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A NEW PUSH TO PROTECT WATER

Groton Utilities, local communities work together on more aggressive approach

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Groton — Along Interstate 95 through Groton, green signs alert drivers that they are entering the watershed of a public water supply.

What they don't see is how far that source reaches, covering about a quarter of Groton and 18 percent of Ledyard. Groton Utilities, which draws from that source, is now exploring future sources in Preston and carrying the water to an even larger number of customers in

southeastern Connecticut.

A pipeline underneath the Thames River will bring its supply to Montville, which has interconnections to Waterford, Norwich and New London.

Now that so many communities have a stake in keeping their water clean, they are all working with Groton Utilities to create a water protection plan.

The recent session of the General Assembly passed an act providing for drinking water quality management. Sponsored by Rep. Lenny Winkler, R-Groton, the act allows for a plan that could be a

model for the state and beyond, said Gerald Iwan, director of the state Department of Public Health's drinking water section.

"Putting up fences and saying 'Keep Out' is not working anymore," Iwan said.

The concept, which Iwan said comes from the European Union, allows a community to decide how best to protect its water at the source rather than simply following local and state regulations, he said.

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Watershed Facts

- A watershed is the land area that drains water into a river system or other body of water.
 - The Groton Utilities watershed totals 15.4 square miles — 26 percent of Groton and 18 percent of Ledyard.
 - Groton Utilities water is collected from five surface water reservoirs, both natural and manmade, which have a capacity of 2.3 billion gallons of water.
 - Statewide, 33 water companies own and control about 150 reservoirs, covering 16.5 percent of the state.
- According to Groton Utilities and the state Department of Public Health's drinking water section*