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RCAP Supports Clean Water Trust Fund, Other Infrastructure Funding

The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) provides technical assistance and training to ensure that small, rural communities have safe, clean drinking water and reliable wastewater systems. RCAP serves communities throughout the U.S. and its territories, most of which are economically disadvantaged and have a population under 2,500.

Basic wastewater infrastructure is critical to protecting public health and the environment, as well as providing the foundation for community and economic development. However, more than a million rural Americans still live without water and sanitation facilities, and more than five million are served by small systems that are inadequate to meet their needs. Rural residents also, on average, pay three times the amount for water and sanitation services. In addition, many such communities do not have the local capacity to effectively operate and maintain their systems.

The Clean Water Act's 35-year legacy is threatened by a lack of federal infrastructure investment to protect water quality. The Clean Water State Revolving Fund is woefully inadequate to meet the needs of the nation's wastewater systems. The EPA, the GAO, and the Water Infrastructure Network estimate the infrastructure funding gap over the next 20 years to be \$300 to \$500 billion. Small rural communities are especially challenged to provide the necessary infrastructure to collect and treat wastewater. However, in light of current budget restrictions, a significant increase in federal general fund support for wastewater projects seems unlikely. Therefore, a dedicated, deficit-neutral funding source is needed to address the issue. A Clean Water Trust Fund, similar to those that finance highways and airports, is a viable solution.

A Clean Water Trust Fund would provide additional federal funding for technical assistance and wastewater infrastructure in communities across the country, which would help address the affordability and capacity issues they face. This funding would supplement existing local and state revenue to prevent water pollution and fund high priority projects to repair crumbling and outdated wastewater treatment systems. The trust fund concept has the support of dozens of national organizations with diverse interests, from environmental and conservation groups to industry and local government coalitions.

Rural America, like the rest of our country, needs Congress' help now. Filling the infrastructure funding gap would help make communities better able to provide wastewater disposal services, which is an important step toward maintaining public health and the environment and improving the economic viability of rural America.

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