

# **JULY 2023 SMALL COMMUNITY WATER INFRASTRUCTURE EXCHANGE (SCWIE) E-MAIL NEWSLETTER**

## **UPDATE OF SCWIE**

Steve Grossman, Coordinator of the Small Community Water Infrastructure Exchange began the June 14<sup>th</sup> SCWIE Microsoft Teams Meeting with an update of the SCWIE. During the past 5 months the SCWIE has been rejuvenated. A collaboration has been created among several state SRF staff from Montana (Anna Miller), Oklahoma (Charles de Coune) and Kentucky (Sandy Williams). Also included in the collaboration are Franny Josephs (Clean Water in USEPA Hdqrs) and Kiri Anderers on the Drinking Water side in USEPA Hdqrs. Sarah Buck is representing RCAP and Megan Gernenetz is representing USDA Rural Development

Our collaborators are not limited to those mentioned. He noted that if someone is interested, then they should let someone who is mentioned know. Right now, the SCWIE will continue to hold regular Microsoft Teams Meetings, put out an e-mail news letter, maintain the scwie website (scwie.org) and participate in appropriate meetings and conferences.

## **RURAL COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIP UPDATE**

Sarah Buck reported that a significant piece of legislation was passed in New Mexico earlier this year. The Regional Water System Resiliency Act's (Senate Bill 1) passage, represents a major milestone for under served communities that seek improvements to their water infrastructure and services. The Regional Water System Resiliency Act became law on July 1, 2023. This legislation will provide community water systems with the tools to improve their capacity and tackle a range of technical, managerial and financial challenges.

2

Supporters expect the bill to have a trans-formative impact on New Mexico as a whole. The Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC which represents 13 western states) has started to receive multiple requests from different regional groups from across New Mexico. There is significant interest and excitement about this new opportunity. It is hoped that some help and technical assistance and guidance will be provided in the near future. Copies of the bill will be shared to all when available.

RCAP's national staff has been consulting with their lobbyist group about things that might be able to be accomplished at federal level with this legislation as inspiration. Look forward to be hearing about this in the future.

## **USEPA CLEAN WATER UPDATE**

Franny Josephs provided the following information:

The climate adaptation implementation plan has the Water offices of USEPA being responsible for putting climate action priority items into a spreadsheet so some of the projects that are being worked on can be tracked to better promote climate projects for our communities.

New fact sheets that focus on drought resiliency and wildfire are being developed which also will show how combined funding can be integrated with other programs like the WIFIA program.

Another project that is being developed encompasses updating the SRF database to include some climate related activities where one will be able to track for the first time the number and nature of:

drought projects;

3

flood projects;  
wildfire projects and  
anything related to climate and resiliency.

Work continues with FEMA on promoting the joint assistance agreement. The memo of understanding (MU) is to help communities recover more quickly and efficiently after a presidential declared disaster. Since the MU has been in place since 2019 and it is set to expire next year, work is being done to renew it. By possibly updating the language, it is hoped to improve the relationship with FEMA by making it a stronger collaboration and therefore helping our communities grow and become more resilient both before and after a disaster occurs.

One of the main work groups that has been created through USEPA's State Work Group is the state resiliency sub work group which has now been in place for almost two years. There is a strong working relationship on a lot of projects to help promote climate resiliency and recovery in our regions and our states.

#### WIFIA/SRF Workshop

The American Water Works Association is putting on a WIFIA/SRF focused workshop in Philadelphia on September 13-14. This AWWA workshop brings together water and finance professionals to discuss ways the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA), Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRF), and other programs can be applied to help utilities solve their water infrastructure financing challenges. For more information:

go to [www.awwa.org/Events-Education/WIFIA-SRF-Workshop](http://www.awwa.org/Events-Education/WIFIA-SRF-Workshop)

## USEPA DRINKING WATER SRF UPDATE

### Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment (DWINSA)

Keelan Baldwin reported that on April 4, 2023, the DWSRF FY23 allotments were released, along with a fact sheet about the USEPA's DWINSA. It is used to determine the financial needs of the nation's drinking water infrastructure over the next twenty years. It also guides USEPA's distribution of annual funding to states through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF). You can find more information in the fact sheet at:

[www.epa.gov/dwsrfhttps://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-04/Final\\_DWINSA%20Public%20Factsheet%204.4.23.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-04/Final_DWINSA%20Public%20Factsheet%204.4.23.pdf). The 7<sup>th</sup> DWINSA Report to Congress will come out later this summer.

