

Northeast metro

Met Council report floats water-supply solutions

Aquifer-boosting ideas include drawing from Mississippi

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Water from the Mississippi River could be used to bolster the northeast metro water supply, according to a final report released Monday by the Metropolitan Council.

The report looks at two ways to use the Mississippi's surface water to lessen the burden on groundwater from the Prairie du Chien-Jordan aquifer, where much of the metro-

politan area's drinking water comes from. Another possibility, the report says, would be to continue to develop groundwater sources.

Costs could be as high as \$623 million to build and \$20 million a year to run for the most extensive system. And the ideas evaluated by the report are not the be-all and end-all of what could be done.

"We don't have a clear recommendation in this study. But it is laying the foundation

for the plan of action," said Ali Elhassen, the council's water supply planning manager. "This issue is very complex, and the approaches and alternatives are not mutually exclusive. We might end up with a hybrid ... in addition to conservation and stormwater reuse."

The report also looks at a hot-button recreational issue — the low water level in White Bear Lake, a premier destination for fishing, boat-

ing and swimming. Some lakeside residents support the idea of trying to raise the level by pumping in Mississippi River water. The report said it would cost \$50 million to build a system to pump and filter 2 billion gallons of water a year and run it through a chain of lakes to a pumping station to be built near Vadnais Lake. The annual operating cost would be \$300,000.

Possible approaches outlined in the report include connecting northeast metro cities to St. Paul Regional Water Services — which

draws water from the Mississippi and from wells — by sending water through Charley, Pleasant and Vadnais lakes to the McCarrons Treatment Plant on Rice Street; building a new treatment plant for Mississippi River water, preferably near Vadnais Lake; building a smaller treatment plant to meet average daily demand and using groundwater from existing wells to meet peak demand; and using existing systems and drilling new wells when more water is needed.

A new alternative in the

final report, which wasn't in the draft released in July, is the possibility of "conjunctive use," which means using surface water when available and supplementing with groundwater when necessary. This approach already is used in St. Paul and Bloomington, Elhassen said.

The report also includes strategies such as water reclamation and conservation. The Met Council is identifying areas across the northeast metro where stormwater put

WATER SOLUTIONS, 10A >

CONTINUED FROM 3A

> Water solutions

into a basin built into, say, sandy soil would quickly soak into the aquifer to recharge it. The council is also looking for the best opportunities to capture stormwater for nondrinkable uses such as irrigating parks, Elhassen said.

The Met Council's analysis will provide a basis for decisions that are expected to be made and paid for, at least in part, by the state Legislature.

"What is clear is that the status quo is not acceptable," said Sen. Chuck Wiger, DFL-Maplewood, who is on the Legislative Water Commission and was among those

ONLINE

To read a summary of the Metropolitan Council's final report on the Northeast Metro water supply, go to bit.ly/17OZhqC.

To see the full report, go to bit.ly/1ECcQeI.

WATER SUPPLY OPTIONS AND COSTS

Connect northeast metro cities to St. Paul Regional Water Services.

- For just North St. Paul, \$5 million to build and \$1.4 million a year to operate.
- To also include Mahtomedi, Shoreview, Vadnais Heights, White Bear Lake and White Bear Township, \$155 million to build and \$11 million a year to operate.
- To also include Centerville, Circle Pines, Columbus, Forest Lake, Hugo, Lexington and Lino Lakes, \$623 million to build and \$20 million a year to operate.

Build a new treatment plant for Mississippi River water.

- To supply Mahtomedi, Shoreview, Vadnais Heights, White Bear Lake and White Bear Township, \$227 million to build and \$9 million a year to operate.
- To also include Centerville, Circle Pines, Columbus, Forest Lake, Hugo, Lexington and Lino Lakes, \$609 million to build and \$16 million a year to operate.

Build a smaller treatment plant and use groundwater from existing wells to meet peak demand.

- To supply North St. Paul, Mahtomedi, Shoreview, Vadnais Heights, White Bear Lake and White Bear Township, \$164 million to build and \$7.5 million a year to operate.

Use existing systems, drill new wells when water is needed, build groundwater treatment facilities that are already planned.

- \$91 million to build.

— Metropolitan Council

requiring the Met Council report. He foresees many community meetings sorting through the approaches outlined in the report.

"Ideally, the communities will come together and figure it out, the type of system they would prefer. Anything is going to have to be realistically priced," he said. "It might be part of a regional

solution. There clearly could be legislative involvement on that."

If new infrastructure is necessary, he said, some of the costs could be included in the state's bonding bill. Wiger strongly endorses water conservation measures and said new regulations on that and

other water-related matters could come from the Legislature.

"It's more than a northeast (metro) area issue — it's a regional and a state issue," Wiger said. "We no longer are going to take water for granted."