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## **10 Lake County communities can dip into Lake Michigan water**

**Illinois OKs lake water to areas now on wells, but access would be costly**

By Lisa Black, Tribune reporter

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The Illinois Department of Natural Resources has approved allowing 10 Lake County communities to tap into Lake Michigan, a move welcomed by village officials who fear their wells will run dry or start coughing up contaminants.

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But first the communities must figure out how to pay for the \$250 million project. Under one scenario, a newly formed agency would use an existing intake facility in Zion and build pipelines that would extend to each west suburb. Residents would pay about \$40 more per month to cover the costs.

Convincing residents that they need a new water source may be difficult in the midst of a recession, officials said. The cost projections are tentative and could change depending on whether all 10 communities stay on board. Each community has pledged to let residents decide by referendum, said Mark Knigge, mayor of Wauconda, one of the villages involved.

"It is all obviously money-driven," said Knigge, also president of the Lake County Municipal League.

The other communities are Antioch, Fox Lake, Lake Villa, Lake Zurich, Lindenhurst, Long Grove, Volo and the unincorporated areas of Fox Lake Hills and Grandwood Park.

The communities currently obtain water from wells that tap into an aquifer in the bedrock. Some rely on wells that are running low, such as Lindenhurst. Others, such as Wauconda, worry about vinyl chloride leaching into private wells from a Superfund site in the village.

"No one community can do this on their own," said Peter Kolb, Lake County's director of public works.

Meanwhile, Lake Michigan water levels have remained stable, said Daniel Injerd, the chief of Lake Michigan management for the Department of Natural Resources.

The communities — which call themselves the North-West Lake County Lake Michigan Water Planning Group — would use an estimated 15 million gallons per day of Lake Michigan water under the proposal, Injerd said.

Under a 1967 U.S. Supreme Court decree, Illinois is allowed to divert 2.1 billion gallons a day from Lake Michigan. The state has been close to that limit and gone over it in some years, but has seen a significant decline in usage in recent years, Injerd said.

"Water use from the city of Chicago alone has decreased 200 million gallons a day over the past 15 to 20 years," Injerd said, crediting a conservation movement and fewer operating industries.

Today, more than half the population of Illinois — or about 7 million people — rely on Lake Michigan water, he said.

Lake County officials could band together and form a new water agency. But officials are evaluating whether they could save money by joining the Central Lake County Joint Action Water Agency, which runs a water treatment plant in Lake Bluff.

"It's part of our due diligence ... to find the cheapest way that this system could be built," Knigge said.

Early estimates call for residents in each community to share the costs equally, paying about \$40 more per month in a combined property tax increase and service charge.

Scott Pierce, the lone Antioch trustee to oppose the proposal, worries about its financial and environmental costs.

"I think it will be prohibitively expensive to taxpayers," he said. "Each community will have to replace water lines and have new building codes. I think we'd be better off cutting down on usage by enforcing water conservation and relying on what we have."

*Tribune reporter Robert McCoppin contributed to this report.*

[lblack@tribune.com](mailto:lblack@tribune.com)

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