



Manistee plan tackles water withdrawals

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MANISTEE -- A provision in Manistee County's new master plan will prohibit unnecessary water withdrawals from area watersheds and aquifers, while Lansing legislators continue to mull the specifics of water management in Michigan.

Manistee County commissioners recently added a resolution to their draft master plan aimed at protecting the county's surface and ground water resources by prohibiting withdrawals that "have no direct benefits to residents ... and which do not increase public safety, health or welfare."

"We want to keep away from bottling companies coming in or major withdrawals. I personally don't believe our Senate or Legislature has done a very good job ... protecting our waters," said Glenn Lottie, county commissioner.

The Michigan Legislature this month approved a regional compact to prevent Great Lakes water from being shipped to dry regions. But differences in competing state House and Senate bills that would regulate mass withdrawals in Michigan must be resolved before the compact agreement becomes official.

The recent discussion over water management prompted Manistee County's planning commission to research similar local resolutions and work with a consultant to draft the addition to the county's revised master plan. That plan is the fruit of a three-year effort and is expected to be approved this summer, said Sue Wagner, county planner.

The new master plan would require water withdrawals to go through the county board of commissioners for consideration, Lottie said.

"It seems to be something that people are talking about lately, that they want to have the protection there," Wagner said. "We have so many wonderful natural resources in our county and we want to make sure they are there in the future."

Economics count, too, Lottie said.

"My goal is to protect our economy," he said. "Natural resources is a big part of our economy."

Steve Morris, executive director for the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce, said the agency hasn't taken a position on the issue, but he believes it has the potential to impact a variety of businesses, from manufacturing to tourism.

"Manistee County, much like the rest of northern Michigan, has a pretty significant investment in water in terms of its attractiveness to tourists and to residents, businesses and industry," Morris said. "I don't think we

would have been talking about this 20 years ago.

"The fact that the county is considering making that a part of their plan is good, but how that all works out in the end and how effective it is, remains to be seen," he said.

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