

Groundwater Advisory Committee
Options Paper
for
November 15 Ballot

Date: November 14, 2007

From (list GAC members): Todd Ambs

Title (Subject): Springs

DISCUSSION:

The GAC believes that additional field-verified data is necessary before considering modification of both the statutory definition of “spring” and the regulatory criteria applied to the protection of springs. Many springs do not meet or exceed the current 1 cubic foot per second (“cfs”) discharge threshold established in the statutes.

The inventories of springs compiled by the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation (WWF) and others represent an important first step in understanding the location and natural resource significance of springs. While the information is extensive, its value for setting policy and regulatory decisions is limited. It is generally agreed that the inventory needs to be updated, verified and expanded before considering modifications to existing policy.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Groundwater Advisory Committee recommends the following:

1. Funding should be made available for a long-term program enabling the DNR to maintain and update a springs database. The data should be made available to the public.
2. Two years after funding is in place, the DNR should complete field verification of spring sites with flows of at least 0.25 cfs beginning with information compiled in the *Wisconsin Springs Inventory* (Wisconsin Wildlife Federation) and in *Assessing the Ecological Status and Vulnerability of Springs in Wisconsin* (Swanson, S.K., Bradbury, K.R., and Hart, D.J.). Conditions in springs will be partially field-verified through a multi-year project by the DNR. The DNR should explore funding this work through existing Act 310 funds. In the course of completing field work and as resources allow, staff may also field verify springs with a flow rate of less than 0.25 cfs.
3. To the extent feasible, the updated springs inventory should note significant environmental/ecological aspects of each spring site visited. If possible, unique environmental settings such as calcareous fens and trout streams along with other important ecological features such as the presence of threatened and endangered species should be noted. The proximity to a Groundwater Protection Area should also be noted.
4. Within the first six months following completion of the above mentioned field study, the DNR shall review the updated information. Based on that review, the DNR may recommend changes to the statutory definition of “spring” and develop a list of springs, including a process for publishing, updating, and maintaining the list.

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5. Within the first six months following completion of the springs field study, the DNR shall form an Advisory Committee to review the results of the field study, and the DNR's proposed recommendations for statutory changes and additional rule-making to protect springs. Based on that review the Committee should advise the Legislature on future policy decisions regarding protection of spring from impacts due to pumping of high capacity wells. The Advisory Committee shall be comprised of representatives similar to that of the Groundwater Advisory Committee established under 2003 Act 310.

6. Not more than six months after the Advisory Committee is formed, members will complete a review of the DNR recommendations for statutory modification and rule-making. In advising the DNR, the Committee shall consider the updated information from the springs inventory, and any other available information concerning springs in the state. The Advisory Committee may submit additional recommendations to the legislature concerning the need to statutorily modify the definition of "spring" and other regulatory protection considerations related to springs. Within one month of the Advisory Committee's end date, the DNR and Advisory Committee will submit final recommendations to the Legislature.