### Water System Partnerships

Carla Hagerman spoke about the water system partnerships workshop. It is an engagement tool and is a good resource at the beginning of these partnerships discussions. The *Water System Partnerships Workshop* is the result of collaboration between USEPA, states, technical assistance providers, other federal partners, utilities, and water organizations. The purpose of the Partnerships Workshop is to increase awareness about the wide range of water system partnerships opportunities and how partnerships can address technical, managerial, and financial challenges at water systems. For more information, go to:

[www.epa.gov/dwcapacity/water-system-partnerships-workshop](http://www.epa.gov/dwcapacity/water-system-partnerships-workshop)

### Spanish SRF Website

A Spanish version of the SRF website is now available at (<https://espanol.epa.gov/financiamiento-de-infraestructura-de-agua>). Some existing fact sheets have been translated and posted. Content to this website will continue to be added

### **USDA/RURAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

Megan Gernentz presented an overview of RD's current programs. Two billion dollars was invested in construction in rural communities for FY 2022 through the Water and Waste Disposal Program.

RD has many programs for water and sewer including:

- Native American/Colonias;
- Rural and Native Alaskan Villages;
- Technical Assistance and Training Programs;
- Solid Waste Management;
- Rural Decentralized Water System;
- Revolving Loan Funds and several more.

For loans, current interest rates are between 2.25% to 3.75% for up to 40 year. The rates changes quarterly.

There is one million dollars available for water source projects for qualifying communities.

For more detailed information, please contact your state RD representative. An RD contact for almost any state can be found on the scwie website

### Technical Assistance and Construction for Innovative Regional Wastewater Treatment Solutions (TAC-RWTS) Grant Pilot Program

With a deadline of July 31<sup>st</sup>, USDA has announced a pilot grants program that can be made to eligible entities for the study, design or construction of regional wastewater systems for historically impoverished communities that have had difficulty installing traditional wastewater treatment systems due to soil conditions. For more information go to:

[www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/water-environmental-programs/technical-assistance-and-construction-innovative-regional-wastewater-treatment-solutions-tac-rwts](http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/water-environmental-programs/technical-assistance-and-construction-innovative-regional-wastewater-treatment-solutions-tac-rwts)

### Indiana Regionalization Project

Rochelle Owen, from Indiana's RD office, via video, presented a unique drinking water project that was directed by RD for an approximately 2.5 million dollars that is almost exclusively grant. The village of Hazeltown (population 194 based on the 2020 census) obtained funding to rehabilitate its existing water treatment system and tie into the Pike-Gibson Regional Water System. Through extensive and personalized work by an RD staffer, grants from RD and CDBG, SRF loan forgiveness and a Rural Water Association loan made this a reality.

### Water/Wastewater Agency Response Networks (WARNs)

Last year, thanks to a presentation at RCAP's National Conference, I realized how important regionalization is to address the challenges that climate change is presenting to the operation and maintenance of water and wastewater systems.

Joan Douglas, the Florida Lead for the Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project (SERCAP) discussed WARNS, a network, built on collaboration, which was started in 2006-07 to assist other utilities during times of disaster.

The data shows there are now more extreme weather events. more heat events, more heavy precipitation events, more hurricane events, stronger droughts. In summary, lot of things are going on that makes it necessary for everyone working with water and wastewater systems to be able to take care of each other during these kinds of events. WARNS

Water and wastewater agency personnel needed to have a response network where they can help each other. WARNS is a network of utilities where they help each other. It is a voluntary network There's no obligation. The way that they work is that one signs an agreement that if there's a disaster and if you bring someone in to help you that you will reimburse them for their cost. Now you may get reimbursed through FEMA or some other funding, but it's a way of showing that you are going to get reimbursed. You do not have to accept help and you do not have to give help; so it does not obligate you in any way.

