



Wisconsin Rural Water Journal

Fall 2025

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Reunions: You Either Love Them
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September Winds

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Dean Bergstrom,
WRWA President, Cumberland

Message from the President

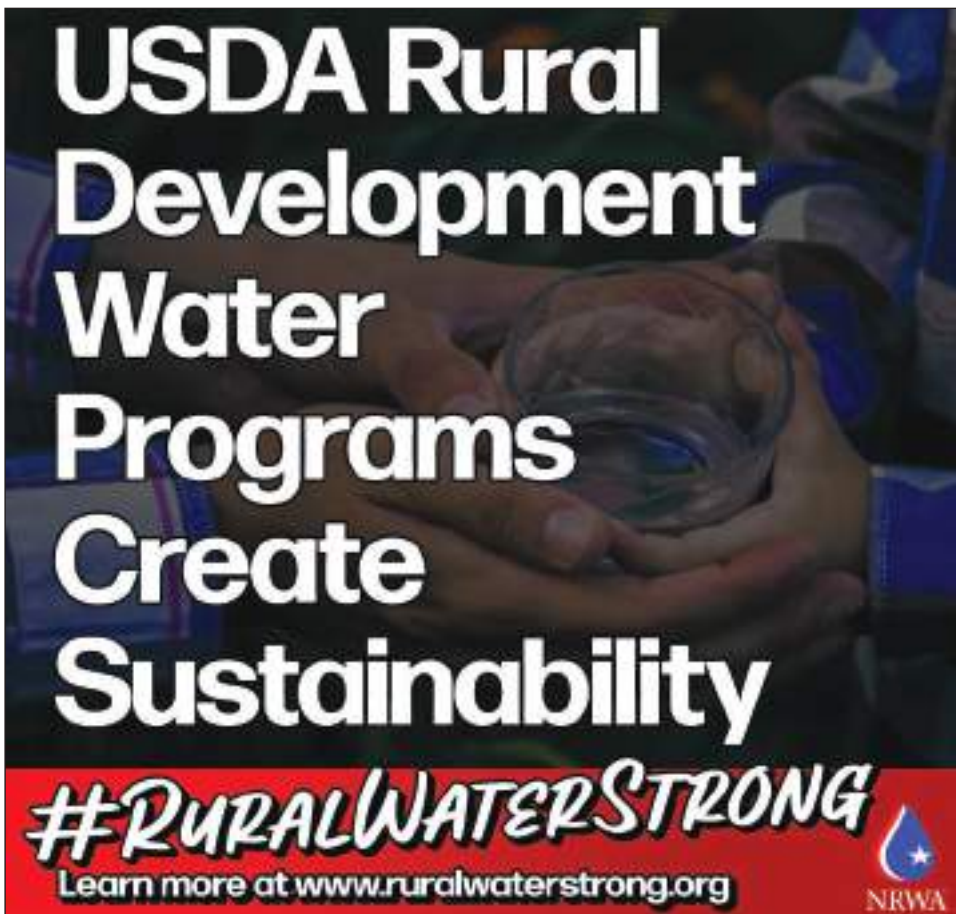
I am not sure where summer went, but as I write this, we just had the 2025 WRWA Outdoor Expo, which was a huge success. We had 872 attendees, 103 vendor booths and we have had a lot of donations to help build the new Outdoor Expo Facility. I would like to say thank you to all of the WRWA staff with putting on another great show! They work hard to make it one of, if not the biggest, one-day shows in the state of Wisconsin.

It is amazing the support WRWA gets from members and our vendors. Without everyone's help, building our outdoor hands-on facility would not be possible. We are hoping to someday to be the first National Water College right here in the great state of Wisconsin. Of course, that will only be possible with financial support from our federal government. All across the country, there is getting to be a shortage of operators and trained operators, so we hope that this will be a solution to this nation-wide problem.

While speaking about funding, there is a FY2026 Agriculture Bill that needs everyone's support. If everyone could send an email to your congressman in support of this bill. Tell them to support the \$500 million of base funding for USDA Water and Environmental Programs, with Congressionally Directed Spending funded above that level, not out of it. With this funding it creates jobs, attracts businesses, and keeps communities viable. Tell them Wisconsin's rural communities deserve better and mention your system and all the challenges you face. If you don't know who your congressman's contact information, you can your email's to Chris Groh at WRWA and he will get it to the right representative. All together we can make a difference!

Next month a lot of your WRWA Board and staff will be attending the NRWA National Conference in New Orleans. I'm sure this will be a big topic there. We will be there representing the State of Wisconsin.

I hope you all have a great fall, and until next time, stay safe. *Dean*



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WRWA Mission:

Assisting, educating
and representing
our members in the
Water & Wastewater
Industries.



Chris Groh,
WRWA Executive Director

Message from the Executive Director

Your Public Health Role

I know I have told you about your voice in how the government can mean a lot, but sometimes in our work, we, as water professionals, face moments that define not just our year ahead, but the future of rural water for generations. We're at one of those crossroads right now, let's speak plainly about what's at stake.

The House of Representatives has proposed FY2026 funding for USDA's Water and Environmental Programs that would devastate rural water infrastructure development. Their mark of \$346 million – with \$109 million carved out for Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS), what many still call earmarks – leaves just \$237 million for the entire nation. That is the lowest funding level in decades for the programs that built and sustain rural America's water systems. And after the mandated Congressional set-asides, most states will receive less than \$1 million in total **grant** funding. One million dollars. For an entire state. That's not just inadequate – it's a crisis.

When **grants** dry up, Rural Development can't blend financing to make projects affordable. Without the loan-to-grant ratio that has worked for decades – historically about 70/30 – water rates skyrocket. Projects stall. Communities that desperately need safe water get pushed to the back of the line – again. Those of you who have recently upgraded your plants; would you have been able to afford to upgrade if your funding did not include a grant?

Let's be clear: rural America helped elect this administration, and water and wastewater services remain one of the last truly bipartisan areas in our great country. Our funding request directly supports the Trump administration's key objectives.

The first term Trump administration's USDA invested a record \$40 billion in rural communities in 2020. This isn't a partisan issue – it's about keeping America competitive and ensuring rural communities aren't left behind in any economic boom that may be ahead.

Through our "Rural Water Strong" campaign, over 8,000 rural water leaders from every state have pledged to support USDA Rural Development's Water and Environmental Programs. These aren't just numbers – they're water operators, board members, mayors, and community leaders who understand that WEP funding is the lifeline for rural America. With your help, we have convinced the powers in DC to scratch in a little more money into the grants portion of the RD funding, but it is tenuous and probably not enough.

We need every one of those 8,000 voices – and thousands more – speaking up RIGHT NOW. The Senate is drafting their version of the FY2026 Agriculture Appropriations Bill as you read this. What they decide in the coming weeks will determine whether rural communities thrive or merely survive.

PLEASE TAKE THE Rural Water Strong pledge and consider calling or emailing your congressman, here's what to say:

1. Support \$500 million base funding for USDA Water and Environmental Programs – with Congressionally Directed Spending (earmarks) funded ABOVE that level, not carved from it

2. Rural water infrastructure drives rural economies – we create jobs, attract businesses, and keep communities viable

3. The House level is unacceptable – it abandons rural America when we need support most

4. Water infrastructure is essential for the Trump administration's priorities – none of it happens without adequate water and wastewater systems

5. Wisconsin's rural communities deserve better – mention your specific system and the challenges you face

If you don't know your congressman's contact information, you can send me your email, and I will get it to your representative. I realize that calling can be hard, but a well-crafted email means a lot, even though you may think "what does my opinion mean?" If we put thousands of those opinions together, they mean a lot!

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Chris



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We get letters and emails!

We'd love to hear from you...

Rural Water Employees,

We would like to send a special thanks to Brooke & Dan who came out to help the Village on June 18, 2025. We appreciate all of the hard-working employees that Rural Water has. They are always there to help us answer our water questions and to deal with the challenges that a small rural village faces.

Thank you so much.

Village of Bay City

To Whom It May Concern,

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge how instrumental the Wisconsin Rural Water Association (WRWA) has been in supporting our utility operations through their loaner equipment program.

Specifically, the availability of blow-off valves and leak detection equipment has been an invaluable resource. These tools have helped us improve system maintenance, respond to customer concerns more efficiently, and better manage water loss. Without WRWA's support, many of these tasks would be more difficult and costly for a small system like ours.

We greatly appreciate WRWA's continued dedication to helping rural utilities like ours succeed.

Sincerely,

Ryan James, Village of Gresham – Water/Wastewater Operator

Hi Renee,

On behalf of the City of Altoona, I'd like to express our sincere appreciation for the outstanding support provided by Andrew Aslesen through the Source Water Protection Program. Andrew played a key role in helping us develop our wellhead protection plan and was instrumental in guiding us through the process of getting it formally adopted as a city ordinance.

Andrew was a pleasure to work with—knowledgeable, responsive, and always willing to go the extra mile. His assistance not only helped us protect our drinking water supply but also ensured that the plan met the necessary technical and regulatory standards. Thanks to his help, our community is in a much better position to safeguard our wells for the long term.

I would highly recommend that any municipality or system interested in developing a wellhead protection program reach out to Andrew and take advantage of this valuable resource.

Thank you to WRWA and the Source Water Protection Program for continuing to provide this kind of hands-on, local support to communities across Wisconsin. Your work truly makes a difference.

Sincerely,

Scott Kwick, Public Works Director, City of Altoona, Wisconsin

Hi Renee,

I'd like to say a thank you to Annetta Rueden and Matt Rettler. Annetta came down to introduce herself, and I had showed her a few things, which she is going to contact me about.

Then Matt Rettler came to do the energy audit, he was very helpful and informative.

