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FUNDS IN THE RED: White Bear Lake utility rates restructured **PAGE 8A**

Price tag to fill lake shocking to proponents

BY DEBRA NEUTKENS
REGIONAL EDITOR

ST. PAUL — The highly anticipated report on "Cost Estimates for Moving Water to White Bear Lake" was delivered to lawmakers Jan. 29, right on schedule. It left many of those most vocal about augmentation in sticker shock.

The report was called a "preliminary glimpse at augmentation," by Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Tom Landwehr, who was careful to add that the agency's involvement "was not a recommendation but a mandate given to us by the Legislature."

The DNR was directed in 2015 to prepare cost estimates for augmenting White Bear Lake with Mississippi River water taken from the Sucker Lake Chain of Lakes. Water would be purchased from St. Paul Regional Water Services, which pumps river water through the chain of lakes as part of its drinking water supply system.

Vadnais Heights engineering firm Short Elliott Hendrickson (SEH) was hired to conduct the analysis and present the report, which cost a total of \$218,000 to prepare. The company has substantial experience building pipelines in Shoreview and North Oaks.

A lead engineer on the project cut right to the chase in a briefing last Friday at Department of Natural Resources headquarters: Capital costs to build

SEE AUGMENTATION, PAGE 9A

AUGMENTATION: Alternative estimate in works

FROM PAGE 1A

a pipeline from Sucker Lake to White Bear Lake is estimated at \$67 million. A cheaper alternative from East Vadnais Lake would cost \$55 million.

Operations and maintenance cost was estimated at \$570,000 per year for either pipeline.

Both lakes are located in Vadnais Heights about 4 miles west of White Bear Lake. Both alignment alternatives were assumed to have similar infrastructure systems and include water treatment to remove aquatic invasive species and solid particles.

Cost estimates, in 2018-19 dollars, are higher for Sucker Lake because it requires a 1,600-foot tunnel under I-35E, noted SEH senior engineer Patti Craddock. Its alignment also has more contaminated sites and poorer soils for construction.

The Vadnais Lake estimate includes road replacement and purchase of private property for the treatment plant.

Craddock said there were key assumptions in the study: Size of the system and a flow rate of 6,000 gallons pumped per minute. Two billion gallons per year was selected as system size, historically the volume pumped when White Bear Lake was augmented with groundwater, she said. That would add about 2 feet on top of the lake.

DNR spokesman Jason Moeckel said additional firms provided independent peer review of SEH's work and the agency is confident the analysis provides an accurate concept level cost

estimate. Members of the Friends of White Bear Lake (FOWBL), an augmentation advocacy group attending the DNR briefing, were left scratching their heads.

Greg McNeely, a Birchwood resident who also chairs the White Bear Lake Restoration Association, the plaintiff in the lake level lawsuit, told DNR representatives "the high number will make it tougher to have something happen."

"We knew the SEH number would be high, but we had no idea it would be the number you're estimating," McNeely said. "Some of us are here because we're trying to help this lake that has been in trouble for 10 years. This number is overwhelming. We have to be open, if we care about the lake, to another side. And understand that side is way different than what we heard today."

McNeely is referring to an alternative cost estimate being prepared on behalf of FOWBL.

Members commissioned the firm of Emmons and Olivier Resources to do its own study. Results aren't due until March 1, but the Friends group is expecting a price tag less than half the number provided in the SEH study.

During a question and answer session, an engineer for the city of North St. Paul asked what the study means for the settlement agreement?

"Obviously the focus on augmentation somewhat complicates efforts to implement terms of the agreement," replied Barb Naramore, DNR assistant

commissioner. "We continue to work on implementation of the terms of the agreement. We have done the work the Legislature directed us to do on developing cost estimates of augmentation."

Jim Markoe, president of the Lake Homeowners Association, an intervenor in the lawsuit, and a FOWBL board member, wanted everyone in the room to know that a clause in the settlement preserves the right to pursue augmentation.


The lake resident noted that the DNR has permitted two augmentation systems within five miles of White Bear Lake — on Lake Gilfillan and Snail Lake. "They are operating efficiently and safely," Markoe said. "They did not require an environmental impact statement or extraordinary water quality standards. Those lakes are cleaner and fuller than they were prior to augmentation."

When asked if he was shocked at the estimate, Sen. Chuck Wiger said "Yes. We'll need to examine the assumptions and put together a proposal. We need to keep the momentum going. We all know how important this is for our region."

The senator added that the Sucker Lake option will be taken off the table.

Rep. Matt Dean had a similar reaction, telling constituents after the briefing that he was "very disappointed. We obviously got a little sticker shock," he said.

There are other uncertainties, as well, that could affect the estimate. Unknown underground conditions, the amount of water pumped, changes in



WHITE BEAR TOWNSHIP

1858 RAMSEY COUNTY MINNESOTA

News & Views

A bi-weekly section where readers will be informed on subjects of seasonal interest, upcoming events and other timely topics.

IMPORTANT CUSTOMER INFORMATION

will be reflected in the bill you will be receiving at the end of February or first part of March, changes include lowering the water volume of each of the four tiers & adjusting each of the four tiers. There are also small changes to the sewer & stormwater rates. Please refer to the rate sheet that was sent with your December bill for more detailed information.

