

News Release

NACWA
A Clear Commitment to America's Waters

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NACWA Calls for More Federal Assistance to Meet Clean Water Infrastructure Needs

The National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) asked Congress to pass new clean water legislation that will “provide greater overall assistance to meet the critical need to repair, replace and properly manage our clean water infrastructure.” Testifying before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment Jan. 19, Kurt Soderberg, Executive Director of the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District in Duluth, Minn., a NACWA member agency, said Congress should reauthorize the clean water state revolving fund (SRF) with a combination of loans, loan subsidies, and grants to help close the funding gap estimated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and the Water Infrastructure Network (WIN) at \$400-\$500 billion over the next 20 years.

In the Duluth area alone, the estimated replacement cost for the aging infrastructure is \$550 million. Many municipalities face needs in the billions of dollars brought on by aging infrastructure and increasingly stringent consent decrees.

“Despite the consensus around the funding gap, broad public support for federal action, and years of hearings on these issues, the federal contribution to clean water investment has declined from more than 70 percent in the early 1970s, to less than 5 percent today,” Soderberg said. “Reduced federal spending and increased federal mandates are taking their toll on utilities. The collective aging of our pipes and systems further limits our ability to meet the objectives of the Clean Water Act.”

NACWA recognizes that reauthorizing the SRF is only the first step and urged Congress to also provide a revenue source to pay for the authorization. To that end, NACWA recommended that any legislation include a short-term study to ascertain “the appropriate combination of viable, long-term, dedicated revenue sources to bridge the clean water funding gap.” The Association continues to believe a trust fund, similar to what is available for highways and airports, is the best option.

Soderberg also recommended any forthcoming legislation provide for the establishment of a Utility Management Institute and funding for much-needed research and technology development. “Clean water agencies could benefit from additional training and education and the use of a greater variety of resources and tools to improve asset management, worker training, and financial reporting,” he told the Subcommittee.

Additional funding for research and technology development would help bring about innovative and alternative approaches to reducing nonpoint sources of water pollution, municipal storm water runoff, and sanitary and combined sewer overflows while also allowing for improvements to methods for water conservation and safe water reuse, monitoring and data analysis, and alternative treatment technologies.

Finally, NACWA called on Congress to use the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the Clean Water Act to consider developing a more integrated approach to water quality management that incorporates water reuse, water conservation, energy efficiency, and the increased use of green technologies. “The ‘silo’ approach to managing drinking water, wastewater and storm water issues separately is dissolving,” Soderberg said. “As comprehensive approaches are taking grip at the municipal level, it is critical to consider new, more comprehensive federal legislative approaches that reflect the new realities of the 21st century,” he said.

NACWA represents the interests of the nation's clean water agencies, collectively treating and reclaiming over 18 billion gallons of wastewater every day.