Keith Leitzinger, Village of Bloomington

To Whom it May Concern,

On behalf of the Village of Trempealeau, I would like to extend our sincere appreciation for the outstanding support and technical assistance we have received from Dan Wundrow, one of your Municipal Water Circuit Riders.

Dan has been a tremendous resource to our utility. He consistently brings industry best practices, thoughtful guidance, and a collaborative approach to every interaction. His help with reviewing and interpreting water statistics for our year-end reporting has given us confidence that we are staying aligned with regulatory expectations and maintaining transparency in our operations. Having another set of expert eyes on our data has been extremely valuable.

Dan has also provided meaningful connections to other utilities that led to a substantial financial benefit for our community. Through one of those connections, we were able to purchase a significant quantity of used water meters at a greatly reduced price. These types of opportunities help small utilities like ours remain fiscally responsible while still making necessary upgrades to our systems.

The WRWA's continued support of communities across Wisconsin, especially through programs like the Circuit Rider program, has a real and measurable impact. We are grateful not only for the help we have received, but also the chance to show our support for keeping these vital programs funded and available to other communities.

Thank you for the work you do and for the dedicated team you have assembled.

Sincerely,

Isaac Pooler, CPA

Village Administrator/Finance Director

Village of Trempealeau & Trempealeau Municipal Utilities

NRWA,

Dan is doing a great job and enjoy our informative visits when he comes around. With all the new legislation happening, it's nice to have someone from WRWA to keep the communities up to speed and in compliance. Keep up the good work.

Joel Weber, Director of Public Works, City of Bayfield

Dear Renee,

I wanted to send you this email thanking Tony Roche, Wastewater Technician from Wisconsin Rural Water Association, for teaching me everything about HACH TNT843 phosphorous test method.

Our previous lead operator took a different job, so that put me as the operator in charge. I reached out to Tony, and he was able to make it to our facility within a matter of days. Tony is very knowledgeable and great to work with. Anytime I had a question, he was on it!

Tony does a great job of making contact time to time just checking in to see how operations are going and to see if I have any questions. As a newly advanced operator, it is a great feeling to know I have someone to count on if I have technical questions. I just wanted to say thanks again for all your hard work and dedication.

I would recommend other operators to use the resources Wisconsin Rural Water has to offer!

Thanks,

John Rickleff, Prairie du Chien WWTF

Thank you to the Wisconsin Rural Water Association!

The Village of Cazenovia lost our long-time Public Works Director when he passed unexpectedly earlier this year. As a new Director came on and worked on learning our water system, we realized we needed some help. It was suggested to us to call the Wisconsin Rural Water Association. After speaking with Annie Van Rueden over the phone, we knew we had contacted the correct place. Annie is a wealth of information and let us know of the services Rural Water is able to provide. I called Annie on a Thursday, and by Tuesday of the following week she was able to be in our community and working with us hands-on. What an unbelievable great resource we have with Rural Water in a location as remote and as small as Cazenovia.

We will be contacting Rural Water again in the future as we continue to serve the needs of our village.

Thank you!

Rita Bulin, Village of Cazenovia

To all the WRWA staff:

Your organization plays such a major part in helping small communities like ours transition through difficult and trying times.

Recently, Todd helped find a leak which we were unable to locate. He used his knowledge and expertise and found the leak very quickly. Thank You Todd!

Your staff continues to amaze all on how you organize and execute the Annual Technical Conferences and Outdoor Expo's. They continue to grow and get better each year. You should all be commended on a job well done.

Andrew recently visited the local school and shared his expertise of the "water cycle" with the kids there. Prior to that, Andrew was very instrumental in preparing a wellhead protection plan for the Village and Tony has done an energy audit of both our water and wastewater departments.

WRWA has been very supportive in teaching and instructing, helping and guiding our small community over the years. Thank You so much for your continued help and support.

Scott Popelka, Village of White Lake

I would like to write this letter about the help that WRWA has been for the Village of Albany this last year and for the last 20 years that I have been with the Village. When I started, I was hired by the superintendent that hired me and passed away that night. I got a call the next day from the village president that told me about his passing. I was able to leave the job that I was working for early so I could start as soon as possible. At the village at the time there was one person that had been there for many years but didn't want to take charge. He called WRWA and they came down and helped with getting everything lined up, making sure we would get things done and all the testing and the paperwork filled out right. We could call anytime if we had any questions and helped me. The one that became Superintendent did not know how to and what we needed to get our State Water and Sewer Certification done. WRWA came in with one call and pointed us in the right direction. Over the years they have come down and helped find a water break and we had a hard time finding. Annie was very good help that very cold day. WRWA helped me get through paperwork that I was having trouble with for the Villages USDA loan for a New Standpipe and Replacement of Watermains. WRWA has and will always be for the communities of the State of Wisconsin their funding should never be cut or anything for what they do for the State and the communities that one sees but the one that they every day.

Thank you,

Lonnie W. Gill, Superintendent of Public Works, Village of Albany

Hello,

I want to express my appreciation for the rural water circuit rider program and to thank Annetta Von Rueden of the Wisconsin Rural Water Association for her recent visit.

Over the years WRWA has provided technical assistance and guidance to our water and wastewater systems along with training opportunities.

John Hauth, Public Works Director

City of Lancaster

The Village of Bay City appreciates all the help that has been received from WRWA, they have helped us with many things and made trips here to help us with reports. We are in the process of completing drilling a new well and they have made multiple trips to meet with us on how they feel we need to proceed and help us to know what type of testing we need to do for test sites.

We have been able to borrow tools from them, and they have really helped us cut cost with not having to buy those tools. The WRWA staff has come to our offices and helped us with completing state reports that we have not had to report on before.

WRWA has been an extraordinary help to us here at the Village of Bay City. Thank You so much for being there for us. I hope that the state funding continues for you as this entity is just so important for rural Wisconsin, America!!

Thank-You!

All of the Village of Bay City Wisconsin Staff

Continued on page 7



Reunions

You Either Love Them or Hate Them

Kelly Thomas,
WRWA Technical Assistance Director

I like to think of our Outdoor Expo as a kind of reunion. A gathering of water and wastewater operators from every corner of the state.

Family reunions can be tricky. You don't really get to choose whether you see your relatives—there's always that one or two family members who rub you the wrong way. But if you skip the gathering, you risk getting the cold shoulder until the next one. Sometimes you'll even face a few passive-aggressive comments about why you missed it.

Class reunions are a little different. You definitely have the choice of whether or not to attend. For your spouse, though, it can be awkward since they likely don't know most of your classmates. Still, it's always fun to reminisce about the "good old days" of high school or college. Somehow, the old cliques and clubs always seem to re-form at these events. And, just like family reunions, there are always a few people you'd rather not see—but that's all part of the experience, isn't it?

At any reunion, sometimes the best thing to do is sit back and people watch. Maybe you'll notice that one person who never misses a year, or spot someone you haven't seen in ages. You may also find yourself wondering about those who are missing. Did they retire, take a new job, or, sadly, pass away without anyone sharing the news?

I like to think of our Outdoor Expo as a kind of reunion. A gathering of water and wastewater operators from every corner of the state.

Vendors from across the Midwest reunite in Plover, WI, making this operator's reunion one of the largest single-day events in the region. In just one day, attendees can earn six hours of continuing education credits by participating in training sessions on safety, infrastructure improvements, and lessons learned from real emergency situations faced by members of our "family."

This past August, more than 870 water professionals came together in Plover to learn, connect, and enjoy each other's company, often gaining valuable education without even realizing it. We also hosted 103 vendors eager to showcase their products, equipment, and new technologies to help communities run more efficiently and safely. The day was full of laughter, great food, and the chance to win prizes.

On behalf of the WRWA staff, I want to sincerely thank each and every one of you for attending our Annual Outdoor Expo. It was a tremendous success, and we couldn't have done it without you. Thank you—and we'll see you next year!

Stay safe, stay healthy, *Kelly*

Continued from page 5



We get letters and emails!

We'd love to hear from you...

Hello,

My name is Tony Steffen, I work with MCO on behalf of the Village of St. Cloud. In early 2025, we discovered that the village had a significant water leak that was not surfacing. After using the resources, we had and could not find the leak, we contacted WRWA. On June 11th WRWA associate Todd Weich came to the village to help us out. Todd helped us sound out hydrants then eventually pressure test and correlate a section and determine where the leak was located. A week later the village dug up the leak, replaced the damaged service line and are seeing a great reduction in pumping amounts.

The Village of St. Cloud and myself would like to thank Todd for all his time, efforts, and help with finding this leak. You were a great resource, and we were glad you could help us!

Sincerely,

Tony Steffen, Operations Specialist, Midwest Contract Operations

Dear Wisconsin Rural Water Association Team,

I am writing to extend my sincere appreciation for the outstanding training services provided through your program. Most specially, to commend Kelly Thomas for the exceptional experience I had during my recent training. Kelly's professionalism, knowledge, and dedication were clearly evident throughout the training.

Throughout our time preparing, Kelly consistently demonstrated flexibility, even accommodating sessions on shorter notices when needed. Kelly was prepared to answer question I threw at him during the training session, and he always knew the best response. Moreover, Kelly's personable nature made the learning environment that encouraged my curiosity and involvement. Leaving our exam training session, I felt well-informed and prepared, which significantly boosted my confidence.

What stood out most was Kelly's ability to break down complex systems using relatable analogies was incredibly helpful, especially since I came into the training with almost no prior knowledge on water systems. Thanks to his thorough teaching styles, I was not only able to grasp the material but also passed the exam on my first attempt! His depth of knowledge and passion for the industry truly shone through the lesson. It was clear that Kelly doesn't just do his job, he enjoys it, and that passion makes a significant difference for learners.

