

Water woes

Citizen group against city of Charlottetown's long range water- supply plan

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- BY NIGEL ARMSTRONG

As Charlottetown considers drilling water wells yet again in the hard- pressed Winter River zone, a citizen group says it opposes the city's long range water- supply plan.

With summer looming, the Winter River- Tracadie Bay Watershed Association predicts another season of dried- out stream beds and pressure on its underground aquifer.

Last year members of the group found and distributed photos of dry streams that formerly ran into Winter River.

"It looks more like a path now," said Cathy Corrigan, co- chairperson of the association, of what it calls the Cudmore and Union tributaries.

The watershed is home to three water- well fields, named Upton, Brackely and Suffolk, that supply all of Charlottetown's water.

She said the dry stream reveals that too much water is coming out of the watershed to feed Charlottetown's growing need.

"We didn't get any rain since last summer, or snow, really, to speak of so we know what it's going to look like this year," said Corrigan.

The group has heard that Charlottetown wants to drill yet more wells in the Suffolk area of the watershed.

It's all part of a longrange plan being developed by the city with direction from the provincial government, said Craig Walker, manager of sewer and water for Charlottetown.

In 2010 the province issued the city with a permit to extract water from a new, as yet completed well site in Miltonvale, and it set limits on the water already being drawn out of the Winter River area.

The permit also instructed the city to distribute its water pumping water more equitably across the large geographic area of the Winter River watershed, said Walker.

Then in January this year the province produced a policy governing all water supply decisions.

Both elements are helping Charlottetown develop a water management plan it must submit to the provincial government in 2015, said Walker.

An early discussion about that plan suggests that the city will have to reduce the amount of water it takes out of the Brackley station and make up the difference with new wells to be drilled in Suffolk. Union would remain the same, said Walker.

A draft plan, followed by negotiations and eventual provincial approval will push that work out beyond 2015, he said.

The watershed group has a very different view. It says a new standard needs to be adopted, based on pumping out just half of an aquifer's recharge rate, which is not the standard used by the province.

"To achieve sustainable extraction, a 26 percent overall reduction is needed from 2010 levels," said a challenge published in March 2012 by the Winter River- Tracadie Bay Watershed group.

"In each of the three wellfields, extraction needs to be reduced by 48 percent at Brackley, by 26 percent at Union, while no reduction is required at this time at Suffolk."

In any case, once Miltonvale comes on line after the 2014 federal infrastructure funding is announced, the city will have to start looking at yet another new water site, said Walker. “We have identified sites that we would go to next, already,” he said. “The reality is that the City of Charlottetown and the folks that are here keeps growing. It’s not getting smaller. The demand keeps growing.”