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Water supply strategy

Task force studies ways to prevent shortages

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By **JIM NEWTON** jnewton@stmedianetwork.com

Local water conservation measures are key elements of a regional water supply plan endorsed this month by the Lake County Board.

The board endorsed the "Water 2050: Northeastern Illinois Water Supply/Demand Plan" created as part of a multicounty effort to address the impact of rapid population growth on the region's water supply.

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Bonnie Thomson Carter

The plan, commissioned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, is based on studies predicting that without improved conservation and resource management, water shortages could be a problem in coming years.

"This is a highly specific plan directed at state, regional, county, municipal, and other public agencies responsible for ensuring adequate supplies of clean water," said County Board member Bonnie Thomson Carter of Ingleside.

Carter chairs the Regional Water Supply Planning Group, made up of representatives of 11 counties in northeastern Illinois that voted to approve the plan earlier this year.

The region's population is projected to increase by 38 percent over the next 40 years, Carter said, and without the adoption of consistent conservation practices, demand could increase as much as 64 percent, creating serious shortages.

Even without new growth, the region's aquifers are being strained and treatment costs are climbing due to contamination, including runoff from fertilizers, she said.

Carter suggested that everyone needs to examine their water consumption and conservation practices, and elected officials should lead the way in terms of education and the initiation of conservation programs.

"As elected officials, it's our responsibility to ensure that our residents have a safe, reliable water source in the future," she said.

Carter said the task force that developed the plan included representatives of all levels of government, and each municipality and county should focus on initiatives in the plan that suit their needs and abilities.

Grant funding may be available to cover some of the costs of the proposals, such as retrofitting older plumbing systems, Carter said.

The plan, in addition to outlining specific resource management and conservation initiatives, also calls for the region to conduct a public campaign to inform adults and schoolchildren of the need for water conservation.

"Public awareness needs to really take off," Carter said.

County Board Chairman Suzi Schmidt of Lake Villa said the County Board's endorsement of the plan "is a formal recognition of the county's commitment to this effort both locally and regionally."



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