

Geologists to test county's water supply

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Those folks asking permission to drill water wells in the gravel hills of Oakland, Livingston and Washtenaw counties are from the federal government. They're here to find out for Congress if America's multi-billion investment in clean water is paying off.

"We'll drill 30 wells randomly, most in Oakland County. We'll request permission to drill," said Erin Lynch, a geologist and a member of the Lake Erie basin groundwater team of the U.S. Geological Survey.

"We're shooting for August to start," Lynch told a June 26 meeting of the Arcwide Water Quality Board, a regional agency headquartered with the South-

east Michigan Council of Governments.

"We'll collect soil samples as we drill. We'll drill below the water table," said Lynch, holding up a two-page list of chemicals and trace elements that USGS will test for.

At the request of West Bloomfield Township, USGS will contact local officials when it is in an area, to help assure landowners the project is legitimate. USGS also will inform local newspapers.

"About 60 to 70 percent of the nation uses groundwater," said Donna Myers, project chief for the NAQWA, the National Water Quality assessment program started in 1994.

The Lake Erie project isn't concerned with Lake St. Clair,

the Detroit River and Lake Erie themselves; rather with the quality of water in the ground in the 22,300 square miles of land that stretch like a giant check mark from Port Huron, Mich., to Fort Wayne, Ind., and across northern Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York state to the Niagara River.

Nor will it concentrate on the former lake bottom that covered Detroit, all of Wayne County except the northwestern corner, and southeastern Oakland County.

Instead it will focus on gravel hills, called "terminal moraines," deposited by the last glaciers that melted more than 12,000 years ago.

"The last glacier gave that mantle," said Myers. "Thick,

extensive unconsolidated glacial deposits serve as important sources of public water supply," added a USGS newsletter.

The USGS team will study the effects on the upper Black, Clinton (upstream from Sterling Heights), Huron and Raisin rivers. They are among 10 rivers in the Erie basin project being studied.

USGS is part of the Interior Department, said regional deputy Cindy Barton, who is headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. It collects data and maps on earth sciences, water, minerals and energy reserves. Its three Michigan offices are in Lansing, Grayling and Escanaba.

"We have a team of 40 multidisciplinary people — hydro-

geists, chemists, geologists," said Barton. "We work with the states, counties, watershed councils, Indian groups, any nonprofit group. We're also a consultant to other federal agencies like the Army Corps of Engineer and Department of Energy. We're measuring toxins in Lake Michigan for the Environmental Protection Agency."

The NAQWA program is designed to answer Congress' question: "Is our water getting any cleaner?" Barton said. After five years of intensive work, the project will resume in 2003 for additional intensive work.

In other business, the regional AWQB:

• Elected officers for the year starting July 1. They are Novi councilmember Robert Mittel,

chair; Holly councilmember Ardath Regan, first vice chair; and Sumpter Township environmental planner Stephen Kunselman, second vice-chair.

• Learned that its 28-minute video *Headwaters: The Life Line of a River*, about the Rouge, was named a national finalist in the Telly Awards competition for non-network TV. It also earned a certificate of excellence from the National Association of Regional Councils. Sponsors were the AWQB and the Rouge Watershed Council. Local governments in the Rouge basin contributed to the effort.

Copies of the video have been distributed to all area cable TV companies. Watch local listings or call your cable company to learn viewing times.

Legislators place court reform on fall agenda

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

"Go slow," Democrats warned as legislative Republicans pushed for trial court reform. Republicans took the advice, taking two steps July 3 and paving the way for more massive steps in the fall.

The Legislature:

- Voted to abolish Detroit Recorder's Court effective Oct. 1, 1997, "grandfathering" its 29 judges as Wayne Circuit Court judges and requiring them to run countywide when seeking reelection.

For the first time in history, Michigan will have a uniform, statewide trial court system. Detroit no longer will be the only one of 271 Michigan cities with a separate criminal court. The law also blocks the Supreme Court from again shifting all suburban criminal cases to Detroit judges

and juries.

- Established a uniform funding formula based on caseload. For a few outstate counties, it may be a windfall. Wayne County and Detroit are "hold harmless," meaning they can't lose state aid through the end of fiscal 2001. Court employees' benefits also are protected.

Lawmakers must wait until a fall session beginning Sept. 10 to decide whether to:

- Establish a "family court" division of circuit court. It would involve transferring most of the powers of probate court and a few to district court.

- Place HJR S, a massive amendment to the judicial article of the Michigan Constitution, on the ballot. As drafted, it would establish a single "trial court," abolishing probate and district courts. Court borders would be county lines, but counties could have "election dis-

tricts," meaning Detroit and the suburbs could be able to elect their "own" judges.

If adopted by voters, it will be the most massive change in state court history, surpassing the abolition of non-lawyer justices of the peace in the 1960s.

Gov. John Engler remained silent on the issue during the House-Senate conference committee's week of negotiations and the Legislature's two-day session.

Although legal reformers long sought the package of change, Engler precipitated it by (1) threatening to veto new judgeships in Oakland County, Farmington, the Northville-Plymouth-Canton area and Ypsilanti Township in 1994 and (2) actually vetoing more court funding this year until court reform took place.

"Reform," to supporters, means more ability to shift

judges across jurisdictional and geographical boundaries. "A judge is a judge is a judge," in the words of House Judiciary Chair Michael Nye, R-Litchfield.

Senate Republican stumbled when three of their 22 members missed the session — including Robert Geake of Northville. The bill failed on a 19-16 party-line vote with 20 needed for passage.

It was the second time Geake a 19-year senator with a nearly perfect attendance record, missed a court reform vote. An aide said Geake had a church camp commitment July 2 but changed it to July 3 when the one-day session was called. Majority leader Dick Posthumus, R-Alto, extended the session a day. Geake's aide said the senator couldn't break the July 3 commitment.

A month earlier, when the Senate Judiciary Committee took a key vote to report the

reform bill out of committee, Geake attended a safety conference and had to be replaced on the committee so the GOP could have a majority to report out the bills.

On second try, the Senate passed the key bill won with a 23-12 vote as four Democrats crossed over: Chris Dingell of Trenton, Art Miller of Warren, Ken DeBeauvoir of Macomb County and Don Koivisto of Ironwood.

All other senators voted with their parties except the three absentees.

The House vote was 70 to 33 with six not voting. Voting yes were 51 Republicans and 19 Democrats. Voting no were 33 Democrats.

Yes — Penny Crissman, R-Rochester, Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak.

No — Maxine Berman, D-

Southfield, David Gubow, D-Huntington Woods.

Not voting — Barbara Pugh, R-Union Lake, John Jamian, R-Bloomfield Township, Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills. Dobb and Kaza had attended other portions of the two-day session. Their absences are the equivalent of a "no" vote because 56 "yes" votes are needed for passage.

The bill sets up a 23-member commission to assess court cases on their difficulty with a goal of reallocating court resources.

Rep. Michael Nye, R-Litchfield, House Judiciary chair who headed the conference committee, said, "We've had battles in the counties about who's in control (of court budgets). The judges are going to fight this, no matter what. We say to the judges, 'You can hire and fire,' but the counties will handle the money."

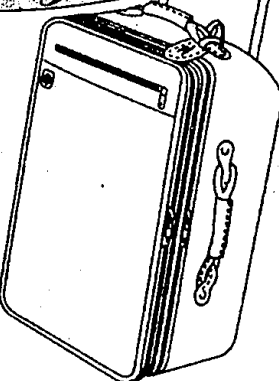
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