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Merrimack firm gets DES water resources plan contract

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The Department of Environmental Services has begun an ambitious project to develop a single plan to manage water resources in the state.

The contract was awarded to a Merrimack engineering firm.

Eileen Pannetier, founder of environmental engineering firm CEI, said her company was awarded the \$75,000 phase I contract to develop a water resources plan.

The 100-page report she will produce will draw on existing data from U.S. Geological Survey and relative databases on aquifer resources, storm water recharge systems, available drinking water and wastewater treatment systems.

The purpose is to provide an inventory of existing resources and capabilities to enable the state, and more specifically the State Water Resources Committee, to know how it can best expend resources at a time when development is rapidly accelerating in the southern tier.

"It is somewhat of a primer, an inventory, to determine what we now know, and how the state can best spend time and resources," Pannetier said.

The report is a kind of state-of-the-union on water resources in the state and will be used to later develop a Phase II report that includes recommendations for the state. The second contract has not yet gone out to bid.

Pannetier said she is reassured the state is taking steps to look at its existing systems and resources.

Few states had such comprehensive plans, spare Utah and Delaware, and New Hampshire has one of the more thoughtful DES agencies, she said.

"The state is growing very rapidly, and it is a good time to do more sufficient planning for water resources that gives decision-makers a basis for their decisions."

DES official Sarah Pillsbury said in a statement, "The plan will help ensure that N.H. residents receive a high level of water quality and sufficient quantity as well as the necessary protection of essential environmental resources."

CEI was chosen for their "focus on water resources projects, especially areas such as projecting water demand, evaluating water supply alternatives, hydraulic modeling, stream-flow assessment, and wastewater and stormwater management," she said.

"We have on-the-ground training, and can help DES to bridge the gap (between the intent of the project and the engineering in the field)," Pannetier said.

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