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## State tightens spigot on flow from Lake Michigan: Illinois finally complies with court's 1967 water decree; [Final Edition]

Gary Wisby. **Chicago Sun - Times**. Chicago, Ill.: Feb 22, 2006. pg. 15

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Document types: Business

Section: *News*

Publication title: Chicago Sun - Times. Chicago, Ill.: Feb 22, 2006. pg. 15

Source type: Newspaper

ProQuest document ID: 991311471

Text Word Count 446

Document URL: <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=991311471&sid=11&Fmt=3&clientId=11417&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

### Abstract (Document Summary)

"And I can't count my water before it's certified," said [Dan Injerd] (pronounced IN-yerd). But a U.S. Geological Survey flow gauge at Romeoville gives him enough information to safely say, "It looks like we've finally finished, and are putting a little water into the bank."

Illinois' 3,200 cfs limit was set by a 1980 change in the decree, "and heavy rainstorms got us in hot water in the mid-'90s" by forcing larger withdrawals, Injerd said. To stay out of court, the state agreed in 1996 to pay off its debt by 2019 -- meaning it's now 14 years ahead of schedule.

"Those people need a water supply," Injerd said. "It's nice to know we can accommodate them and still be in compliance with the Supreme Court decree."

### Full Text (446 words)

*Copyright Chicago Sun Times Feb 22, 2006*

Sometime last year, no one yet knows exactly when, Illinois quietly and unofficially finished repaying its huge water debt to Lake Michigan.

Best estimates are that by year's end the state was averaging a withdrawal of at or below 3,200 cubic feet per second. That's 2.1 billion gallons a day -- enough to fill the Sears Tower five times.

The repayment by Illinois, which was overdrawing by 641 cfs in 1993, finally brings it into compliance with a 1967 U.S. Supreme Court decree.

Payback also will give the state some flexibility -- "and for lack of a better word, comfort," Dan Injerd, the state's water management chief, said Tuesday -- in trying to slake the Chicago area's increasing thirst for water.

Illinois won't officially be debt-free until the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers goes through a complicated certification process. It isn't expected to certify even 2002-2003 withdrawals until this summer.

"And I can't count my water before it's certified," said Injerd (pronounced IN-yerd). But a U.S. Geological Survey flow gauge at Romeoville gives him enough information to safely say, "It looks like we've finally finished, and are putting a little water into the bank."

### WATER 'THIEVERY'

Illinois, and especially Chicago, have been accused of water thievery ever since the city reversed the flow of the Chicago River in 1900. The 1967 high court decree resulted from a lawsuit by the seven other Great Lakes states and the U.S. Justice Department.

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now 14 years ahead of schedule.

Less rainfall and lower lake levels have helped, but so has conservation. Chicago alone has been saving 160 million gallons a day compared with 10 years ago "basically by fixing leaking pipes underground," said Environment Commissioner Sadhu Johnston.

Suburbs that want Lake Michigan water must show that their systems leak less than 8 percent. They need sprinkling ordinances and tough restrictions on big water users like carwashes.

#### CUSHION FOR FUTURE GROWTH

Driving withdrawals below the limit will give the state a cushion against future rainstorms. It also will make water available for the rapidly growing Chicago region.

The Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission projects the region's population at 10,034,800 by 2030, up from the 8,091,720 counted by the 2000 census.

"Those people need a water supply," Injerd said. "It's nice to know we can accommodate them and still be in compliance with the Supreme Court decree."

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