I want to offer a huge thank you to the Wisconsin Rural Water Association for establishing and maintaining such a valuable program. It's efforts like these that open doors for individuals to grow professionally and help ensure the continued excellence of water systems in Wisconsin. I feel privileged and extremely appreciative to have been a part of it.

Warm regards,

Mackenzie Leibiger, EHS Coordinator, Techniplas

Dear those from WRWA,

I deeply appreciate being awarded your scholarship. As someone going into college, being able to finance school has proven itself to be quite the challenge, so all of the help counts. Your donation is not only substantial, but something I'm very grateful for, since it helps to chip away at that hefty cost of entry. Again, thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Caleb Retcheski

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LIFE IN A STABILIZATION POND

Tony Roche,
WRWA Wastewater Trainer

Hello Wisconsin! We are in the second week of August, and the dog days of summer are officially here! Garden tomatoes are going crazy, the days are starting to get shorter, and it is almost time for football season! Yeehaw! Now let's talk about something even more exciting than that – stabilization ponds!

Stabilization ponds are non-aerated basins that provide wastewater treatment and stabilization through natural processes. Since natural processes take a significant amount of time, stabilization pond systems have long detention times (greater than 150 days) to ensure adequate treatment. These systems rely on gravity settling, aerobic bacteria, anaerobic bacteria, algae, and a host of other micro and macro-organisms to get the job done.

This large and complex community of life in a stabilization ponds is interconnected. Members of the microbiological community work together and interact with each other in a way which is mutually beneficial. Algae aren't quite plants – but they share similar traits. Both require nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus and create their own energy through a process called photosynthesis.

Photosynthesis is the natural process whereby algae create their own energy. Algal cells that contain chlorophyll utilize carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the presence of sunlight to produce simple carbohydrates. These carbohydrates are used for energy and allow the algae to grow. An important byproduct of photosynthesis is oxygen. This is very beneficial in wastewater treatment ponds because aerobic bacteria

Since natural processes take a significant amount of time, stabilization pond systems have long detention times (greater than 150 days) to ensure adequate treatment

will then use oxygen to break down organic matter. Breaking down organic matter ultimately reduces BOD in wastewater systems and helps to create clean final effluent. When bacteria are using oxygen through the process of respiration, carbon dioxide is given off as a byproduct. This carbon dioxide is then used by the algae and the cycle repeats itself. That's pretty darn cool!

The consumption and release of carbon dioxide also plays a significant role in pH fluctuations in pond systems. When carbon dioxide mixes with water it creates carbonic acid and lowers the pH level. During the day, when the sun is out, algae are photosynthesizing like mad and consuming lots of carbon dioxide. This drop in carbon dioxide levels means pH levels will rise throughout the day and will be greatest at dusk. During the night microorganisms are respiring, consuming oxygen and releasing carbon dioxide. This in turn will lower pH levels and pH will be lowest at sunrise.



Life in a pond system is complex and is ever changing. If you have any questions about your pond, or if you want a hand sludge-judging your pond please give me a call! Enjoy the rest of your summer and hopefully we will see you at our Outdoor Expo on August 28th!

Tony



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Vince Matarrese,
President, Advanced Safety Technology, Inc.

Most cases public employees are using them for maintenance, repairs and hanging decorations.

In 2020 (OSHA), there were **161 fatal work** injuries from which ladders were the primary source. This was a 5.8 percent decline from 2019 (171 deaths).

There were 105 deaths specifically from movable ladders in 2020 and 5 deaths from fixed ladders.

BY THE NUMBERS:

22,710 workplace injuries from ladders.

- ✓ 5,790 ladder injuries in installation, maintenance, and repair jobs.
- ✓ 5,370 ladder injuries in construction and extraction jobs.
- ✓ 3,160 ladder injuries in service jobs.

Some examples of improper ladder use include:

- Overreaching while on the ladder.
- Carrying objects while going up or down the ladder, such as tools, buckets, etc.
- Applying excessive force while working on the ladder.

Most cases public employees are using them for maintenance, repairs and hanging decorations. And, NO, you can not use a ladder in a loader bucket!

Are you inspecting your ladder?

To ensure safety and serviceability the following precautions on the care of ladders shall be observed:

- ✓ Ladders shall be maintained in good condition at all times, the joint between the steps and side rails shall be tight, all hardware and fittings securely attached, and the movable parts shall operate freely without binding or undue play.
- ✓ Metal bearings of locks, wheels, pulleys, etc., shall be frequently lubricated.
- ✓ Frayed or badly worn rope shall be replaced.
- ✓ Safety feet and other auxiliary equipment shall be kept in good condition to insure proper performance.

- ✓ Ladders shall be inspected frequently and those, which have developed defects, shall be withdrawn from service for repair or destruction and tagged or marked as "Dangerous, Do Not Use".
- ✓ Rungs should be kept free of grease and oil.
- ✓ Follow OSHA 29 CFR 1910.333(c) for work practices to be used when work is performed on or near electric circuits.

The following safety precautions shall be observed in connection with the use of ladders:

- Portable rung and cleat ladders shall, where possible, be used at such a pitch that the horizontal distance from the top support to the foot of the ladder is one-quarter of the working length of the ladder (the length along the ladder between the foot and the top support).

All extension ladders must be tied off at the top and secured to prevent displacement.

- When climbing the ladder to tie it off, another person must hold it rigidly.
- If it is not possible to tie it off, someone must hold it while in use, and it must be taken down between uses.
- Step ladders are not to be used as straight ladders to access elevated positions.

PUBLIC EMPLOYERS

State of Wisconsin, Department of Safety & Professional Services, SPS 332.22 Portable ladders [29 CFR 1910.25 and 1910.26]. These are department rules in addition to the requirements in 29 CFR 1910.25 and 1910.26:

- (1) APPLICATION. The requirements of 29 CFR 1910.25 and
- (2) No portable ladder may be used to gain access to a roof, floor or platform, unless the top of the ladder extends at least 3 feet above the point of support.

Note: Further information relating to construction and use of portable ladders is available in the following American National Standards

Institute (ANSI) standards: A14.1, for wood ladders; A14.2, for metal ladders; and A14.5, for reinforced-plastic ladders. 1910.26 also apply to portable fiberglass ladders.

Stepladders shall be of three types:

- Type I - Industrial Stepladder
 - 3 to 20 feet for heavy duty, such as utilities, contractors, and industrial use.
- Type II - Commercial Stepladder
 - 3 to 12 feet for medium duty, such as painters, offices, and light industrial use.
- Type III - Household Stepladder (No Type III ladders in the workplace)
 - 3 to 6 feet for light duty, such as light household use.

Ladders must be marked with ladder size, type, maximum length, number of sections (if appropriate), highest standing level, total length of sections (if applicable), model number, manufacturer's name, manufacturer's location, and date of manufacture.

- Usage guidelines and other warning statements must also be placed on the ladders in specific locations depending on ladder type.



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PSC WATER RATE INCREASE ORDERS ISSUED

6/1/2025 – 8/31/2025

UTILITY NAME	ORDER ISSUED	OVERALL% INCREASE
Town of Farmington Sanitary District	6/9	2.82%
Luck Municipal Water Utility	6/24	93.64%
Grafton Water and Wastewater Utility	6/26	45.6%
South Milwaukee Water Utility	7/1	22.29%
Loganville Municipal Water and Sewer Utility	7/3	21.6%
Durand Municipal Water Utility	7/7	63.8%
Village of Bay City Utility	7/16	23.48%
Blue River Municipal Water and Sewer Utility	7/16	21.48%
Dousman Water Utility	7/28	39.19%
Jamestown Sanitary District 2	7/28	44.49%
Brodhead Water and Light Commission	7/31	34.08%
Sheboygan Tn of Sanitary Dist #3	8/8	71.83%
Pulaski Water Department	8/14	39.36%
Argyle Municipal Electric and Water Utility	8/20	93.76%
Village of Maiden Rock Municipal Water Utility	8/22	79.17%

PSC CONSTRUCTION AUTHORIZATIONS ISSUED

6/1/2025 – 8/31/2025

UTILITY NAME	ORDER ISSUED	CONSTRUCTION COST
Algoma Sanitary District No. 1	8/21	\$4,180,000
Brown Deer Water Public Utility	6/27	\$21,600
Village of Fox Point Water Utility	7/18	\$582,701
Glendale Water Utility	7/23	\$1,558,439
Green Bay Water Utility	6/4	\$686,000
La Crosse Water Utility	6/10	\$5,050,155
Village of Menomonee Falls Water Utility	8/28	\$20,000
Middleton Municipal Water Utility	7/1	\$2,500,000
City of Oshkosh Water Utility	6/30	\$45,500,00
Stanley Municipal Waterworks	8/20	\$8,568,893
Suamico Water Utility	6/16	\$9,490,000
Village of Waterford Water and Sewer Utility	7/23	\$2,900,000
Village of Whitefish Bay Water Utility	7/22	\$978,235



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Half page	\$370	\$1,265	\$575	\$1,965
Quarter page	\$270	\$860	\$400	\$1,400
Business card	\$200	\$600	\$335	\$1,000

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WORKFORCE RETIREMENTS



Annie Von Rueden,
WRWA Water Circuit Rider

Over the past few years, the water and wastewater industry has experienced challenges filling open positions for operators, managers and clerks, especially when a license is required for the position. You may have seen this in your own utility or have heard it from neighboring utilities. You could have started counting down the years long before the problem becomes something that must be addressed. The issues that have led up to this employment gap in the industry are wide-ranging that are going to impact systems across the entire state.

Demographics. One of the reasons the Baby Boomer generation – those born between 1946 and 1964 has reached retirement age. When the first of these baby boomers began entering the workforce in 1964, then the oldest of them became eligible for full Social Security retirement in 2012. Some of those baby boomers might have chosen to work beyond full retirement age, but 10+ years into retirement, there are fewer and fewer of those boomers left and more of their younger colleagues joining them in retirement at a fast rate.

