



Urgent Action for Sustainable Water Infrastructure Funding

Most subscribers to *Clearwaters* know firsthand that much of our wastewater and drinking water infrastructure in New York needs attention and that federal funding for it has been plummeting. Over the past year, the state has been focused on reversing this trend, which started in earnest when the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Commissioner Pete Grannis established the Clean and Safe Water

Infrastructure Initiative. In a March report, the NYSDEC called for a new sustainable water infrastructure program and estimated that at least \$36.2 billion is needed for this infrastructure over the next 20 years (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/42383.html>). This prompted Governor David Paterson and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, in a joint letter, to implore Congress to stop the cuts and restore funding. In July, the Governor established the Clean Water Collaborative with members of diverse backgrounds in environmental, business, labor and state and local government to work toward solutions with a strong focus on restoring federal funds.

When the stock market plummeted in October, wrecking New York State's budget along with it, Governor Paterson went to Washington to urge Congress to adopt a stimulus package that includes funding for infrastructure. New York's Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Judith Enck, also testified in support of water infrastructure funding.

She noted the dire need for this funding to protect our precious water resources as well as the economic benefit that would be derived from public investment. Creation of anywhere from 35,000 to 47,500 jobs per \$1 billion in federal investment in water infrastructure is projected. If Congress provides an additional \$6.5 billion for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund projects, New York will receive \$715 million, creating about 30,000 jobs at prevailing wages and \$1.2 billion in economic benefit. Such an infusion of funds would make significant progress on New York State's list for this year's 412 projects, totaling over \$4 billion, which are "reviewed, ranked and ready to go." This would also provide direct assistance to our "Main Streets," especially if Congress allows the state to give loan forgiveness for hardship communities.

Yet, even with the possibility of significant water infrastructure funding in a federal stimulus package, the crisis in New York will not be averted. We need a long term program. Moreover, the Department of Health (DOH) recently projected that over \$38 billion is needed for New York State's drinking water infrastructure over the next 20 years. Sustainable funding for this critical infrastructure must still be found. Localities cannot bear this burden alone. The federal government must restore its commitment to this infrastructure that protects the nation's citizens and precious water resources.

The New York Water Environment Association has been actively working to get the word out about this need. This edition of *Clearwaters* is one of several efforts. Others include promoting the "Water is Life" campaign and the "Liquid Assets" documentary as well as the local government official training program. Many other state and national organizations are also championing this cause. Yet, your voice is urgently needed. This is the moment that your action can make a difference.

—James Tierney, Assistant Commissioner for Water Resources
NYS Department of Environmental Conservation



The Reynolds Water Works

I live in a rural county. I own my water infrastructure – well, septic tank and leach field. This makes my water situation very common here and very much at odds with the national averages. Locally, a couple small municipal water systems serve approximately one third of the population. The other two thirds use private wells, with some using lake water. However, not everyone who has 'city' water has 'city' sewer. The majority of households, and many businesses, have septic

systems. When wells and septic tanks share the same area, sometimes there is trouble.

Prior to the 1854 cholera epidemic in London, the connection between sickness and contaminated water was not known. Dr. John Snow's studies proved otherwise and so started the process of treating drinking water and wastewater employed by municipal systems. For those of us who do not have access to municipal systems, maintaining our own 'works' is a little science project that needs to have a passing grade each day. Before a shovel of dirt was thrown, I had to determine where the well was to be located and then make sure the septic was

down-gradient a sufficient distance. The well needed to be dug by a registered driller following the state and local requirements for depth, construction, seal and cap. Each year I test the well for contaminants. There is usually no problem, but the year with the flood brought a bad water test and a flooded septic tank.

The average family of four uses about 275 gallons per day of drinking water. That is a lot of bottled water when the well is bad. Necessity drove me to the Centers for Disease Control website, where I found the magical formula to disinfect the well with chlorine, and to the Environmental Protection Agency website where I learned what to do with a flooded septic system. We capped drains to prevent backups; restricted toilet usage; imposed ourselves onto friends on higher ground; and bought hand sanitizer by the quart. We ran the outside faucet through a hose back to the well to make sure all parts of our private water infrastructure had chlorine circulated through it. Then we worried about all the chlorine we eventually ran into the septic tank so we dumped enzymes down the toilet. We tested. When we got good results on the home kit, we sent a sample to a certified lab and received results we could trust.

The first glass of water from the tap was scrutinized. So was I after I drank it – the proverbial parakeet in the mine – but I didn't get sick and neither did anyone else. The adventure made us conscious of the trade offs of living where we do and of the simple joys of being able to turn one handle to have water emerge and to turn another handle to make water disappear.

—Eileen Reynolds, CSP (Certified Safety Professional)
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