



Sunset over West Lake Reservoir in Danbury.

News-Times/David W. Horple

Plenty of water, if you can get it

By Sarah Passell
News-Times staff

A two-year study of the area's public drinking water resources found water enough to last for the next 40 years but serious weaknesses in some of the supply systems that deliver it to your home.

The multi-volume study, prepared by a consultant for the Water Utilities Coordinating Committee of the Housatonic Water Supply Management Area, also found that some of the region's most important water supplies are surrounded by land uses that put the supplies at high risk of contamination. They include Danbury's major reservoirs and the Croton River and its tributaries.

"I've got plenty of water, but I can't get it everywhere," said William Buckley, head of Danbury's Department of Public Utilities and co-chairman of the committee.

While the study found community well systems abound in the Housatonic area, Buckley said the cost of connecting them into a region-wide water supply network would be prohibitive. Even sections of Danbury lie outside of areas easily served by the city's abundant reservoirs, he said.

He favors tapping Ball Pond Brook in New Fairfield, and, in a pinch, Candlewood Lake, as future water sources. The study supports his position.

This recommendation has set off more thunder in a long-storming controversy over Ball Pond Brook. New Fairfield officials have protested the study's support of the brook as an alternative water supply, and the state criticized both the brook and the lake as alternatives because their waters are rated undrinkable by state standards — both are fed by streams into which treated waste water is discharged upstream.

Members of the Water Utilities Coordinating Committee, a cross-section of water utility officials and planners from throughout the Housatonic region, argue water from the brook and the lake could be brought to federal water quality standards through processes already in use at Danbury's two water treatment plants.

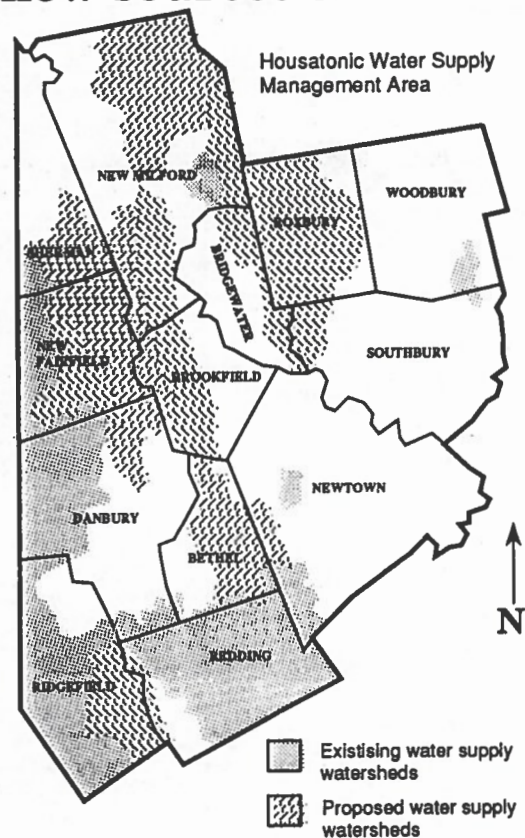
The debate over Ball Pond Brook pits Buckley against New Fairfield and the state Department of Health Services.

"Bill Buckley has been quoted as a sort of imperialist who wants Danbury to be the hub of all water supply," said Frederick Benedickt, a member of the Ball Pond Advisory Committee to the New Fairfield Board of Selectmen. "They absolutely don't need it. The studies have shown groundwater supplies in New Fairfield to be quite adequate."

And improvements to the West Lake Reservoir system in Danbury are Dan-

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Watersheds: new sources of water



From Housatonic Water Supply Management Area study

News-Times Illustration / Kim McNally

Declining supply cuts U.S. water use

WASHINGTON (AP) — While this summer's drought is imposing new water restrictions on many Americans, water use already was down in many areas, due in part to declining supply.

A long-term analysis by the U.S. Geological Survey found that the amount of water drawn from lakes, streams, reservoirs, wells and springs fell 10 percent between 1980 and 1985.