Increased demand is a second reason. As populations increase, we shift to larger or smaller towns, and so does the demand for water and wastewater. They all need to drink, bathe, brush their teeth, and cook. As a result, water utilities have been constructing and upgrading billions of dollars' worth of infrastructure throughout the state to accommodate the water customers and the industries within their municipality. This creates a lot of pressure on both the supply of workers, and the demand for water.

Automation and technology can save a lot of staff time and in doing so can help lighten some of the workforce shortages. One example is the use of SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition). SCADA

Automation and technology can save a lot of staff time and in doing so can help lighten some of the workforce shortages

systems, software programs that allow operators to view their entire water system to determine well operations, tank levels, system pressures, and much more allowing for monitoring an entire system from a computer or smartphone.

AMI (Automatic Meter Reading) has been a great innovation for water utilities. AMI uses repeaters or antennas strategically placed throughout the system to download meter readings periodically. On billing day, the readings can be downloaded from the cloud to the billing department and processed. Whereas previously it was required of the operator to drive the entire system with meter reading equipment that downloaded readings as it passed by, and forward the downloaded readings onto the billing software to be processed by the utility billing department.

How about a public relations push? A better job of informing our community of the work we all do, and the processes of clean, safe drinking water is delivered to the customers homes and businesses. Pamphlets on awareness, posters at Village Hall, or billing drop boxes. Seek out opportunities to partner with school districts and visit with primary and high school students to discuss the importance of potable drinking water and a working system in which to collect and treat wastewater. Field days to the water and wastewater treatment plants are great opportunities for hands on learning. Given the workforce challenges the industry is facing, we need to put a special focus on those preparing to join the workforce.

There is no single answer when tackling a labor shortage of this magnitude. Our industry will always need trained, certified and talented operators. If we keep the door of opportunity open, the right operator will come along.

Have a great fall. Be safe out there. *Annie*

"OTM/NN SMALL WATER SYSTEMS" - Emergency Response Plan 2025"

Good morning,

With Fall right around the corner, I would like to remind everyone to keep their Emergency Response Plans up to date. No matter the situation, **an up to date Emergency Response Plan is a key tool for any water operator to have during those stressful emergency situations.** Anything from power outages to well failures to water leaks. Anything can happen out in the field. Being ready and being able to respond swiftly is key to any water operator and your water system.

Here are just a few things to include in your - "Emergency Response Plan"

- **A list of plumbers electricians or other contractors available during an emergency**
- **Procedures for obtaining a backup water source**
- **A List of Local and State emergency contacts.**
- **A system for establishing emergency communications**
- **Any mutual aid agreements the utility has with other communities for sharing personnel equipment and other resources during an emergency.**
- **Standard procedures for emergency water productions.**
- **Means of sharing information with customers**
- **WRWA Circuit Riders /WI-DNR REPS**
- **Utility Maps of water system (Updated)**
- **GPS of curb stops, and water shut offs**
- **Heat tape and Extra insulation around Mobile Homes**
- **Snow removal equipment at the ready**
- **Water utility trickle notices**
- **Keep up routine Well-house inspections.**
- **Handling of all customer Complaints – (IF ANY)**

These are just a couple of things to consider when creating an emergency response plan for your water system. We at Wisconsin Rural Water Association are here to help fill out a more in depth Emergency Response Plan to fit your water system. We are always here to help in any emergency situation you may encounter out in the field. Please refer to DNR web site for NR-810 WI Code. Also feel free to contact your WI DNR Representative or your WRWA Circuit Rider with any questions or concerns.

We are always here to assist your water needs.

George Taylor, Small Water System Circuit Rider
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REGIONALIZATION *VS* UPGRADE

Jesse Hass,
WRWA Wastewater Trainer

For communities of all sizes, a decision most will have to make in the upcoming years is what to do when their treatment facility needs upgrading. For some plants the upgrade will consist of refurbishing existing equipment. Others will have a more interesting decision. A common topic is how communities should proceed when upgrading a plant that was built 40 or 50 years ago. It's a testament to how well the plants were constructed in the 70's and 80's that they have lasted this long. But nothing lasts forever and many of these plants are nearing their end date. For some communities a complete rebuild will be needed. If this is the case the cost of such a rebuild could be much higher than previously thought. In the past 5 years the cost of building any new structures has skyrocketed.

The first consideration when starting an upgrade is what type of upgrades or what type of plant will be constructed. If you are mulling over a possible treatment type or process change, ask for references. Once you have references or examples find out where the technology is being used in Wisconsin. If something is working in another state that's fine but insist

But nothing lasts forever and many of these plants are nearing their end date.

on having an example in Wisconsin where the technology is being used. Talk to other operators, use WRWA as a resource and get every piece of information to make the best decision for your utility. If your community is spending a substantial amount of money, then do your best to gather all pertinent information.

Another consideration for smaller communities is regionalization. When many of the wastewater treatment facilities were constructed in the 70's and 80's, Clean Water Act money was available. When these facilities were constructed, these plants were asked to take out BOD and TSS. There are many treatment options available to take out BOD and TSS. Today WWTP's are asked to remove many nutrients including but not limited to phosphorus, ammonia and nitrogen. Removing some of these nutrients can be difficult and expensive. Also, water is very rich in Wisconsin, so plants popped up in every little community and served their purpose. Now those plants are being held together with duct tape and tough decisions will need to be made. Some communities will have to upgrade due to location. It's not feasible to regionalize if the wastewater must be

pumped a long distance. But for communities with a facility near them that has capacity, it's not a bad idea to explore all options.

The rough estimate is a million dollars per mile to pump wastewater. The DNR has money that can be applied for in certain instances of regionalization. The information can be found on the WI DNR website at this address:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/aid/documents/EIF/Guide/cwfpPriorityPF.html>

To be eligible at least one publicly owned WWTP must be eliminated and sent to a neighboring municipality. The amount that can be awarded is up to \$3,000,000 to a community in form of principal forgiveness. There are other eligibility criteria that must be met but for smaller communities that are receiving lower phosphorus limits regionalization money might be available.

In closing, if you are going to need an upgrade in the near future, make sure to do your due diligence. Research all options, talk to other operators and WRWA, and use every resource available to make the best decision for your utility. Be open minded about regionalization. Smaller communities may save a ton of money for their rater payers by sending wastewater to another community. If two communities are near each other and both are in the planning stages of upgrading, consider a joint plant. It may not be feasible in the end, but just try to be open-minded and consider all options.

Jesse

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Witching Sticks

Dan Wundrow,
WRWA Circuit Rider

In rural communities and small water systems, dowsing remains a useful method, especially when advanced equipment is unavailable or too expensive.

In the world of rural water systems, many professionals, including staff from the Wisconsin Rural Water Association (WRWA), have been observed using dowsing rods, also called witching sticks, divining rods, or, in rare instances, doodle bugging. While some claim they are effective in locating underground utilities, others remain doubtful, questioning the science and legitimacy behind the practice. To understand the debate, it's important to examine the history, traditional uses, modern applications, and scientific research related to dowsing.

Dowsing is not a recent invention. Its origins date back to the mid-fifth century, around the fall of the Roman Empire. The Greeks are among the earliest known practitioners, using Y-shaped branches to find underground mineral deposits and water sources. In those early times, dowsing was often seen as a form of divination, linked to magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. This view led to its condemnation by the Catholic Church, which banned the practice under the First Commandment. People caught using dowsing rods were sometimes punished for what was considered worship of a false god.

By the 1400s, dowsing became popular in Germany, especially for finding ore and water. The Germans called the dowsing rod a "Deuter," a term with several meanings, including "to show," "indicate," "point," and "strike." German miners and water seekers used this technique for centuries, and some scholars dedicated their lives to exploring both the mystical and scientific sides of dowsing.

Over time, the tools used in dowsing have evolved. While the Y-shaped branch remains iconic, modern dowsers often use L-shaped wires, telescoping rods, or marking flags. The belief that a willow branch is required is widespread, passed down through generations. However, historical records suggest that willow branches were not exclusively used in early dowsing practices. Peach tree branches were more common in ancient Greek methods. Despite technological advancements in water detection, many still rely on these simple tools, believing in their ability to locate underground water sources.

In rural communities and small water systems, dowsing remains a useful method, especially when advanced equipment is unavailable or too expensive. WRWA staff and other field workers often use dowsing rods to find underground utilities. Subjective evidence and personal experiences still support its use, even if scientific proof is lacking. For many, dowsing is more than just a tool; it is a tradition passed down through generations of water workers and farmers.

Despite its widespread use, dowsing has faced significant scrutiny from the scientific community. In the 1980s, a major experiment tested the validity of dowsing. A large water pipe was placed on the first floor of a building, and trained dowsers were asked to locate it. After each attempt, the pipe was moved to a different spot. Initial results seemed promising, but further analysis showed only a few participants had successfully identified the pipe's location, likely by chance. Most failed

to detect the water pipe, casting doubt on the reliability of dowsing as a scientific method.

Other controlled studies have found similar results, indicating that dowsing might depend more on subconscious cues, muscle movements, or environmental factors than on any measurable physical phenomenon. The ideomotor effect, a psychological phenomenon where someone makes motions unconsciously, has been suggested as a possible explanation for why dowsing rods seem to move in response to underground water.

Despite the absence of scientific consensus, dowsing remains practiced and respected in many communities. Its longevity and cultural importance cannot be overlooked. For some, dowsing combines intuition, experience, and tradition. For others, it remains a mystery, one science has yet to fully explain or validate. Whether seen as a mystical art or a misunderstood science, dowsing continues to generate curiosity and debate within the water industry and beyond.

