

SLOW DOWN FLOOD OF WATER TO SUBURBS, COMMUNITY GROUPS SAY

For Immediate Release: March 16, 2009

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A broad coalition of community groups has filed comments objecting to any efforts to finalize the draft Water Supply Study released by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC). The objections are based on SEWRPC's continuing refusal to evaluate the civil rights and environmental justice effects of diverting of Lake Michigan water to suburban communities.

"Once again SEWRPC has acted in a way that furthers, rather than reduces, the deplorable racial disparities in our region," stated Milwaukee Branch NAACP President Jerry Ann Hamilton.

"The Water Supply Study simply does not address the potential harm to urban residents and to the environment that could occur if water sales facilitate suburban sprawl," noted Karen Schapiro, Executive Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates. Schapiro noted that SEWRPC is basing the Water Supply Study on unsustainable and unreasonable land use assumptions. "SEWRPC admitted it's assuming that all communities seeking water will follow its regional land use plans - even though it knows those plans have often been ignored. So the demand for diverted water could be much greater, and more harmful, than what SEWRPC is projecting."

"SEWRPC repeatedly promised that, before finalizing the study, it would take the steps that its own Environmental Justice Task Force wanted," emphasized Karyn Rotker, ACLU of Wisconsin Senior Staff Attorney. "But when the EJTF asked SEWRPC to conduct an independent socioeconomic impact analysis, they balked. That evaluation must occur before the Water Supply Study is finalized."

As environmental attorney Dennis M Grzezinski, a former Commissioner and Chair of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Sewerage District, stated: "SEWRPC's technical and professional staff includes many talented, competent individuals, and it is terribly disappointing that they have not been allowed to apply their skills to so many important aspects of the water supply picture. No water supply plan can be complete, or even reasonably useful, without addressing these many issues."

A copy of the comments is attached.