WARNs was started in 2006 in California and in Florida. There are now WARNs in every state. One can go to the USEPA website (<https://www.epa.gov/waterutilityresponse/water-and-wastewater-agency-response-networks-fact-sheet>) to get information on the WARN in your state.

There is four different main types of regionalization and the most informal one is using mutual aid agreements. A quick case study on

how the WARNs worked in Florida is using the Hurricane Michael event that occurred in 2018.

After Hurricane Irma, staff from SERCAP attended a workshop where lessons learned from Hurricane Irma were reviewed using WARNs. SERCAP had participated in that one. It was discussed that all were shorthanded during Irma and additional help had been needed. SERCAP offered to setup the WARNs.

Soon after WARNs had been set up for Florida, a trial run tabletop exercise had been planned. On October 10<sup>th</sup>, however, tropical storm Michael hit. This was a category 5 hurricane, with winds of 160 mile per hour so the practice event ended up being a real event where SERCAP staff participated.

The damage was extensive. Staff from the University of Florida at Gainesville headed up the group which consisted of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Rural Water Association and SERCAP (the trio group). Other staff that were included were USEPA, the Army Corps of Engineers, many large and small utilities and other people on the ground who also assisted.

The way it worked was, calls from systems that had a need which were followed up with other utilities throughout the state to determine who had what was needed. A lot of times it was for generators or pumps that were out or assistance from electricians. Sometimes it was just a skill sets.

This event was so massive that it took weeks to do, and so even in the small systems their personnel was burned out and they could not



function anymore. Calls of what was needed would be received and then meetings would be held throughout the day to follow up with other utilities throughout the state to implement what was needed and where to send people. Many challenges had to be overcome.

Cell phone towers were down in southern Florida. There was no way to communicate with people. There were no regular telephone lines. There were no cell phone lines. There was no Internet. Fortunately, Florida Rural Water Association had a satellite phone, so all communication was going on from the field site through satellite phones to the trio group and then the University of Florida. And then it would follow to the utilities.

The mutual aid agreement is voluntary, but some systems, unless they have that guarantee that they are going to get reimbursed for coming to provide assistance, would not do it. So in order to be able to assist communities, the mutual aid agreement had to be on hand. People had to be tracked down to get things signed, but some of the roads were impassable; there was no communication. What should have been an hour drive to get from where one was staying to the site took them from 5:30 in the morning to 9:30 just because of the conditions of the roads.

Tracking had to be done. There were several tracking systems that further complicated matter. Initially there were several tracking systems that further delayed matters.

There is now one joint tracking system with a shared database where one could find out what the needs are and put it out there. Utilities throughout the state can now go on to the site and say, oh, I see that

you need a generator piece of equipment. We have got it. We can help. And so that is how we coordinated Florida.

There were several state tracking systems in existence So everyone was spending a lot of time and putting the same data over and over and again into different databases. The year after the above event, everyone came together to come up with one system, called Water Tracker, where we are only tracking in one location.

In conclusion, information on mutual aid agreements can be found on USEPA's website previously mentioned above one can learn more about WARNs, how to join and how to start one.

## **NEWS FROM THE STATES**

### Montana

Anna Miller reported Montana is working with several communities with emerging contaminants that may go toward regionalization. An update on this will be presented in the future.

### Louisiana

Scott Templett has asked the group for any regionalization information to help communities get started. One can contact Scott at [scott.templet@la.gov](mailto:scott.templet@la.gov)

In response to Scott, Ken Heigel, Executive Director of the Ohio Water Development Authority noted some videos and information sheets are available on Ohio's Small Communities

Environmental Infrastructure Group's website  
([www.sceig.org/shared-resources-partnering-committee](http://www.sceig.org/shared-resources-partnering-committee)).

Note that the section on Regionalization on SCWIE's website also can be reviewed.

### **SCWIE Website**

This e-mail newsletter is sent to all water funding officials currently listed on the SCWIE website ([www.scwie.org](http://www.scwie.org)). It is sent to all those who have requested that they wish to participate on the regular SCWIE Microsoft Teams Meeting as well as those who have requested that they wish to receive the newsletter. In addition, it is posted on the SCWIE website under Newsletters.

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