Dowsing rods are a fascinating blend of old tradition, modern use, and scientific debate. While skepticism is justified, the continued use of dowsing by both pros and amateurs shows that the practice still matters culturally and practically. As technology improves and research goes on, maybe someday we'll fully understand how this ancient method works. Until then, dowsing remains a compelling example of how history, belief, and practice can come together in surprising ways.

Dan

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IS MY FUTURE ENERGY PRICE STABLE?



Matt Rettler,
WRWA Energy Efficiency Circuit Rider

Most energy rates have had an increase this year.

If what you are hoping for is energy prices to level off and be consistent for the next 5 years, you may want to think again. Currently, the only stable part of electricity is that it looks to be increasing each year by approximately 5%. Most electric providers have already proposed rate hikes or will be requesting them shortly. What this means is that operators or budget planners will need to add this increase each year for the foreseeable future. It also means that now is the best time to look at becoming as energy efficient as possible!

Most energy rates have had an increase this year. Wisconsin Public Service, We Energies, Alliant Energy, Xcel Energy, and Madison Gas & Electric all have plans to increase rates. Xcel Energy is proposing 11.8% in 2026 and 7.2% in 2027. Alliant Energy is seeking 8.3% in 2026 and

another 5.7% in 2027. MGE is looking at 4.89% in 2026 and 4.33% for 2027. WPS is looking at a 4.9% increase for 2026 while We Energies is considering 4.6% in 2026. These are not the only providers that are increasing rates as many smaller providers who purchase power will also need to increase rates. The increases will be felt across the board. These are not just rate hikes for municipalities, but for your home and businesses where you purchase all products.

There are many key drivers for the increase in electricity prices. Capital investments and infrastructure costs are part of that equation. As utilities construct new renewable energy sources (solar and wind farms mainly) the costs are being passed through to the rate payers. The push for “green” energy sources has seen a steady decline in

the number of coal fired electric plants within the state. While some plants have been retired from service, others are still being maintained at high costs to come online if needed. Both solar and wind energy have had their struggles, and we need to build some resilience into our outlook on energy production. There is also mounting demand for electrification among many areas including data centers, AI workloads, EVs, appliances, and air conditioning. Policy and incentives are impacting the cost of electricity. As clean energy project incentives are taken away, there are increased burdens in finding measures for creating reliable and affordable alternatives. We do have some regulatory oversight from the PSC to moderate rate increases and reduce utility profit margins. Nonetheless, we will still see increases as the cost of doing business continues to increase.

Electric prices are clearly trending upward over the next five years. Many of the changes we see aim to support reliability, cleaner energy, and a sustainable future, but always require careful policy balancing to ensure affordability to Wisconsin rate payers. As I started this article...

...there is no better time than now to receive your **FREE ENERGY ASSESSMENT** from WRWA to start saving your facility money!

Matt

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The Importance of **MAPPING IN A WATER SYSTEM**

Todd Weich,
WRWA Water Circuit Rider

Mapping plays a crucial role in the effective management and operation of water systems. Through tools like Geographic Information Systems (GIS), water utilities and authorities can visualize, monitor, and manage both underground and above-ground infrastructure. This spatial awareness enables decision-makers to clearly understand where resources are located, how they are connected, and what conditions they are in. Without accurate maps, managing a complex network of pipes, pumps, treatment plants, and valves becomes a nightmare for the current operator and more importantly, future operators.

One of the primary benefits of mapping in a water system is asset management. With an accurate digital map, water utilities can track the location and condition of infrastructure components. This enables timely maintenance and replacement, thereby reducing the risk of sudden failures or costly repairs. You can also map your repairs and develop a story book together to show how many repairs are in a certain area, which will show the need to be replaced. It also supports predictive maintenance, where potential problems are addressed before they cause service disruptions. Mapping ensures that field crews can locate parts quickly and accurately, leading to reduced downtime and improved customer service.

In addition to maintenance, mapping greatly improves emergency response. In the event of a pipe burst, contamination, or a natural

With an accurate digital map, water utilities can track the location and condition of infrastructure components.

disaster like a flood. The DPW crew needs quick access to information about the system. Real-time GIS data can help pinpoint vulnerable areas and direct crews to critical valves. This significantly enhances the speed and accuracy of emergency responses, helping to minimize damage and restore services faster.

Mapping is also essential for long-term planning and sustainability. It allows utilities to analyze water demand, identify underserved areas, and plan system expansions or upgrades accordingly. In rural or developing regions, mapping helps ensure that resources are distributed fairly and efficiently.

There are many mapping / GIS programs out there. Some mapping systems are costly, while others are reasonably priced for your system needs. The cost of mapping can be based on who is going to put the map together, the engineer, or maybe the operator has time to collect and input the data. My suggestion is to develop a list of what your system needs and how you, the operator, will utilize the mapping.

In conclusion, mapping is a foundational tool for the efficient, safe, and sustainable management of water systems. From routine maintenance to emergency response and environmental planning, maps provide the spatial context necessary to make informed decisions. Contact your circuit rider to get your system started with GSI/GPS.

Todd



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Ayres Keeps Communities in Sync with Funding Deadlines, State Agencies

What does Ayres do? Yes, as a consultant providing engineering and a raft of other services, the firm completes design projects for counties, towns, villages, cities, and state agencies. But the firm takes pride in seeing the bigger picture on behalf of its longtime clients.

Its planners watch out for funding deadlines such as the October 31 deadline to submit an “intent to apply” document to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) for funding for 2027 construction of lead service line (LSL) replacements and other water distribution and sanitary sewer collection projects. Its transportation experts use their experience from hundreds of Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) projects to help small communities dovetail their underground utilities replacement projects with WisDOT’s plans to reconstruct their main streets. Its wetlands and environmental experts, landscape architects, structural and water resources engineers, land surveyors, and aerial mappers stand ready to support the whole project – not just pipe and pavement design.

For rural communities, part of being prepared for the future is having a five-year plan that’s periodically updated to reflect their highest priorities. While the oldest infrastructure generally is placed at the highest priority for replacement, Ayres helps clients keep an eye on projected dates for WisDOT projects involving reconstruction of main thoroughfares through town. These are opportunities to plan concurrent projects to replace aging water mains, sanitary sewers, and storm sewers rather than running the risk of a water main break or other issues under a newly paved street. Also, grants are often on 18-month or three-year cycles, so Ayres keeps clients aware of those key dates and helps communities prioritize projects to best take



advantage of grants and low-interest loan availability. In addition to making sure communities are aware what state agencies and funding sources are planning, Ayres’ project managers make sure departments within a municipality are aware of each other’s plans so that work can be coordinated.

Ayres’ familiarity with WDNR, WisDOT, and other state and federal agencies’ processes and requirements also serves clients well by putting project designs on the right course from Day 1 – not on a collision course with regulations.

Following are three examples of communities using foresight to maximize the bang they get for their buck on capital improvements.

LEAD SERVICE LINE REPLACEMENT

Ayres is getting to work this fall on a new City of Mellen contract to design the replacements of approximately 100 city segments of lead water service lines and approximately 100 private segments. Ayres is providing survey services, bidding documents, and specifications for work that will be constructed in 2027. To join Mellen in taking advantage of LSL grant and loan funding through part of the WDNR’s Safe Drinking Water Loan Program, get your “intent to apply” submitted to the WDNR by the end of October – and your final application turned in by June 30, 2026. Grants generally cover private

segments of lead service line replacement first, followed by part or all of the public segments. Low interest loans generally pick up whatever grants do not.

The fate of such funding beyond the 2027 construction year is unknown. But if the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding that supports the WDNR LSL replacement program comes to an end with the 2027 construction season, communities may continue to apply to other federal or state loan programs, such as SDWLP or CWFPP, which may not offer the same level of grant funding (principal forgiveness).

Ayres also is helping Mellen with an extensive program to replace undersized water mains.



Replacement of water service line

PFAS

Finding a solution for a municipal well contaminated by PFAS (also known as forever chemicals) is another area where Ayres can assist clients – most notably by designing a replacement well if an uncontaminated location can be found in the city or village to construct a new well.

Ayres is assisting the City of Medford with such a solution, designing a new well that was constructed this spring, followed by the related well

house, whose construction began in September. The new well will be online and serving Medford by next summer.

Ayres helped Medford apply for loan/grant funding in 2024 and is assisting with funding administration in 2025-2026.

Known as Well 14, the \$2 million project replaces PFAS-contaminated Well 5 with one that is projected to provide approximately the same water volume that Well 5 did.



Well equipment in Ladysmith

The project also includes the well house, process piping, HVAC, plumbing, electrical, SCADA and controls, chemical feed equipment and piping, emergency backup generator, gas and electric utilities, site grading, and site driveway access.

PRIMARY STREET RECONSTRUCTION

Ayres worked in synchronization with the WisDOT team that's been designing the roadway along Washburn's main corridor to determine the proper horizontal and vertical location for pipe locations to avoid utility location conflicts. The water and sewer construction was completed within the schedule of WisDOT's project plans for reconstruction of approximately 1 mile of Bayfield Street (STH 13) that



Well equipment in Kewaunee



Reconstructed section of Bayfield Street (STH 13) in Washburn

Continued on page 26

was constructed in 2024. Another set of plans will be prepared for another 1-mile segment to be constructed in 2027. Ayres coordinated with other consultants and utilities and prepared permit applications for the city utilities. Construction assistance included public outreach, grant administration, and resident inspection. Ayres also assisted the City in selecting decorative lighting fixtures for the downtown portions of the project.

Washburn secured grant and loan application assistance that paid for 80% of the City's infrastructure on the 2024 segment through Community Development Block Grants, the WDNR Clean Water Fund, and the WDNR Safe Drinking Water Loan Program. Ayres assisted with those funding applications and advised the City on timing for the second segment of work. The firm will begin the funding application process with the City again this fall for the 2027 segment. Spacing the projects three years apart allows the City to maximize funding

assistance through the state and federal programs, which run on three-year cycles.

