

Casino Construction Gambles With Water Quality

by Goeff Welch and Erica Van Auken

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Construction of either of the casinos proposed for Southern Orange County would have severe consequences on drinking water in southern New York and northern New Jersey. That is the conclusion of recent studies commissioned by the Sterling Forest Partnership and performed by the former chief of Water Supply Planning for NJDEP, Robert A. Kecskes.

Construction of the Genting Sterling Forest Resort Casino in Tuxedo, or Caesar's in Woodbury, could bring substantial reductions in freshwater flow and simultaneous increases in wastewater in the Ramapo River. This once pure source of water could become mainly treated sewage during dry periods.

Overall river flow stands to be reduced if either of these casinos comes on line, resulting in an overall decrease in water supply during future drought.

The report predicts that the water in wells along the river will be composed of larger and larger fractions of wastewater if either casino is built. These wells include the United Water New York Ramapo Valley well field in Rockland County, and municipal well fields serving Suffern, Mahwah, Allendale, Franklin Lakes, Oakland, Pompton Lakes, Ramsey and Wayne.

Further downstream, the North Jersey District Supply Commission and United Water New Jersey pump water from the Ramapo River to the Wanaque and Oradell Reservoirs. Should either of these casinos be built, more wastewater will be pumped to these major water supplies.

The New York Gaming Commission will soon announce which of the 19 casino applicants statewide will receive licenses to proceed. For the sake of our water, we hope they choose wisely.

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