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Water levels to be studied

October 19, 2013

By JOHN PEPIN - Journal Staff Writer (jpepin@miningjournal.net) , The Mining Journal

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MARQUETTE - The Marquette County Board voted unanimously Tuesday to approve the composition of a group appointed to study a plan to recharge the Sands Plains aquifer with spring flood waters.

Last month, the board approved appointing the study group to look at a groundwater recharge plan presented by former Cleveland Cliffs Iron Co. engineer Hank Greenwood. Greenwood proposed diverting spring flood waters from the Escanaba River to replenish the Sands Plains aquifer, which residents and government officials have watched decline over the past several years.

The study group was also tasked with gathering data of the levels of Marquette County lakes over the past decade.

County administrative staff recommended several appointments. Those recommendations were approved Tuesday by the board.

Among them, Sands, Forsyth, West Branch and Chocloy townships will each appoint one member with a hydrology background to the group. Additional appointments included Eric Johnson from county planning staff; Michelle Jarvi Eggart from the Marquette County Planning Commission; Sawyer Operations Manager Steve Schenden and Carl Lindquist from the Superior Watershed Partnership.

Three other individuals will be contacted to see if they are interested in serving on the study group. They include retired Cliffs Natural Resources engineer John Meier; Robert Regis, a professor of geology and remote sensing at Northern Michigan University; and Dan Wiitala, a professional geologist at North Jackson Co. in Marquette.

In a related matter, Marquette County administrator Scott Erbis provided an information update to the board. Last month, staff was asked to contact state Sen. Tom Casperson, R-Escanaba, to see if any grant money would be available to do an in-depth study on declining levels of Martin Lake at K.I. Sawyer and the Sands Plains aquifer.

Staff was also asked to contact Michigan Tech University to see if the school could conduct a hydrology study.

Erbis said he contacted Casperson aide Marty Fittante who advised he had no personal knowledge of any grant funding for the study. He said he would look into it further.

"I have not yet received any new information," Erbis said in a memo to the board.

On Oct. 3, Erbis, Anderson and Schenden had a conference call with Michigan Tech professor John Gierke about the possibility of the school conducting a hydrology study.

Erbis said Gierke stated there are no known grant funds to complete the study. He said undergraduate and graduate students have completed studies in the past.

The cost for an undergraduate study would be \$20,000 and a graduate study would be \$50,000. The study could not start until the fall 2014.

"Professor Gierke did explain that even if a sizeable grant was received to have an aquifer study performed, the results may be inconclusive and it could take years to complete," Erbis wrote. "He did not rule out being a resource for the study group to contact."

The board did not take any action Tuesday, based on the information Erbis provided.

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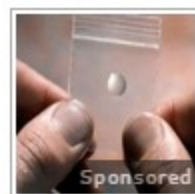
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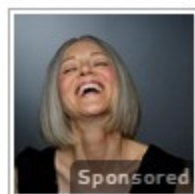
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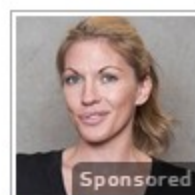
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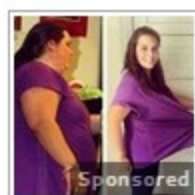
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