

# Testing shows 'abundant water' supply to support LEAP District, state says

September 21, 2023 | [Peter Blanchard](#)

KEYWORDS [BOONE COUNTY](#) / [ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT](#) / [INDIANA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP.](#) / [LAFAYETTE](#) / [WATER](#) / [WATER CONSERVATION](#) / [WEST LAFAYETTE](#)



*The Wabash River in Lafayette, October 2022 (Eric Learned/IBJ photo).*

The initial findings of a central Indiana water study show that an aquifer connected to the Wabash River contains enough water to support a high-tech manufacturing district in Boone County without depriving the Greater Lafayette region of an adequate water supply, according to the [Indiana Economic Development Corp.](#)

The [preliminary results](#) of the long-anticipated study indicate what IEDC officials [had been asserting for nearly a year](#): transporting as much as 100 million gallons of water a day through a 35-mile pipeline to support a planned 9,000 acre or more technology and manufacturing hub is feasible without hurting existing homeowners and businesses that rely on the water supply.

State officials have said the massive water supply is needed to support the advanced manufacturing activities that will take place at the LEAP Lebanon Innovation and Research District. LEAP stands for Limitless Exploration/Advanced Pace.

The study conducted by Texas-based environmental and water resource consulting firm INTERA on behalf of the IEDC shows that "current mapping indicates we will likely see similar results" going forward, the firm's principal water resources hydrologist said.

"Indiana has an incredible network of rivers and aquifers, with abundant water throughout the state," INTERA Vice President Jack Wittman said in a media release. "With the rising demand for water in central Indiana, we are confident that this is a viable water solution that will give cities and towns the needed

access to a new water supply source while protecting those already connected to it and ensuring long-term viability.”

The aquifer testing included exploratory drilling, conducting a geophysical survey of the region, a geologic model of the aquifer, two aquifer pumping tests, and creating a groundwater flow to estimate the amount of water that can be sustainably withdrawn from new wells constructed along the river, according to the IEDC.

The initial study of a 70-acre area above the Wabash Alluvial Aquifer found that the average flow rate of the Wabash River is 2 billion gallons per day, and that the aquifer itself “is deeper and wider” than previous studies indicated.

The next step will be conducting similar testing at a second site to determine “a more thorough yield for the river-aquifer” system, officials said.

“The IEDC is investing in this effort to support the growth of Indiana as a whole,” said Indiana Secretary of Commerce David Rosenberg. “Based on preliminary results from phase one of the study, the work being done is expected to benefit Lafayette, central Indiana, LEAP, and cities and towns along the proposed water pipeline. This is an investment for Hoosiers and will have a transformational return for generations to come.”

The IEDC said it expects the final results of its study to be released before the end of the year.

The agency already has a \$10.2 million contract with Kansas-based Black & Veatch Corp. to plan a 35-mile water pipeline from Lafayette to Lebanon.

Despite lacking an adequate water supply to support advanced manufacturing operations, state officials have said that the LEAP district’s close proximity to a major interstate, [Purdue University](#) and the city of Indianapolis [made it the ideal choice](#) for a high-tech manufacturing district.

But some state lawmakers and local officials from the Lafayette region [have raised serious concerns](#) about the project.

“I’m a huge supporter of the IEDC, but it seems like they put the cart before the horse,” Republican Sen. Ron Alting, who has represented Tippecanoe County since 1998, previously told IBJ. “They should have thought about that water challenge before they started signing businesses to come in.”

But the IEDC’s confidence in the results indicate that it has no plans of slowing down.

State officials have said that numerous companies [are considering major investments](#) in the tech hub. Indiana is one of two Midwestern states [competing for a potential \\$50 billion semiconductor plant](#), and the state is also courting a \$3.2 billion data center project, according to the IEDC.

Subaru CEO Atsushi Osaki [recently told reporters](#) during a meeting in Tokyo that Indiana could become the next location of an electric vehicle production site, though he did not say where in the state it would be located.

In April, Eli Lilly and Co. announced plans to build [a \\$3.7 billion manufacturing site](#) in the LEAP District that will result in an estimated 700 new jobs. The pharmaceutical giant will serve as the anchor tenant for the district.

**Editor's note:** Please note our [updated comment policy](#) that will govern how comments are moderated.