

Lake Beulah Dispute Echoes Larger Battle

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Excerpts:

Taking a page from the international move to protect the Great Lakes from harmful water diversions, the tiny Lake Beulah Management District in Walworth County has empowered itself to block the sinking of new wells within its boundaries.

The new ordinance also says that water pumped out of the basin, above or below ground, must be returned to the basin, a directive that reflects a hotly debated issue in Waukesha's attempt to divert water from Lake Michigan.

Lake residents fear that a high-volume well tapped into an aquifer that replenishes the lake via underground springs will lead to a decline in lake levels and ultimately harm the ecology of the basin.

The ordinance says that before a well is sunk, a permit must be obtained from the district. Residential users are exempt, and the regulations apply only to taking water from the shallow aquifer. Deep aquifers in bedrock are exempt from the permit requirement.

The protracted legal battle between the district and the village is being watched by other lake districts that fear thirsty communities will sink wells near their shores, negatively affecting water levels and quality.

Residents of Upper Phantom Lake near Mukwonago have staved off attempts by that village to install wells along its shores.

And residents of Pine and Beaver lakes in north-central Waukesha County are concerned about the installation of shallow wells to quench the water needs of expanding populations and developments of nearby communities.