Legislative Analysis

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KARST GEOLOGY: PROHIBIT DISPOSAL OR STORAGE IN INJECTION WELL

House Bill 4694 as introduced
Sponsor: Rep. Jason M. Sheppard
Committee: Energy Policy
Complete to 12-2-15

SUMMARY:

The bill would prohibit the Supervisor of Wells from issuing a permit for drilling, or authorizing the use of, an injection well for disposal or storage within an area of Karst geology that is located within 25 miles of the Great Lakes or their connecting waterways.

The bill adds a new section to Part 615, entitled "Supervisor of Wells." Part 615 is within a subchapter of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act that pertains to the regulation of oil and gas wells (MCL 324.61505b, proposed). The act defines "Supervisor of Wells" to mean the Department of Environmental Quality. The prohibition would apply notwithstanding any other provision of Part 615 or rules promulgated under it.

FISCAL IMPACT:

House Bill 4694 would have an indeterminable fiscal impact on the Department of Environmental Quality. It is unknown at present how many permits to drill would be outlawed if HB 4694 becomes law. The purview of the bill regulates a certain topography and it is unclear how many potential wells are or would be located in an areas that qualify as karst geology. Permits to drill range from $300 to $5000. This bill would have no fiscal impact on local units of government.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

"Karst geology" refers to a type of landscape, or terrain, made up of solid rock, but rock that dissolves in water, such as limestone. Karsts therefore resemble Swiss cheese, with holes that can range in size from small holes to underground caves and caverns, and often develop sinkholes like those seen in Florida. Due to their porous nature, karst areas do not offer the same natural filtration system of soil and rock to clean contaminants from surface water as it soaks into the ground that other geologic topographies have. Because of this, water can move through karst areas rapidly. Thus, water from any source that flows into a karst can quickly flow to other water sources with the potential to compromise aquifers (a major source of drinking water).

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