

Gauthier Lake Proposal Raises Urgent Questions About Cedarburg's Water Security and Ecosystem Stability

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Cedarburg residents are voicing growing alarm over a proposal by the owners of Gauthier Biomedical to construct a 13.2-acre artificial lake that would require more than 45 million gallons of water to fill and an estimated 14 million gallons per year to offset natural evaporation. While the project has been quietly in process for several

years, community members who live along Cedar Creek—and whose families have stewarded this watershed for generations—say they were never meaningfully informed and had no opportunity to participate in early planning discussions.



Save Cedar Creek

“

This isn't just about one lake. This is about what kind of community Cedarburg wants to be—and whether we protect what belongs to all of us.”

Town of Cedarburg Resident

One longtime resident stated, “My husband and I have lived here most of our lives. We have family who border this property. We attended the planning meetings before the public hearing, and even then we didn't understand the sheer scope of the project. The momentum behind this proposal has been incredibly fast, and the lack of transparency has been disturbing.”

Water-resource scientists warn that while a single high-volume water withdrawal may not collapse an aquifer

overnight, large artificial basins fundamentally alter groundwater flow, discharge patterns, and ecological stability. Aquifers function like underground rivers, moving slowly but continually, and their balance depends on a delicate relationship between recharge (rain, infiltration, upstream flow) and withdrawals. When tens of millions of gallons are redirected into a private lake—combined with ongoing pumping to compensate for evaporation—the surrounding water table can shift, leading to reduced groundwater flow into streams, wetlands, and nearby wells.

The U.S. Geological Survey's foundational report "[Sustainability of Ground-Water Resources](#)" details how persistent pumping depresses groundwater levels and can undermine natural discharge into streams, springs, and fisheries.

Plain-text link: <https://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/circ1186/pdf/circ1186.pdf>

Additionally, scientific literature shows that human management of lake water levels often disrupts natural seasonal cycles, reduces biodiversity, and alters downstream water conditions. A peer-reviewed study published on the National Institutes of Health database documents measurable ecological damage from sustained artificial modifications to lake level.

Plain-text link: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9533913/>

Residents argue that Cedarburg's soil composition, proximity to the Cedar Creek watershed, and reliance on groundwater wells make this region especially vulnerable. Even small fluctuations in the water table can affect fish habitat, cold-water inflow, wetland integrity, and the health of the creek itself. A lake of this size—unmatched in similar rural Wisconsin settings—introduces a permanent hydrological sink with no natural offset.

Concerns extend beyond local ecology. Advocates for water stewardship, such as the [River Alliance of Wisconsin](#), emphasize that water is held in trust for the public under state law and that communities should have a decisive role in approving or rejecting large private uses of shared resources.

Plain-text link: <https://wisconsinrivers.org/>

Residents highlight that the public was never fully informed. The project surfaced suddenly after years of quiet development; neighbors received no official mailers, and some only learned of it because a nearby landowner placed flyers in mailboxes days before a key vote. Such a major alteration to the local watershed—one that effectively privatizes a vast public-water withdrawal—demands transparency and broad community engagement.

Critics also question the scale of the water extraction. According to publicly available hydrological calculators, a 13.2-acre lake averaging 10.5 feet deep contains more than 45 million gallons of water—roughly equivalent to the annual usage of over 400 Wisconsin households combined. And unlike the initial fill, which is massive but finite, evaporation loss is ongoing. In an average summer month, Cedarburg experiences evaporation rates that can exceed six inches, meaning the lake may lose more than one million gallons per month at peak conditions. Replacing that water requires a pump that, from the first day it begins running, cannot stop without the lake shrinking.

Hydrologists caution that once groundwater begins flowing into an artificial basin, the effect is not reversible. Even if the Town were to later reconsider or revoke approval, the hydrological

impacts would already have begun, and the aquifer could take years—or decades—to recover.

Residents are urging Cedarburg officials to halt the project until an independent groundwater impact study is conducted. They argue that the Town must evaluate how sustained pumping could affect wells, septic systems, Cedar Creek flow, wetland recharge, and flood patterns. They also stress that in the context of climate variability—hotter summers, drier fall seasons, and inconsistent snowfall—any project that permanently increases groundwater withdrawal deserves heightened scrutiny.

Wisconsin's Public Trust Doctrine affirms that waters belong to the people, not to individuals or corporations. Converting tens of millions of gallons of public water into a private lake raises serious ethical and legal concerns about the long-term consequences for the community and the environment.

Residents say they are not opposed to development, but they insist that development must not compromise shared natural resources. "This isn't just about one lake," one resident said. "This is about what kind of community Cedarburg wants to be—and whether we protect what belongs to all of us."

Citizens of Cedarburg

Save Cedar Creek

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