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New Mexico Gov. promotes Great Lakes water grab: Michigan legislature urged to pass pending water protections ASAP

Presidential candidate says states "awash in water" should give it up

New Mexico Governor and Presidential candidate Bill Richardson's suggestion that Western states might siphon off Great Lakes water under his presidency underscores the need for state lawmakers to act immediately on Great Lakes protection legislation introduced in August, according to the Great Lakes, Great Michigan coalition.

Richardson, in a Las Vegas Sun story last week, recounted in the Detroit Free Press today, advocated a system of "water delivery and water production" to move water West, noting that "states like Wisconsin" (and presumably Michigan) "are awash in water."

"Governor Richardson apparently understands neither the dynamics of a Great Lakes ecosystem that renews its water at a rate of only 1 percent each year, nor the globally significant resource that the Great Lakes represent," said David Holtz, of Clean Water Action.

Richardson apparently is unaware that Great Lakes water levels have been receding for decades, exposing bottomlands, grounding recreational boats and ferry services, and creating economic havoc for Great Lakes shippers and marina owners.

"Don't get us wrong. Mr. Richardson and his constituents in New Mexico are welcome to reasonable use of Great Lakes water," said Hugh McDiarmid Jr. of the Michigan Environmental Council. "All they have to do is move to the Great Lakes region. They'll be free to enjoy all our best beaches, trout streams and great-tasting municipal water."

Richardson's assault is the latest in a lengthy list of schemes to siphon Great Lakes water to other areas of the nation and the world.

Legislation introduced in both the state Senate and House of Representatives earlier this year would help protect the lakes from such diversions and establish a program safeguarding the resource for future generations. The package binds Michigan to an eight-state Great Lakes Compact and enacts Michigan-specific rules to ensure that in-state water uses do not dry up neighboring wells or harm the environment.

"Right now, the only thing standing between thirsty Western states and the Great Lakes is a thin thread of federal law that, if struck down by courts, could result in a water free-for-all," said Grenetta Thomassey of the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council. "The Compact and Michigan enabling legislation would establish a firewall against such raids. We call on Republicans and Democrats alike to move these protections forward without delay."

For more information, visit www.greatlakesgreatmichigan.org