**Great Lakes water shouldn't be for sale to the world**by Ron Dzwonkowski

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At the end of a hot, sticky, stuck-in-traffic week, there's nothing like a plunge into a cool, clean lake, or a waist-deep wade into a rushing river, or just dipping your tootsies in a babbling brook.

There is nothing like water, shimmering in your backyard pool, bubbling up in the bathtub or kneading your neck from a pulsating shower head. Ask the folks in Auburn Hills and Rochester Hills how much they missed it last week.

And there is no water like Great Lakes water. If you have been on a well, or traveled much outside the region, you know. The water's a touch salty or oily or rusty. People drink from the jug in the fridge or the bubbler in the corner.

And what do they say in many foreign lands? Don't drink the water at all.

So it is understandable that enterprising businesspeople want to scoop millions of gallons of water from the lakes, bottle it and sell it in Asia and the Middle East, the fastest-growing nations, places where water is always in short supply.

This should not be allowed. If the Great Lakes are to stay great, they must stay put. Michigan, surrounded by these magnificent sweet water seas, should be leading the charge in their defense.

**Allowing a sale of Great Lakes water will start a run on the lakes that Michigan and other states in this region, with their clout declining in Washington, may not be able to stop.** If water becomes a commodity to be sold, instead of a resource to be protected and managed, the lakes will never be the same. Neither will Michigan.

Not too many years ago, there was talk of the Great Lakes region as the Middle East of the 21st Century, pumping water to the world for a price, as Middle East nations do with oil.

**Big difference: Those Middle East nations don't have any water. You can get along without oil, or get by with less, but not without water**.

And as soon as Great Lakes water is being tankered to Asia or Latin America, there will be precedent to pipe it to Nevada or California, which continue to grow too fast for their own good. **If the people who live there are demanding water, let them move here, build a house, and put up with winter and all the road construction.** That's the price you pay for never being thirsty and having enough pressure to rinse all the soap out of your hair.

The International Joint Commission, the U.S.-Canada governing body of the Great Lakes, is studying the water-sale issue. It's expected to release a report late this summer on what, if anything, can be done. The normally glacial IJC is acting with surprising urgency. Two Canadian provinces, Quebec and Newfoundland, agreed to temporarily delay the start of international bulk-water export operations until the IJC has its say. Northern Michigan U.S.

Rep. Bart Stupak is lining up support in Congress for a moratorium on any sale of Great Lakes water.

But a Vancouver company is going ahead with plans to siphon water from a lake in Alaska for sale in Asia. The Alaskan government approves, so already there will be precedent. **It is doubtful that any of that water, to be marketed Evian-style, will reach the most impoverished people who really need it.**

But more fundamentally, **merely moving water from the haves to the have-nots, either in this country or overseas, will do nothing for water conservation** or the development of alternative water sources, such as desalination. The earth is about 70 percent water, but all but 5 percent of that is sea water, not drinkable. The removal of salt from water is today a very expensive process that is most widely done in Saudi Arabia, which can afford it because it sells so much oil.

There is much more immediate profit to be made -- and potential harm to be done -- by pumping out a lake and moving it, gallon by gallon, somewhere supply can meet demand. Maybe the lake will recover, maybe it won't. Maybe the profiteers will be long gone before we know.

Some pretty impressive forecasters have already said that the wars of the 21st Century are going to be fought over water. In this country, they may be only political wars, but elsewhere, there is fear of real shootin' matches that aren't going to be stopped by the arrival of a tanker filled with Lake Superior H2O.

**The Great Lakes cannot slake the world's thirst, and to tap them for that purpose would leave them irreparably damaged. Instead of eyeing the lakes, policy makers ought to be encouraging water conservation and alternative source development, as they once did with oil.** If the result is a glut of water, that can only portend well for a thirsty world.

Let's hope sensible heads in Washington and Ottawa come to the sensible realization that the Great Lakes are a great thing, right where they are. They ought to be defended at all costs against becoming a well that will either give some other country an excuse not to manage its own resources better, or some developer in Las Vegas the means to build a bigger hotel.