

Water Use Update

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The legislative process to address the red hot issue of water use in Michigan has nearly completed its cycle for this year. The recent flurry of water use legislation and policy debates have been in response to the ever growing focus on the future rights to the water in the Great Lakes. Those organizations providing the energy to drive this process agree that the legislation crafted this year is a healthy start to a process that will last several more years and result in additional legislation in future sessions.

The allied golf, turf and “Green” industries in Michigan were involved in the legislative process over the last six months and need to stay aggressive, engaged and proactive in the years ahead. Here’s a quick sketch of the water use issues at this time –

A bill has been generated from the Senate and another one from the House of Representatives that are tied together as a package. The objectives of the Senate Bill (SB 289) are:

1. to expand the current reporting requirements for high capacity water users;
2. to create a statewide aquifer inventory and map; and
3. to create a Groundwater Advisory Council.

The objective of the House Bill (HB 487) is to engage the state agencies (DEQ & MDA) to create a system to resolve conflicts between aggrieved ground water users. There are several high profile cases in the Michigan now where homeowners have accused a nearby high capacity well owner of affecting their ability to pump water from their domestic wells. The intent of this bill is to give the state agencies a shot at resolving the conflict before the case goes straight to court.

The package will soon be ready to leave the legislature and head for the Governor's desk where it is expected to be signed into law. Again, the word on the street is that these bills represent the first in a series over the next few years as Michigan attempts to secure the future of water use and prevent diversions of water from the Great Lakes.

A high capacity well is one that has the “capacity” to pump more than 100,000 gallons per day for a 30 day period. An irrigation facility is defined as..... all wells, pumps, intakes, gates, tanks, pipes under common ownership “used to distribute water for the purposes of irrigating golf courses, parks, recreational areas, or other grounds.....”. Current Michigan law requires that all high capacity well owners in four specific use areas to report their water use annually. These use areas are thermoelectric power plants, municipal supply wells, industrial/processing facilities, and irrigation facilities.

This definition is important because it identifies many areas of the green industry that are required to report water use, yet golf is the only one that has been reporting at this time. High capacity irrigation wells on school grounds, athletic fields and other turf areas will be required to report in the future. It is not clear how or when these turf areas will be phased into the reporting system.

Now let's describe the changes these bills will bring to the reporting requirements, including those golf courses already in the loop. Current requirements include the amount of water withdrawn on a monthly and annual basis, the source of water supply (groundwater, surface water, direct from Great Lakes), use of the water and amount of consumptive use. Golf courses are already familiar with this system. Other irrigators in the Green Industry will need to begin reporting in this manner at some time in the future. The additions to this system will include a requirement to locate your irrigation wells using a GPS instrument and the reporting fee has been raised from \$50.00 to \$100.00.

The MTF has been active in representing the turf industry and has made an impact on this legislative process. Tom Smith, Gerry Grossi and others have met with legislators and a variety of interest groups and they have been very effective in communicating the diverse interests of the turf industry. Stay tuned and continue to learn about the water issues in your own community. The turf industry is considered to be a high profile, high capacity user of water in Michigan. The MTF has committed to develop a best management plan for irrigation in the future. Your input will be needed..... stay tuned!!