Because this project involved bidding out the underground utilities work through City procedures and not through WisDOT, Washburn maintained additional control over the process, and smaller contractors were able to compete effectively for the work and ultimately reduce the price tag for the utility work. Ayres assists in making sure the City's utility work stays in sync with WisDOT's street work.

Ayres also has helped communities on similar projects (such as STH 13 through the City of Mellen) where sanitary and water utility plans were inserted into the WisDOT street reconstruction project, which saves the municipality the trouble of scheduling and coordinating the utilities work. Ayres provided grant administration and resident construction inspection on behalf of the City during the Mellen project.

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Getting Ready for 2026: Budget and Funding Insights for Wisconsin Water & Wastewater Utilities

Andrew Kurtz,
Vierbicher

Good budgeting is a year-round exercise.

Planning ahead for the 2026 fiscal year is more than simply good practice for Wisconsin municipalities and utilities—it is essential to ensure that funding, permits, and approvals are in place when they are needed. While most local governments will not finalize their 2026 budgets until November 2025, the decisions that shape those budgets are already happening. Updates to equipment inventories, capital improvement planning, preparations for Public Service Commission (PSC) rate adjustments, and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) applications for State Revolving Fund (SRF) loans often start up to a year or more in advance. Thinking of November as the final step in a 12- to 18-month funding process helps ensure that money is available when it is time to start construction.

Key Financial Planning Considerations

Before starting any budget process, utilities need to determine how projects will be paid for—whether through revenue bonds, loans, grants, or a combination of these. Utility leaders must understand their rate schedule and how those rates impact customers and how they align with broader community affordability. Affordability is not just about the utility bill. Households face rising taxes, energy, and housing costs, so utilities must be mindful of how rate changes pair with other financial pressures. The goal is to identify a rate structure that gains public support while still covering necessary costs.

If revenue bonds are part of the funding plan, utilities must also begin preparing for a PSC rate case - a formal process required to raise water

rates. Without PSC approval, a utility cannot increase rates to support capital investments or expanded operations. Because this process takes time, starting early is critical to meeting construction timelines and community expectations.

Understanding funding eligibility is also vital. Many communities can benefit from Wisconsin DNR's State Revolving Loan Funds, USDA Rural Development loans and grants, or Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). Each program has different criteria, and a community's median income, population size, or infrastructure age can affect eligibility. Smart planning means combining these sources effectively - layering loans with grants to lower the financial burden on ratepayers.

To do this well, utilities need a clear Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that maps out projects, timelines, and costs. A good CIP serves as a roadmap that ties together financial planning, regulatory approvals, and funding applications. It is the foundation for sound budgeting and strategic decision-making.

Combining Multiple Funding Sources

No single funding source will fully cover most projects. To lower the burden on local ratepayers, utilities should build a successful funding strategy that layers grants, low-interest loans, and principal forgiveness options.

For example, federal funds for PFAS or lead removal may cover significant portions of project costs based on economic criteria. USDA or CDBG programs can add to this support, depending on community eligibility. State Revolving Loan Funds may also provide principal forgiveness (effectively a grant), reducing long-term debt.

The goal is to build a funding stack that minimizes local costs while meeting all program requirements and maintaining project timelines.

Mapping Out the Timeline

Planning ahead is critical. The first major deadline is October 31, 2025—the last day to submit an "Intent to Apply" for SRF loans through the Clean Water Fund or Safe Drinking Water Loan programs. Missing this deadline means waiting another year for key funding opportunities. Final applications are due between January and June 2026. At the same time, draft rate cases and budget requests are typically prepared in August and September to coordinate with loan schedules. By the time public hearings and final budgets are held in November and December, most of the hard work should already be complete.

Prioritizing Projects

Since funding is always limited, projects must be prioritized carefully. Top priorities include those required by regulations, such as removing lead water lines or meeting new

water quality rules for PFAS, phosphorus, or disinfection. Other factors include the condition of equipment and potential consequences of failure - fixing aging equipment is often more urgent than building new office space.

External funding opportunities also influence priorities: grants and loans from USDA Rural Development, SRF Loans, and CDBG can make certain projects more attractive. It is also important to document priorities clearly in case new leadership takes office and needs continuity in decision-making.

Building a Smart Budget

When it is time to create the budget, there are five key questions to answer:

1. Is a rate increase required and will the projected rate increases cover required loan payments without overburdening ratepayers?
2. Does each project have a clear and realistic funding plan?
3. Are any old loans eligible for refinancing, and has the budget been tested for possible interest rate hikes?
4. Does the staffing budget account for pay increases tied to certifications and extra work from new regulations?
5. Have construction cost estimates been adjusted for inflation using reliable industry benchmarks?

Good budgeting is a year-round exercise. Identifying and scheduling future capital projects is a proactive approach that enables planning for design, funding, and execution. Utility budgeting is more than just capital budgeting. Utility revenues, operating costs, personnel costs, and maintenance costs are all critical components of the utility budget that must be reviewed and included. Again, the November approval of the budget closes the loop on the budgeting cycle.

Continued on page 30



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Planning for the Unexpected

Even with a solid plan, surprises happen. By developing several budget scenarios—basic, moderate, and optimistic—utilities can adapt if bids come in high, new regulations take effect, or other conditions shift.

Regularly updating the capital improvement plan and securing formal approval helps ensure that future leadership inherits a clear, actionable roadmap. Clear communication also matters; explaining costs in everyday terms (e.g., “\$1.25 per 1,000 gallons of water”) connects better with residents than raw budget figures.

Final Takeaways

Before wrapping up the next budget planning session, leadership should ensure these questions are answered:

- Which upcoming projects have regulatory deadlines?
- Could new regulations change project priorities?
- What funding sources are available for the projects?
- What are the application cycles for the funding sources for the projects?
- Have all necessary funding applications been submitted?
- Where can state and federal funding help reduce local costs?
- How much borrowing capacity does the utility or community have?
- Are there opportunities to refinance existing debt?
- What impact will the project have on user rates and budget limits?
- Are inflation adjustments included in project estimates?
- Does the wage plan support staff retention?
- Is there a clear plan to communicate budget impacts to the public and future leadership?



Wisconsin utilities operate in a complex environment of budget limits, debt caps, evolving regulations, and economic uncertainty. Treating budget adoption as the final step in a year-round planning process helps ensure safe, affordable utility services while minimizing surprises and unexpected costs. By combining funding sources, ranking risks honestly, and communicating clearly, communities can turn good planning in 2025 into solid results for years to come.

(This article is provided for general informational purposes and does not constitute legal or financial advice. Readers should consult appropriate professionals and official program guidance for specific situations.)

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MCMAHON'S Impact on Wisconsin's Water Infrastructure

The foundation of any thriving community is access to clean, reliable water. For over a century, McMahon has helped shape Wisconsin's water infrastructure—working with municipalities large and small to meet the evolving needs of their residents. Its influence can be seen in wells, towers and pipelines across the state.

Founded in 1909 in the Fox Valley, McMahon began as a local engineering firm. Over generations, the company expanded its reach and expertise, growing into a trusted partner for communities statewide. While McMahon's capabilities broadened alongside changing technologies and regulations, its values have remained steady: service, client satisfaction and solutions that stand the test of time.

By approaching each challenge as an opportunity for long-term impact, McMahon continues to help municipalities move from outdated water systems to resilient, future-ready networks.

LEADING THE WAY IN WATER TREATMENT

Innovation is central to McMahon's philosophy. Whether it's finding new ways to meet regulatory requirements or streamlining distribution systems for efficiency, it looks beyond quick fixes to deliver creative, cost-effective solutions. When it comes to water treatment, McMahon is a leader in adopting advanced technologies that safeguard communities.

The recent Reverse Osmosis Water Treatment System in Winneconne is a clear example. To address the village's water quality concerns, McMahon conducted extensive pilot testing and opted for a centralized RO membrane treatment facility designed for both efficiency and compliance—only the third municipal application of its kind in Wisconsin.

Reverse Osmosis Water Treatment System in Winneconne, Wisconsin



- Three (3) two-stage reverse osmosis membrane skids were installed.
- Each membrane skid features eight (8) 8-inch diameter, 6-element pressure vessels, providing a feed capacity of 250-gpm per skid for a total system capacity of 500-gpm when one stage is out of service or in a cleaning cycle.
- A clean-in-place and permeate flush skid system was provided for maintenance.
- Chemical feed systems consisting of scale inhibitors, sodium hypochlorite, blended phosphate and pH adjustment as well as chemicals for membrane cleaning were provided.
- The Well #2 project included upgrades to the electrical and control systems, which also added new emergency backup power for uninterrupted operation.

SUSTAINABILITY FOR THE LONG HAUL

Recognizing that today's investments must serve communities reliably for generations, McMahon prioritizes solutions that not only address current needs but also anticipate future demands, reduce long-term costs, and simplify ongoing maintenance. This forward-thinking approach shapes every project, big or small, ensuring that both resources and infrastructure remain resilient long into the future.

The Town of Greenville faced aging infrastructure and operational inefficiencies that required a comprehensive solution. McMahon stepped in to develop a Water System Master Plan that would streamline operations, enhance system reliability, and ensure sustainable service for years to come.

Water System Improvements in Greenville, Wisconsin

- Combined three pressure zones into a single zone.
- Constructed a new elevated tower to replace storage capacity from an older tower, while adjusting overflow elevations and modifying an existing tower to maintain consistent pressure across the community.

- Replaced a leaking iron filter tank at Well #3 with a new packaged iron filter system, featuring a removable underdrain plate for factory coating, easier inspection, and ongoing preventative maintenance.
- Kept the existing filter system in service during construction to maintain uninterrupted water quality and service.

