Community Opposition Intensifies as Gauthier Lake Plan Advances Despite Environmental Uncertainty

Save Cedar Creek

TOWN OF CEDARBURG, WI, UNITED STATES, November 13, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Public opposition is accelerating across Cedarburg as residents raise new questions about the environmental, legal, and community-impact implications of the proposed Gauthier lake—a 13.2-acre artificial basin requiring more than 35 million gallons of groundwater to fill and an estimated 14 million gallons per year to maintain through evaporation replacement. Despite the scale of this project, residents say the Town's process has lacked transparency, scientific evaluation, and meaningful public outreach.

Several long-time creek-side residents say they were entirely unaware of the project until just days before a crucial Town meeting. One resident explained, "We only heard about it because a neighbor placed flyers in our mailbox two days before the vote. A project of this size should require open, transparent communication. Instead, the public was left in the dark." Many residents echoed this sentiment, saying the rollout felt rushed and procedurally incomplete.

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>
> *Long Time Cedarburg Resident*

Environmental concerns center on how the lake might alter local groundwater flow, particularly within the Cedar Creek watershed. Groundwater movement in southeastern Wisconsin is highly interconnected—small shifts in water table elevation can affect wells, wetlands, tributaries, and riparian ecosystems. When water is diverted into a deep artificial basin like the proposed lake, the surrounding aquifer begins to flow toward it, effectively draining nearby zones unless

replenished by rainfall or mechanical pumping.

Unlike natural lakes—which fill gradually, stabilize hydrologically, and typically have complex recharge/discharge relationships—an artificial lake of this size becomes a permanent groundwater sink. With Cedarburg experiencing increasingly variable rainfall and hotter summers, residents are worried that long-term pumping will place substantial strain on the aquifer, especially during dry periods.

Groundwater governance specialists note that this is not a hypothetical risk. Wisconsin has a documented history of water-resource degradation when large withdrawals or diversions occur without robust scientific modeling. In this context, conservation attorneys emphasize that Wisconsin's Public Trust Doctrine protects all waters—including groundwater—"for the benefit of all citizens." That principle raises questions about whether converting tens of millions of gallons of shared groundwater into a private lake aligns with long-term public interest.

Midwest Environmental Advocates, a leading Wisconsin nonprofit focused on water-rights protections, stresses that rigorous analysis must accompany any high-volume water use that could alter regional hydrology.

https://midwestadvocates.org/issues/water/

The United Nations describes groundwater as "invisible but vital," cautioning that poorly monitored withdrawals often lead to crisis conditions only after damage has accumulated for years.

https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/09/380721eng.pdf

Residents also point to the ecological impacts on Cedar Creek itself. Reduced groundwater discharge can lower baseflow, increase water temperature, and diminish cold-water habitat critical for fish spawning. Wetlands that depend on steady groundwater inflow could shrink or dry during periods of low rainfall. Local bird species, amphibians, and macroinvertebrates—many of which rely on shallow, stable wetlands—are vulnerable to these changes.

Advocates argue that the Town must require a full, independent hydrological study prior to approving or allowing the project to proceed. That study, they say, should include:

- Seasonal groundwater modeling
- Well-impact projections
- Stream-flow simulations
- Wetland sensitivity analysis
- Climate-variability assessments
- Evaporation-loss calculations under 5, 10, and 20-year scenarios

No such study has been shared publicly.

Another concern is the unusual pace at which the proposal has advanced. Some residents attended early Planning Commission meetings and said that material details were missing or vague. Over the last several years, the proposal appears to have moved forward largely without public engagement. Now that the scale and water-use implications have become clear, residents say they feel blindsided.

Gathering Waters, Wisconsin's statewide land-trust coalition, emphasizes that responsible land stewardship requires evaluating cumulative environmental impacts—not just the desires of individual property owners.

https://gatheringwaters.org/

Residents note that allowing one private lake of this size sets expectations that similar projects might be allowed in the future, compounding ecological strain. They argue that Cedarburg officials should treat this decision as a precedent-setting moment that will shape the community's environmental stability for decades.

Multiple residents have urged the Town Board to pause the project until a comprehensive public process—including scientific review, legal evaluation, and community education—has taken place. They emphasize they are not opposed to development or private land improvements, but large-scale water extraction must be evaluated against the shared interests of the community and the long-term health of the watershed.

A resident summarized the sentiment felt by many: "This isn't a small garden pond. This is a massive, permanent water project that affects every household, every well, and every inch of Cedar Creek. Before making a decision that could reshape our environment for generations, we need unbiased science, transparency, and public involvement."

Until those steps occur, opposition is expected to continue building across Cedarburg.

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