ST. LOUIS

New system to solve polluted water issues

By Adrian Hedden
For The Morning Sun

Residents of one of Gratiot County's rural communities no longer need to fear their water.

Treated water will soon be pumped throughout St. Louis as the city's new water system will be operational by next week, replacing its groundwater wells and contaminated water.

The Gratiot Area Water Authority started the $40 million project in 2012 to pump water thoughout St. Louis on Oct. 1, but the start date was postponed due to communication malfunctions between the treatment plant, and several water pumps.

Utilities Director Keith Risdon said tentatively the system will be turned on next Monday, Oct. 12. Communication is essential between the plant and various sources to ensure safety within the system, he said.

"We're having some communication issues," Risdon said. "It's a computer programming issue

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in our communication systems between the pumps and the plant. They're working hard, pushing, pushing, pushing.

"We need to make sure everything is working. When a pump is active, we need to be able to know."

City Manager Kurt Giles said the system will be up and running next week and the mechanics of the system are all in place. Once the communication system is repaired, workers are confident in its success, he said.

Along with the radio systems between pumps and the plant, Giles said the south transmission main is still being completed, and will be operational during the next week as well.

Regardless of the south main's completion date, he said all residents will have water next week.

"We're a little bit unsure as to the timing of it," Giles said. "We're pretty confident in how it will run, but we just might have to wait a little longer."

Formed in 2012, the Gratiot Area Water Authority was created by the cities of Alma and St. Louis to provide treated water to St. Louis, and replace the town's previous reliance on groundwater wells.

The efforts to treat St. Louis' water were in response to the discovery of contaminants in the ground water in 2005. The water contained in two wells was found to contain para-chlorobenzene sulfonic acid, a byproduct of the insecticide DDT.

Inhalation of the contaminants have been linked to several symptoms including severe respiratory damage and seizures, according to the Center for Disease Control.

"Following exposure to high doses, human symptoms can include vomiting, tremors or shakiness, and seizures," reads a CDC report. Laboratory animal studies showed effects on the liver and reproduction. DDT is considered a possible human carcinogen."

The GAWA was formed specifically to address St. Louis' contaminated water, Giles said.

"We formed the authority as a solution to St. Louis' problem with contaminants in the ground water," he said. "St. Louis was previously all ground water."

The project will add a north transmission main, which was finished last year, along with the south main to be completed next week. Two booster stations will serve each line, respectively.

St. Louis' water treatment plant was upgraded to provide 6 million gallons of capacity, while a new water tower was erected in St. Louis. Previously used wells will remain active to provide additional capacity to the system.

"We'll keep the wells operational, but hopefully not have to use them when the water starts coming from the authority," Giles said. "We'll keep them operational for awhile."

Construction has been ongoing for the past 18 months, and Risdon said the project will provide a stronger source of water for residents, and allow the city to use resources more effectively.

"It's an excellent idea," he said. "What it does is provide us all with a good solid water source. It combines costs and allows us to spread them more effectively."

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