COLLABORATION AS A CORNERSTONE

None of these successful projects happen in isolation. McMahon believes strongly in the power of partnership—working side by side with municipal leaders, utility staff and the communities themselves. Collaboration is woven into the planning and implementation of every project. It means listening to local needs, respecting budgets and supporting operators long after construction is finished.

This collaborative approach ensures that every project is not just a technical success but also a meaningful investment in the community. By fostering strong partnerships, prioritizing sustainability and focusing on long-term resilience, McMahon continues to help Wisconsin communities thrive well into the future.



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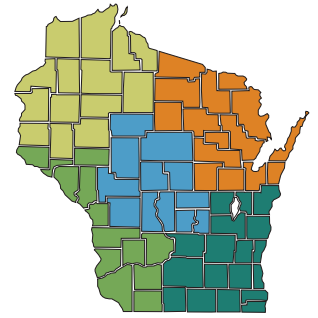
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SEPTEMBER WINDS

Ken Blomberg,
WRWA past Executive Director

I long for September all year round. It marks the beginning of my favorite season. A time of year that marks another hunting season for those that partake in this outdoor activity. Given the authority, I would declare September 1st New Years Day.

The hunt begins on that day. Goose and dove hunters will go afield first, followed later in the month by those pursuing bear, grouse, turkey, deer, woodcock and waterfowl. It is a busy month indeed for those that call outdoors home in the fall. Add late season musky hunting to the list and spare time on the September calendar for sportsmen disappears.

Overnight, the transition from summer to fall will take place. A predicted cold front - with temperatures at night in the 40s and daytime highs in the 50s - will remind us that fall is at our doorsteps. While it is still a month before the brilliant colors of October surround us, something deep inside hunters and migrant birds is stirring now. Following gun dogs, or sitting in secluded blinds, hunters will enjoy front row seats in nature's migratory theater and the transformation of seasons.

At the end of August, while sitting around our fire pit, we witnessed the first wave of nighthawks as they began their gentle movements south. Traveling to South America takes a long time and fueling the voyage involves lots of insects - available in the sky as they pass on through our river valley. Monarch butterflies also began their southward journey - gone by the first frost and by October's end, basking in Mexican sunshine. By the tail end of September, blue-winged teal and wood ducks will be packing their bags.

Like many of our neighbors, we have tempted local and migrant critters to a food plot. Strategically located at the end of our prairie field and in range of the kitchen table spotting scope, ours has offered endless hours of entertainment - especially in the fall. Recently, several turkeys have been stars of the daily show and visit our plot more than once a day. While there, they make the most of what it has to offer. The buckwheat, sorghum and clover were planted rather late, yet have responded to ample rainfall and now provide cover and food for a wide variety of

ANNOUNCING BOOK RELEASE

My fourth book, **COUNTRY JOURNAL - & OLD MAN'S MUSINGS** was released late last year.

In a review by Dan Small, host of Outdoor Wisconsin and contributing editor of Wisconsin Outdoor News, he noted; "In this series of short musings, reminiscent of Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac, Blomberg, with his senses as keen as those of his beloved bird dogs, shares the lessons he has learned from a lifetime of observing the seasonal changes of the natural world."

Country Journal and Old Man's Musings: Publisher - Ten16Press, Waukesha, Wisconsin, 5.5 x 8.5, Paperback, 140 pages, \$14.99
Available from Ten 16 Press, www.ten16press.com, 140 pages, paper, \$14.99.
Also available through Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and can be ordered through Ingram at most independent book stores.

**Autographed copies can be purchased for \$14.99 plus tax and shipping by contacting the author at: 2099 Mayflower Road, Junction City, WI 54443 or by email at: eaupleinekennels@gmail.com.*



wildlife. In the case of our turkeys, the buckwheat is flowering and attracting insects – a protein laden food source for birds of all stripes.

Deer, including a couple of white deer, are working over the neighbor's soybean fields and several mature bucks have been seen grazing at dusk. Their antlers will soon shed their reddish-brown velvet coatings and shine bright as archers wait along their runways between bedding and feeding areas.

By mid-month, hunters and their bird dogs will work the uplands for grouse and woodcock and the sound of bells may be heard as they comb alder and popple stands. The baying of hound dogs will fill the northwoods as the bear hunt will be in full swing. This year, a young neighbor and his mentor have established a bear bait on our back 40. At least four bears have visited the stump full of sweet "goodies" making the possibility of success a reality. By the end of the month, my grandson and I will roam nearby marshes, rivers and lakes for ducks and geese.

In a technical sense, autumn's equinox arrives in late September when the Sun crosses the equator and the duration of day and night stands equal.

But in reality, fall blows in with a vengeance when cold fronts and blustery winds sweep down from Canada. When average temperatures drop more than twenty degrees and suddenly autumn unfolds before our very eyes. October is right around the corner and now's the time to taste the sounds, sights and smells of the season.

Northern geese have begun to pass through in noisy gaggles. Cranes trumpet from nearby harvested fields and secluded marshes. Wood ducks cry as they patrol backwater sloughs and river bottoms. On rare

occasions, male ruffed grouse drum, rooster pheasant crow and tom turkeys gobble. Buck deer will soon grunt for mates and from hedgerow thickets migrating songbirds will warble. Autumn music is with us until the season's final curtain call.

The brilliant shades of yellow, orange, and red overrule the green pigments in leaves that thrive only in warm weather. As temperatures drop and daylight hours diminish, autumn pigments kick in and leaves transform like magic, sometimes overnight. Now is the moment to explore the countryside to view its full glory. Time is of essence as the winds of the season will eventually send the foliage to the forest floor.

For hunters, that means following the course of migrant game birds. For birders, it's time to keep an eye on the sky and in the bush. Throngs of juncos, warblers, fox sparrows and robins will invade central Wisconsin soon. Waterfowl and cranes are staging in large numbers throughout the state. Geese chase their flyways and woodcock slip in quietly – without fanfare and in the dark of night – their initial rides on the wave of northwesterly winds. Dogwood thickets and alder bottoms become transitory homes for woodcock – their secluded whereabouts only uncovered by investigating bird dogs and hunters.

Step outside, take a deep breath and smell the season. Fallen leaves, pine needles and brown grasses soaked in morning dew arouse our senses like nothing else. Exhale and see your breath for perhaps the first time since last winter. Enjoy the tang of frosty mornings and crisp moonlit nights. Until next spring, you'll smell nothing more refreshing.

Together, in September, we greet the chill that accompanies the season.





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Super-Sniffers on the Job



Photo Credit: Walnut Grove K9s or K9 Water Leak Detection

Brenda Staudenmaier,
WRWA Training Specialist

What makes them remarkable is their ability to detect leaks that slip past even the most sophisticated acoustic or electronic tools.

Our best friends just became our best leak detectors.

There's a new hero in the field, leak detection dogs! They may not wear capes, but they're every bit as impressive. These specially trained canines are helping water and wastewater utilities find leaks more quickly, more accurately, and with less disruption than ever before.

Different dogs are trained for different jobs: some detect leaks in water pipes, others in sewer lines. Training a single dog to distinguish between clean water and wastewater is challenging, especially when these lines can be located close together, so utilities typically use separate dogs for each task.

What makes them remarkable is their ability to detect leaks that slip past even the most sophisticated acoustic or electronic tools. While traditional methods might narrow a leak location down to a two-mile stretch, dogs can survey the same area in a fraction of the time and pinpoint the exact location within about two feet. Once the dog alerts to a leak, an acoustic team can confirm before any digging begins.

These dogs aren't here to replace locating technology, they work alongside it. By reducing unnecessary digs, they minimize damage to landscapes and infrastructure, save time and money, and help utilities conserve precious water resources. In the right hands, they're more

than just leak-finders. They're community protectors, budget savers, and one sniff at a time, defenders of our water systems.

A fully trained leak detection dog can cost between \$15,000 and \$20,000, but utilities also have the option to train dogs themselves or work with trainers remotely for a fraction of the cost.

One person leading the charge in this field is Elisa Jones, an Ohio Class 3 Water and Wastewater Operator since 2012. Since 2014, she has worked for the City of Oxford, Ohio, as a wastewater laboratory technician. In 2022, after learning about K9 leak detection through the Ohio EPA, Elisa discovered that the primary trainer for these specialized dogs was located in Little Rock, Arkansas. She traveled there to train her own scent-sport dog and, upon returning home, developed a remote training program for water leak detection. Since then, she has remotely trained five dogs now actively working in the field. Elisa has been training dogs since 1996 and competing with them since 2018, combining her passion for canines with her dedication to water system efficiency.

According to the U.S. EPA, about 16% of treated water is lost before it ever reaches customers, often due to leaks or inaccurate metering. That loss costs utilities millions of dollars annually and wastes valuable resources.

Imagine if every water or wastewater plant had a leak detection dog on staff. Beyond their practical skills, many operators, especially those working alone at night, might appreciate the companionship.

While the initial investment can seem high, the potential savings in water loss prevention and reduced infrastructure damage can quickly outweigh the cost.

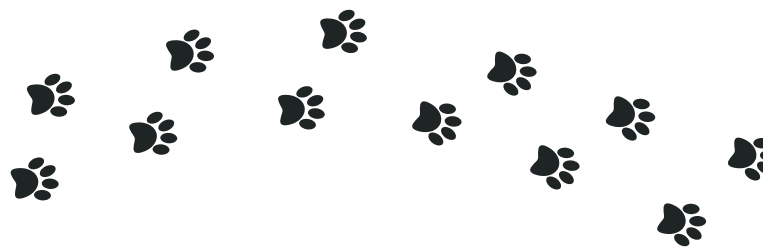
For more information: WATER LEAK DETECTION DOGS, LLC Training exceptional dogs for water conservation
<https://www.waterleakdogs.com/>

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Upcoming Training Opportunity

The Wisconsin Rural Water Association (WRWA) will be partnering with Elisa Jones to offer a virtual leak detection dog training on Wednesday, December 3rd. Check the WRWA training calendar for details (<https://www.wrwa.org/training-calendar/>).

