



For Immediate Release: Michigan Groundwater Emergency

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Michigan Groundwater Emergency

FLOW Report Calls for Major Policy Reforms to Protect The Drinking Water Source for 45% of Michiganders

Traverse City, Michigan – Michigan’s groundwater resources are in deteriorating condition, and changes in state policy are urgently needed to restore it, FLOW said in a report released today.

The report by FLOW, the Great Lakes law and policy center, says Michigan law and policy have adopted an “out of sight, out of mind” approach that is exposing people and the environment to unacceptable risk. Without reforms, the report says, Michigan will be foreclosing options for future Michiganders who need groundwater.

The report is entitled [The Sixth Great Lake: The Emergency Threatening Michigan's Overlooked Groundwater Resource](#), signifying that the volume of groundwater in the Great Lakes watershed is comparable to the volume of Lake Huron. The report is part of [The Campaign for Fresh Water](#), FLOW’s comprehensive and solutions-based response to the current water crises in Michigan.

“Michigan is sitting atop a groundwater resource that already serves the needs of millions of us for drinking water and so much more – but state policy treats it as if it is replaceable. It is not,” said Dave Dempsey, FLOW Senior Advisor.

Michigan has more private drinking water wells drilled annually than any other state. About 45% of the state’s population depends on groundwater as its drinking water source. Daily groundwater withdrawals in Michigan total over 260 million gallons for irrigation as well as 64 million gallons from on-site wells for industrial purposes. As much as 42% of the water in the Great Lakes originates from groundwater.

“Since most groundwater is connected to surface water such as streams, lakes and even the Great Lakes, supplying water that is essential to public water uses, groundwater is subject to public trust protections – and to the Michigan Constitution’s mandate to the Legislature to enact laws that will protect this precious resource,” said Jim Olson, FLOW founder and President.

As the discovery of PFAS chemicals in groundwater wells around Michigan has demonstrated, we tend to think about this resource only when it’s degraded. While cleaning up contamination is important,

Michigan needs to do more to prevent groundwater pollution. In a time of worsening worldwide water scarcity, Michigan can ill afford to neglect or even endanger this vital resource. And yet:

- Of the 50 states, only Michigan lacks a statewide law protecting groundwater from septic systems – and there are an estimated 130,000 leaking septic systems within our borders.
- Michigan also has over 3,000 groundwater sites whose contamination is so severe that state law bars their further use diversion – and both represent a loss of usable water to the Great Lakes system.
- Agricultural wastes have polluted drinking water at thousands of sites across Michigan, even as contamination from leaking storage tanks and industrial facilities continues to be discovered.

“This is no way to treat our water,” said Liz Kirkwood, FLOW’s Executive Director. “We would never treat groundwater this way if it were as visible as surface water.”

Among policy reforms FLOW proposes in this report:

- The state should articulate a groundwater policy and law protecting this paramount public trust resource from impairment and degradation in order to assure it can serve as a sustainable source of safe drinking water, health, sustenance, support healthy ecosystems, and serve other public and societal needs.
- The state should identify a long-term funding source, such as a voter-approved bond, and appropriate funding needed to clean up over 6,000 remaining sites with contaminated groundwater where no other viable party can be found to pay for cleanup. A reasonable estimate of the need is expenditures of \$50 million per year for the next 20 years, or \$1 billion.
- The Michigan Legislature should enact a law requiring all septic systems to be periodically inspected and properly maintained, making Michigan the 50th and last state to adopt a uniform septic code.
- The State of Michigan should aggressively prevent, detect, and clean up nitrate pollution resulting from farm practices and assist rural communities in obtaining safe, nitrate-free drinking water.
- The State of Michigan should improve groundwater data collection and groundwater action.

For more information on this report, please visit our website at: flowforwater.org/sixth-great-lake/

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