

Lakes Basin eyes water battle

PROTECTING Great Lakes water is like locking the barn door before the horse is stolen.

Two bills in the Michigan House of Representatives are aimed at prohibiting diversion of Great Lakes water until the state determines its future water needs.

"I don't think many Michigan legislators want to ever crack open that barn door," said state Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton, a co-sponsor of one of the bills. "Once diversions occur, everyone recognizes they will have detrimental impacts."

SOME 4.5 MILLION Michigan residents and one-tenth of the United States' population rely on the Great Lakes for drinking water. This fresh water system also supports the needs of industry, agriculture, commercial fishing, shipping and recreation.

With more than 3,200 miles of Great Lakes coastline, Michigan ranks tourism as its third largest industry.

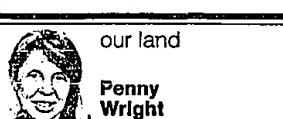
"Water is a key ingredient to life in this state," said Kosteva, a freshman lawmaker and former township planning director. "The diversion issue is of interest to people all over Michigan."

"I'm pleased we are not reacting to crises. We are taking an active stance before a crisis."

THE CURRENT BILLS — HB 4025 and 4026 — come on an issue that has troubled Lansing for a long while.

Over the last 20 years, several projects to divert Great Lakes water to arid sections of the United States and Canada have been proposed. No serious actions have occurred.

The most recent diversion threat is based on scientific findings that the large underground Ogallala aquifer beneath eight Great Plains states is being depleted at a rate of nearly 21 million acre-feet of



our land
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water yearly. An aquifer is an underground layer of porous, water-bearing rock into which wells can be sunk.

Michigan legislators fear increased pressures for diversion on the Great Lakes as America's population shifts westward and the aquifer runs down.

TO COUNTER such pressures, the state has taken several actions since the first of this year:

- On Feb. 11, Gov. James J. Blanchard, along with representatives from seven other Great Lakes states and two Canadian provinces, signed the Great Lakes Charter. The charter opposes harmful water diversions within or outside the Great Lakes Basin. It also creates a water resources management committee to administer a regional database on water uses.

- The state Senate unanimously passed its own version of HB 4025 and 4026 on Feb. 14. The House versions are current in the Marine Affairs and Port Development Committee.

- On March 12, Gov. Blanchard issued an execu-

tive order instructing state agencies to resist all new or increased diversions of Great Lakes water. He also created a Michigan Office on the Great Lakes under the state Department of Natural Resources.

"DIVERSION" means the man-made transfer of water into or out of the Great Lakes Basin or between the basins of two of the Great Lakes. Presently there are five major diversions in the system.

The Long Lac and Ogoki diversions transfer water at a rate of 4,600 cfs (cubic feet per second) into Lake Superior for power generation. The Lake Michigan diversion at Chicago transfers about 3,200 cfs of water out of the basin for municipal purposes. The New York State Barge Canal and Welland Canal transfer nearly 9,700 cfs within the basin for shipping purposes.

The combined effect of existing diversions is a net addition of water to the Great Lakes system.

MICHIGAN'S CONCERN is that any new outside basin diversions would reduce water levels on some of the lakes. The result would be huge economic losses.

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