NEW SEWER & WATER RATES— New sewer & water rates

WATER EFFICIENCY GRANT FUNDS AWARDED— The Metropolitan Council, through funding from the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment, has awarded White Bear Township a water efficiency grant. The goal of the water efficiency grant program is to improve municipal water use. This grant funding has enabled White Bear Township to provide rebates to residents who replace existing products with specified water efficient products through June 30, 2017 or until funds are depleted. Residents can claim 100 percent of the cost of the item, up to a maximum of \$150 for Energy Star washers; \$200 for WaterSense toilets; and \$200 for irrigation controllers. Rebates are limited to 2 per house hold. Visit www.ci.white-bear-township.mn.us for more information about the Water Efficiency Rebate Program.

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vegetables to water indoor plants, just let it cool first. You'll be saving water & giving your plants a boost of nutrients.

NO OVERNIGHT PARKING

JUST A REMINDER - WINTER PARKING RESTRICTIONS ARE IN EFFECT - No vehicle may park on any road or street in the Township between the hours of 2 a.m. & 6 a.m. from now until April 1st, or any time after a snowfall of one or more inches, until the road is cleared curb to curb.

WANT TO CHAT WITH A SHERIFF'S DEPUTY - HERE'S HOW - The next Coffee with a Cop is scheduled for Tuesday, February 16 from 9-10:30 a.m. at the McDonalds at 2260 Rice Street, Little Canada, just north of Highway 36. The goal of events such as these is bring neighbors & deputies together in an informal environment to help improve relationships between the two, one cup of coffee at a time! Feel free to attend.

TIP OF THE MONTH

- You can use the leftover water from cooking pasta or vegetables to water indoor plants, just let it cool first. You'll be saving water & giving your plants a boost of nutrients.

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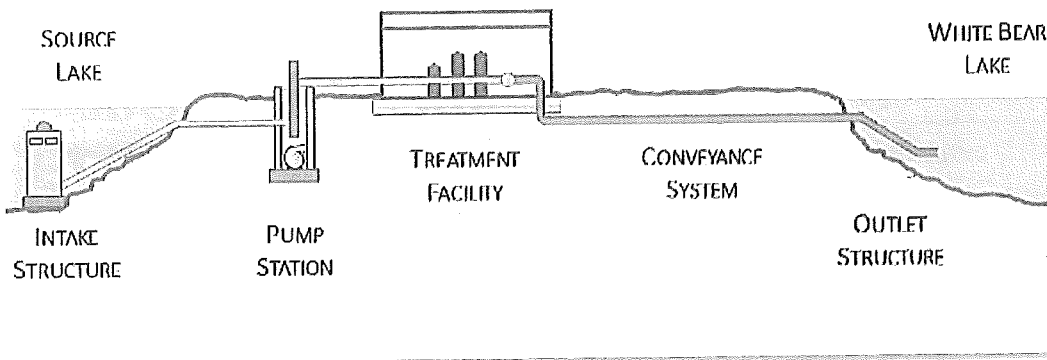
design assumptions such as system capacity and a modified pipeline route, are all variables in the price. Additional water treatment may also be necessary to meet quality standards beyond the basic filtration system included in the SEH cost estimates. The higher level of phosphorus in the river and Sucker Lake Chain compared to White Bear Lake is a particular concern, noted the engineer. Capital costs could increase by \$23 to \$40 million, depending on treatment technology. This could also increase operation and maintenance costs from \$900,000 to \$4.1 million per year, Craddock said. Naramore pointed out that by statute, the impact on water quality must be part of the decision making when issuing a water appropriations permit. The DNR is in discussions with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency regarding permitting requirements and water quality, she said.

It is hoped that bonding money procured from the 2016 Legislature will finance a pipeline. Who will pay operating and maintenance costs and how the project will be managed remain unclear at this point. Area lawmakers plan to meet with all parties early in March, before the start of the session, to discuss answers to many remaining questions.

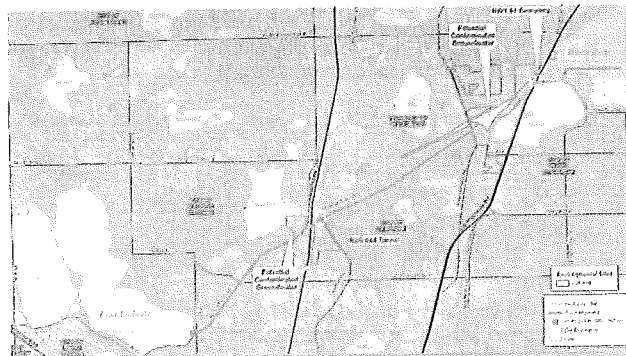
Meanwhile, the Friends group wants those who benefit from the lake to keep an open mind.

"The DNR estimate is not the last word," McNeely said. "There are less complicated system designs and routing options that dramatically reduce the cost estimate."

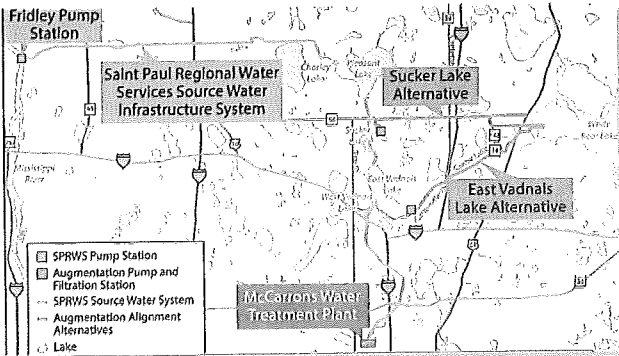
The complete SEH analysis can be found on the DNR website at www.dnr.state.mn.us/gwmp/wbl-report/index.html



SEH included this schematic of augmentation system components.



Engineering firm SEH provided this map of the East Vadnais Lake alignment and route features.



The augmentation alignment alternatives provided by SEH included both Sucker Lake and East Vadnais Lake.