

Brodhead Watershed director wary of Kalahari sewage plan

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The Brodhead Watershed Association has been following the Kalahari Resorts project closely, and Executive Director Theresa Merli said the association has expressed concern about the plan to pipe and transport sewage from the Pocono Manor area to near the Brodhead Creek in Stroudsburg.

Such a trip could have harmful side effects to the environmental balance in the Pocono Manor area of Tobyhanna Township, she said.

"It could potentially short circuit the general hydrology of the area," she said. "That's what happens when you remove water from one watershed and send it to another."

Wisconsin-based Kalahari Resorts plans to build what its supporters and partners have called a "world-class" resort complex in Pocono Manor. At potential full build-out, it would include a 15-acre water park, 1,200 hotel rooms, 300,000 square feet of convention center space and a 300,000-square-foot indoor water park.

Merli is quick to compliment the resort on its plans for water re-use in the water parks and its plans for stormwater maintenance.

However, by the end of the second phase of Kalahari construction — which isn't scheduled to be done until about fall 2016 — the property plans to build a connection to the soon-to-open Pocono Township central sewer project.

The connection would run from Pocono Manor to Swiftwater. It would then be piped in the system to Stroudsburg, treated and then released into McMichael Creek near Brodhead Creek.

The total water travel would be about 20 miles away from where it originally would be taken from the ground.

That's a somewhat dangerous proposition, Merli said. By taking water out of the ground, it affects the amount of flow in the nearby Indian Run stream.

That could affect the quality of the stream. Indian Run empties into Swiftwater Creek, so the flow of Indian Run could affect the creek as well.

Merli said there are two private sewage systems that empty their treated sewage into Swiftwater Creek — Sanofi Pasteur and Pocono Mountain School District's East Campus.

How much sewage their state-issued sewer permits allow them to put into the creek is based on the creek's flow level. If the flow level of the creek drops, more sewage could be put into the creek than the flow can handle.

"When you have that groundwater withdrawal going to another basin, you have to examine the potential, unintended consequences," Merli said. "With the stress on 'unintended.'"

Merli said representatives from Kalahari and the watershed association have formally met twice to discuss the potential issues. She said Kalahari has been "very open" and "very civil" in the meetings.

"You can't ask for more than that, for them to at least listen to our concerns," she said.

Joseph Mullen, the project's engineer at Pennoni Associates in Wilkes-Barre, said Kalahari has preliminary plans in place to counteract whatever effects moving the ground water will have.