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Plenty of water until 2039, says Joliet official

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JOLIET - The city's top utility official disputes a forecast that Joliet could begin finding water harder to get in the next decade.

Utilities Director James Eggen said his best estimate is that the city needs to find a new source of water in about 30 years.

Eggen called a forecast that Joliet would find water harder to get by 2015 a "doomsayer's" outlook, although he agreed the city and other communities must begin to face a future of scarcer water supplies.

Planner's predictions

Eggen was not available for comment before a story was published in Wednesday's The Herald-News about predictions from some regional planners that Joliet, Aurora and some other areas will find it harder to draw water from deep aquifers in six years.

A water specialist with the Metropolitan Planning Council said Joliet and other communities need to begin conserving water and developing more efficient systems or else they could find it more expensive to pump water from an increasingly depleted aquifer.

"I don't see Joliet having that kind of issue with any of its wells in the next six years," Eggen said. "While we do see levels dropping in the aquifers, we still see plenty of water there to supply the city of Joliet."

He described the 2015 timetable as a "doomsayer's" outlook aimed at heightening awareness of the issue of declining water supplies.

"There is going to be a breaking point where the water is not going to be available," Eggen said. But he said his 30-year forecast might even be extended by about five years because of the housing bust that has slowed Joliet's population growth.

New water source

Josh Ellis with the Metropolitan Planning Council this week pointed to a report from the Illinois State Water Survey and said the costs of pumping water from the aquifer Joliet uses could start getting higher by 2015.

At some point, Ellis said, the costs become so high that Joliet, Aurora and other communities that depend on the aquifer will have to look elsewhere for water.

Kankakee River plan

Joliet at one time considered getting water from the Kankakee River. It may have to look that way for water again in 30 years, Eggen said.

But when the city gave up a Kankakee River plan in 2002, officials were looking at Illinois State Water Survey reports that indicated the underground aquifer would provide adequate water supplies to Joliet from anywhere between 20 and 100 years.

That outlook was too broad, he said, for the city to abandon its well water system.

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