



Columbia's water system at a glance

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COLUMBIA — While cities across the country are dealing with significant challenges to their drinking water systems, the city of Columbia is in pretty good shape, Assistant Water and Light Director Ryan Williams said. He sees no immediate threats to the city's water supply.

Columbia will continue to replace and repair existing infrastructure with money from utility bills and a \$38.9 million bond issue approved by voters in November 2008. Federal loans are available to cities like Columbia through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, but Williams said Columbia has never needed them.

“Our bonding capability allows us access to money at a cheaper rate,” he said.

Williams said a new bond issue could be proposed for the 2017 fiscal year, and that's reflected in the draft capital improvement plan for 2016. But Williams said Water and Light won't make firm plans until a long-term study is funded and approved by the Columbia City Council. The study would look at ways Columbia could reduce its water use over the next several decades.

If the city can cut demand, Williams said, a planned expansion of the water treatment plant might not be necessary. The city began exploring the possibility of a treatment plant expansion in 2012, according to previous Missourian reporting.

The capital improvement plan identifies a total of \$116.9 million worth of water utility projects over the next 10 years, including \$32 million three to five years out for the first phase of a treatment plant expansion.

The city of Columbia draws its drinking water from an array of wells that tap an alluvial aquifer in the Missouri River bottoms near McBaine. The groundwater is treated at the Water Treatment Plant and pumped to three reservoirs in the city. Three water towers ensure adequate capacity and fire flow during times of peak demand.

A more detailed description of the city's drinking water source and its treatment and distribution systems can be found on the Water and Light Department's website.

Columbia's water meets or exceeds standards of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, according to the Water and Light Department. Water testing also exceeds legal requirements. The full results of 2014 water testing can be found here. The results are updated every spring.

Still, concerns about water contamination do exist. The presence of chloride had been detected in wetlands surrounding the city's water treatment plant, according to previous *Missourian* reporting, and Williams said that continues to be a concern. "It's still an ongoing conversation with the community," he said.

Supervising editor is Scott Swafford.