

Assistance Available to Rural Communities from Rural Development

By Doug Buresh, Circuit Rider

I have been working for the Nebraska Rural Water Association for nearly seven months now and have thoroughly enjoyed it. There is a great bunch of people working here. NeRWA is a non-profit, service-oriented organization that provides technical assistance and training programs for water and wastewater systems throughout the state of Nebraska. I have also thoroughly enjoyed meeting many of the fine folks who work to keep their water and wastewater systems operating 24/7. I apologize to those systems I have not been out to visit yet. I hope to meet many more of you in the coming months.

Let me remind you that ARRA funds through USDA Rural Development are still available through August 2010 or until funds are exhausted. The following is a Water and Waste Factsheet taken from the Nebraska USDA-RD website at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ne/water&waste_disposal_program.htm.

Water and Environmental Programs (WEP) provides loans, grants and loan guarantees for drinking water, sanitary sewer, solid waste and storm drainage facilities in rural areas and cities and towns of 10,000 or less. Public bodies, non-profit organizations and recognized Indian tribes may qualify for assistance. WEP also makes grants to non-profit organizations to provide technical assistance and training to assist rural communities with their water, wastewater and solid waste problems.

The purpose of the Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program is...to develop and repair drinking water and sanitary sewer systems, including solid waste disposal and storm drainage in rural areas. Funding covers water and waste development costs such as construction, improvements, equipment, facilities, land rights, engineering, fees, etc.

Eligible applicants include...public entities such as municipalities, counties, special-purpose districts, Indian tribes and nonprofit organizations.

Terms and Conditions...

The term of the loan is for 40 years or for the useful life of the security.

Interest rates are comparable to current municipal bond rates and are based on the median household income of the service area.

A test of credit is required.

Grant assistance will be considered once the user costs exceed a certain level of the community's median household income.

Government owned bonds, revenue bonds, notes, mortgages, etc. will be used for security.

Eligible areas include unincorporated rural areas, cities and towns with populations of 10,000 and less.

Systems are generally expected to be self-sufficient.

Other assistance offered includes rural water circuit rider technical assistance, technical assistance and training grants, and solid waste management grants.

Potential applicants along with their consulting engineers are encouraged to utilize the Nebraska Water and Waste Common Pre-Application Process.

- Under the Nebraska Water and Waste Common Pre-Application Process, a simplified single pre-application is submitted and considered jointly by USDA Rural Development, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality and the Nebraska Department of Health Regulation and Licensure to determine the best combination of funding for the proposed project.

Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants assist rural communities that have had a significant decline in quantity or quality of drinking water and may be required to have a Presidential emergency designation.

The maximum amount of grant awarded is \$500,000 when a significant decline in quantity or quality of water has occurred within two years or \$75,000 to make emergency repairs and replacement of facilities on existing systems.

Grants may be made for 100 percent of project cost.

Grants can be made to rural areas, towns, and cities with a population of 10,000 or less and a median household income not in excess of 100 percent of the state's non-metropolitan median household income.

Historically, this program has not been funded by Congress each fiscal year. You should contact your local USDA Rural Development Office to check on the availability of funding.