The analysis, the eighth since 1950, was the first to disclose a drop in usage.

The decreases were spread widely across the nation, with a majority of states reporting less water use during 1985 than in 1980, said Wayne Solley, a Survey hydrologist and senior author of the report.

Spot sampling during the current drought indicates some increases in use of water from various sources, but the agency said it did not have enough information to make national estimates. It took two years to compile all the data for the 1985 analysis.

Reporting that information from the first half of this decade, the agency said a number of factors likely contributed to the decline in water use — not the least of which was that previous consumption left less water available.

"Past increased withdrawals of ground water have tended to lower water levels, thereby increasing the energy needed to pump the water, and at the same time decreasing the availability

and sometimes the quality of the water," the Geological Survey reported.

This, in turn, raised the cost of what water was available, forcing users to be more selective, officials noted.

In addition, the Survey concluded that increased use of recycled water, depressed commodity prices and reduced production likely reduced requirements for industrial and irrigation use.

Nationally, the Survey estimated 1985 water use to be about 10 percent less than in 1980, reversing the trend that had seen water use double over the past 35 years.

Water

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bury's best bet for meeting future demand, Benedickt said.

Buckley argues that Ball Pond Brook is the most economical alternative water supply not only for northern sections of Danbury, but for New Fairfield as well.

The regional study was published this summer and is now before the Department of Health Services for review. The DHS planning analyst reviewing it predicted his department would take no action on it until 1989.

"Until we approve the individual water supply plans for the area, we cannot approve the coordinated plan," said the analyst, Gary Johnson.

Only private utilities serving 1,000 customers or more are required to submit supply plans to the state. There are 13 in the Housatonic area, Johnson said.

The study identifies current water sources and supply systems as well as potential future sources, and rates the environmental factors that threaten their quality. It covers Bethel, Brookfield, Danbury, New Fairfield, Newtown, New Milford, Ridgefield, Sherman, Southbury, Woodbury, Roxbury and Bridge-

water. Well contamination is an occasional problem, the study found, but more troublesome to the study com-

mittee is the weak financial footing of many small utilities that operate community well systems. The dearth of money for capital improvements results in repeated maintenance problems that leave customers without running water in power failures and with diminished pressure during periods of peak demand, such as this summer's hot, dry July.

A 1985 state law decreed that every section of the state must prepare a long-term water plan, called an Areawide Supplement, and the 12-town region around the Danbury area was ordered to submit the first.

Johnson said reasons for making this region the guinea pig include a history of service problems among small private water utilities here and statistics showing northern Fairfield and southern Litchfield counties to be the fastest growing area in the state.

Buckley said the region's water utilities have a vested interest in negotiating their own long-term plan, because without it the state could simply impose solutions to water shortages, such as ordering interconnections between utilities or ordering a major utility to supply a community outside its normal service area.

The study proposes no specific cooperation agreements between utilities, but it does set service boundaries for each utility.

Buckley said he has no way to get a lot of his excess water to areas of Danbury where it's in demand. Many small utilities may also be overestimating their supplies, and in some cases don't have the equipment to pipe it to customers, he and Johnson said.

"Some of the reported yields are questionable," Johnson said. "We're finding some are not calculating yields in accord with regulations."

Buckley cited Topstone Hydraulic Co., which serves more than 500 customers in Danbury and Ridgefield and is run by Robert Kaufman.

Although the company owns wells that yield substantial amounts of water, it supplies its Danbury customers entirely with water bought from and piped through the Danbury Water Department, Buckley said.

"Bobby Kaufman says he's got a million gallons a day in his wells, but he's not using them," Buckley said. "If he ever goes belly-up, and I'm ordered to take over his system, how am I going to chlorinate those wells if I need them?"

This hypothetical scenario applies to private water systems throughout the 12-town area, Buckley said. These concerns are behind his support for turning to Ball Pond Brook and Candlewood Lake in the event of widespread increases in water demand as the more economical alternative to outdated well systems.