~ Brenda



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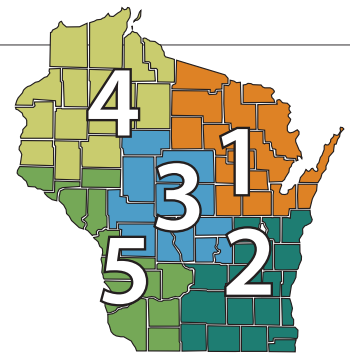
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Exeland
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Hawkins
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Iron River Sanitary District #1
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St. Croix Chippewa Indians
of WI
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Knight
Lac Courte Oreilles Public
Works Department
Ladysmith
Lake Hallie
Lake Holcombe Sanitary
District #1
Luck
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Mason
Mellen
*Menomonie
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**Pleasant Valley Properties of
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Stone Lake Sanitary District
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Blue River
Boscobel
Bridgeport Sanitary District
Campbell
Cassville
Cazenovia
Chaseburg
Cobb
Cochrane
Coon Valley
Cuba City
Darlington
**Dell Creek Estates
Dickeyville
Dodge Sanitary District #1
Dodgeville
Durand
Eastman
Eleva
Ellsworth
Elmwood
Ettrick
Fairchild
Fall Creek
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USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT WATER PROGRAMS ENSURE AFFORDABILITY

AFFORDABILITY FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Affordability is the key factor for small and rural communities in their decisions to upgrade and enhance water services for their customers.

Skyrocketing construction costs, disrupted supply chains, and ever increasing regulatory requirements are just a few of the roadblocks rural America faces when financing critical water infrastructure.

Rural Development's Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program is a lifeline for rural America, funding clean and reliable water systems nationwide.

America has 49,397 community water systems, most of which are small. Small and rural communities lack economies of scale. Passing the costs of unfunded mandates onto customers is not feasible without assistance from USDA Rural Development.

97%
of America's
water systems are small

Grant costs can cover up to 75% of total development costs for the most vulnerable communities, which is necessary to provide affordable rates. For the majority of small and rural communities, a grant/loan mix is critical to keep projects affordable. USDA RD needs an adequate amount of baseline grant funding to maintain their mission to serve rural America.

Today's Congressional policies and funding decisions are jeopardizing the ability of every community in rural America to keep water and wastewater services affordable. Budget cuts will leave USDA WEP unable to accomplish its mission. WEP is instrumental in helping rural America maintain affordable and sustainable water access for all rural people.

PROMOTION BY THE NATIONAL RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT WATER & ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS (WEP)

For many underserved communities, USDA Rural Development is the lender of first opportunity. RD exclusively serves small and rural communities. Without this program, many rural Americans will lose access to affordable safe and clean water.

In 2023, WEP excelled in their mission to serve rural America:

72% of WEP funded projects benefited communities with populations of 2,500 or less.

45% of WEP funded projects benefited communities with populations of 1,000 or less.

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USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT WATER PROGRAMS DRIVE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

ECONOMIC VITALITY FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Critical infrastructure, including adequate water service, is a basic requirement for a healthy economy, encourages employment opportunities and makes a community a desired place to live and work. The nearly 45,000 water systems in rural America are anchor institutions in their communities.

In many rural communities water infrastructure is past its useful life. Without adequate water and sanitation services, businesses move out of our rural communities, forcing the next generation to leave to find better opportunities. Those left behind are robbed of hope for a prosperous future.

Rural America's economy is driven by entrepreneurship, and made of a diverse range of operations through over 700,000 businesses. Rural areas produce most of the food we consume, provide lumber and other forest products used to build our homes and furniture, and supply the energy we consume daily.

Rural economies
are deeply
connected to
their urban
counterparts

USDA RD WEP not only provides essential services to the families that live in rural America, but also all business activities. These include small businesses, farming, manufacturing, emergency services, and more. In rural America, nearly 85% of all business establishments are small. These small businesses are critical to local economies, employing 54% of workers in their communities. Rural communities need access to funding through USDA RD WEP to thrive.

Today's Congressional policies and funding decisions are jeopardizing the economic vitality of every community in rural America. Budget cuts will leave USDA WEP unable to accomplish its mission. WEP is instrumental in helping rural America increase economic opportunities for all rural people.

PROMOTION BY THE NATIONAL RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT WATER & ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS (WEP)

In 2023, USDA RD WEP funded over \$1.7 billion in projects to small and rural communities.

The average median household income for communities that received WEP funding was \$37,029, half of the national average household income of \$74,580.

In 2023, 308 WEP projects addressed health and sanitary challenges and 28,326 new connections provided drinking water to residents for the first time, resulting in over 400,000 individuals and households benefiting from this funding.

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RURAL AMERICA RELIES ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT



USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT WATER PROGRAMS PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH

PUBLIC HEALTH FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Water is a vital resource and is required for all aspects of daily life, including drinking, cooking, washing, and flushing. In order to protect public health, all Americans should have access to this resource through reliable infrastructure.

Rural America's 46.1 million residents deserve safe drinking water and clean wastewater treatment just as much as urban or metropolitan residents.

While access to basic water infrastructure may be taken for granted by many American citizens, it still is not a reality for approximately 146,000 rural households.

Over the last 70 years, through billions of dollars in financial assistance through USDA RD, the U.S. has made great advancements in the standard of living in rural America. Millions now have access to safe drinking water that their parents did not have. Thousands of rural communities now have modern wastewater systems, eliminating millions of failed septic tanks, cesspools, straight pipes, and worse.

For the 27,500 public elementary and secondary schools, approximately 9.8 million students, and 1,810 hospitals in rural America, public health would be immediately jeopardized without safe drinking water and clean wastewater treatment.

Even for established water and wastewater systems, new regulations such as EPA's recent PFAS and Lead and Copper Rules results in costly operational and infrastructure upgrades. USDA RD WEP ensures rural America and its communities have access to funding when they are faced with making these upgrades to remain in compliance.

Today's Congressional policies and funding decisions are jeopardizing the public health of every community in rural America. Budget cuts will leave USDA WEP unable to accomplish its mission. WEP is instrumental in helping rural America ensure public health is protected for all rural people.

PROMOTION BY THE NATIONAL RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT WATER & ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS (WEP)

Since 1972, USDA RD WEP has been the consistent source of support for rural communities to complete necessary upgrades to their water and wastewater facilities.

During 2023, WEP obligated more than \$1.6 billion in loans and grants, with 73.5% of projects addressing a health and sanitary issue.

The projects funded support more than 1.1 million rural residents, including approximately 28,326 new service connections.

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RURAL AMERICA RELIES ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT



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USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT WATER PROGRAMS CREATE SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABILITY FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Small and rural communities rely on access to affordable loan and grant opportunities through USDA Rural Development to make repairs, upgrades, and to build new critical infrastructure for their communities.

While affordable financing is a vital component for these communities, it is not the complete solution. After these projects are completed, the need for training for water and wastewater operators does not go away. Technical assistance ensures the government's and public's investment is secured. For small and rural communities to remain sustainable, they need ongoing training and technical assistance.

Last year, Circuit Riders directly helped to protect the health and safety of 30,721,691 people - 42% of rural America.

1 in 5

Americans Live in a Rural Community

Technical assistance for small and rural communities includes providing training, energy audits, certification, financial management, environmental compliance, governance, and on-site technical assistance necessary to ensure that water and wastewater facilities operate at the highest possible level. Through the grants provided through USDA WEP, these services are provided at no cost through technical assistance providers like NRWA and its State Affiliates. The loss of funding for this essential technical assistance will jeopardize the sustainability of rural water systems and their communities. System managers will be forced to choose between not addressing ongoing operational and management issues or contracting for these services at steep costs.

Today's Congressional policies and funding decisions are jeopardizing the sustainability of every community in rural America. Budget cuts will leave USDA WEP unable to accomplish its mission. WEP is instrumental in helping rural America ensure their communities are sustainable now and into the future.

PROMOTION BY THE NATIONAL RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT WATER & ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS (WEP)

State Rural Water Associations in partnership with USDA RD WEP provide the following technical assistance to rural communities:

Circuit Rider Program

Disaster Recovery Circuit Rider Program

Wastewater Technical Assistance and Training Program

NRWA Apprenticeship Program

Manufactured Housing Program

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Decentralized Wastewater Technical Assistance and Training Program

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Wisconsin Rural Water Association supports Rural Water Financing Agency

The Rural Water Financing Agency provides interim construction funding to borrowers with a USDA takeout (or other approved permanent lender).

The Agency* has made over \$1 billion in interim loans to borrowers with a USDA takeout!

**Includes the Agency's predecessor organization
(Kentucky Rural Water Finance Corporation)*

STREAMLINED PROCESS

1. Submit an application online via ruralwaterfinance.com
2. Legal document preparation
3. Construction bidding, USDA takeout letter
4. Interim loan closing, funds available for disbursement
5. Construction completion, USDA loan closing/interim loan payoff

**Please reach out to one of the
contacts below to learn more.**

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WRWA Calendar

Office Closed for Thanksgiving	November 27 & 28, 2025
Office Closed for Christmas Eve (1/2 Day)	December 24, 2025
Office Closed for Christmas Day	December 25, 2025
Office Closed for New Years Day	January 1, 2026
WRWA Annual Conference (Green Bay)	March 24 - 27, 2026

WRWA Office Hours:

Monday – Thursday 7:00am – 4:00 pm
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