160 to 180 mgd if these plans are fulfilled in the future. With a total potential yield of 120 mgd, the county will not be self-sustaining if it is developed to its full potential in the long-term.

Additionally, groundwater resources and groundwater withdrawals are not evenly distributed across the county. Therefore, while the total potential aquifer yield for the county as a whole appears to be capable of meeting 2030 demand, the distribution of water supply does not coincide with the distribution of water usage.

In July 2007, the Groundwater Protection Task Force was assembled to develop a Water Resources Action Plan to protect and preserve the quality and quantity of groundwater in McHenry County.

The seven-step integrated water resources planning process encouraged the involvement of local government leaders, regional partners, state and federal agencies, special interest groups, agriculturalists, business and industry, and citizens in the development of a countywide groundwater protection action plan.

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During the planning process, it also was recognized that additional scientific data regarding the state of water in McHenry County was needed. Therefore, McHenry County Water Resources has completed the installation of a "real-time" observation well network and is working on other projects.

McHenry County continues to proactively reach out to its stakeholders to ensure that our water supply planning efforts are coordinated with and meet or exceed the goals of state, regional and sub-county water planning efforts.

Finally, the county continues to promote public awareness through community outreach, public presentations, and school-aged education programs.

The Groundwater Protection Task Force and the Water Resources Division of McHenry County invite you to share and use the information within the Water Resources Action Plan to proactively plan for the future of your community and your water supply.

We also invite all stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and others, to take part in the process of protecting our water resources to ensure the long-term sustainability of our beautiful county.

• **Cassandra McKinney** is water resources manager for McHenry County.



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