

# RURAL matters



2011  
Issue 4

The magazine of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership

A serene landscape photograph of a rural area at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and light blue. In the foreground, there are silhouettes of trees and branches hanging over a body of water. The water reflects the sky and the trees. In the background, there are rolling hills and more trees.

## Education and economic development in rural America

Guest editorial by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

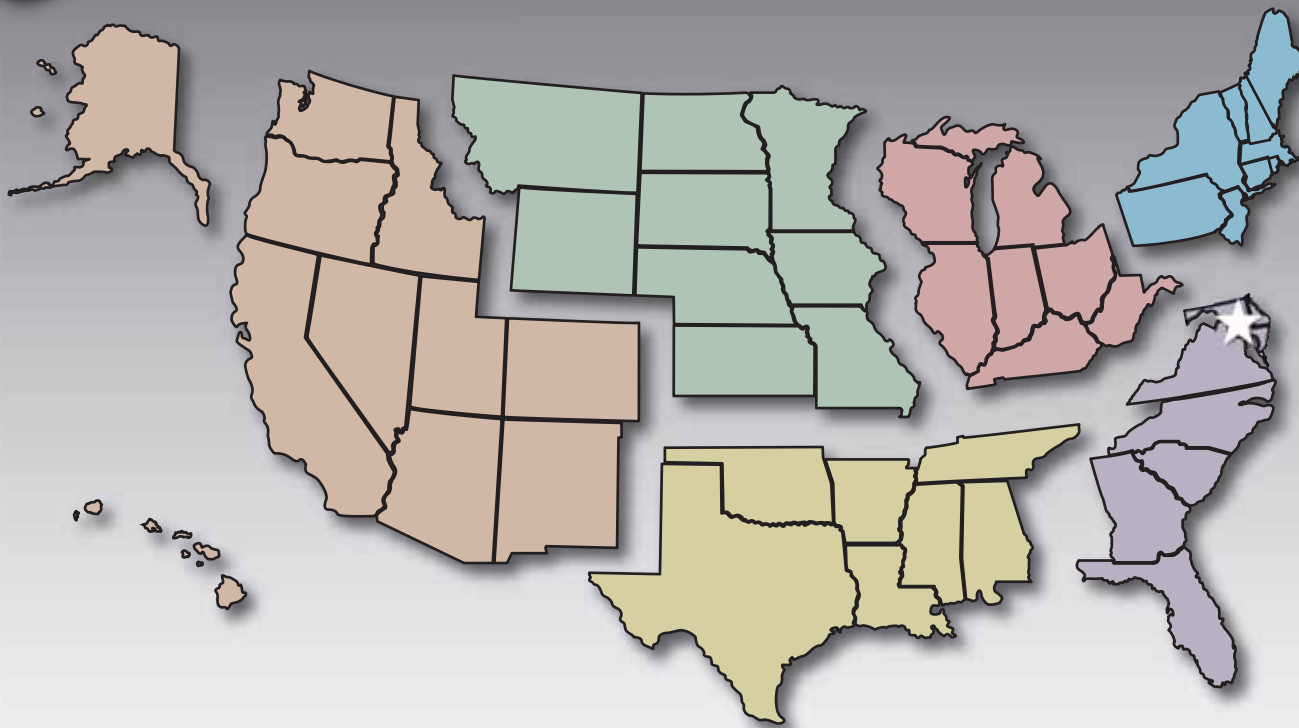
*Also in this issue:*

Facing climate change

RCAP Service Awards



# Rural Community Assistance Partnership: A network of six regions and a national office



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# RURAL matters

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# Improving the quality of life in rural communities

Photo by Melissa Jones

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# Director's letter



Robert Stewart  
RCAP Executive Director

Fall has always signaled the start of school. The laid-back days of summer give way to a more studious and hard-working mindset among everybody, whether a student or not.

Education and training have always been at the heart of RCAP. They are the means by which we can assure ourselves that a rural community will continue to prosper after we have moved on to help another community. While it may be easier at times for our technical assistance providers to just “fix” the problem, long ago we discovered that educating or training community members provides them with the ability to continue to successfully solve similar problems in the future.

This emphasis on education is crucial as we all struggle to stay on top of the informational and technological advances that are driving our society and economy. We are very pleased to have an important, topical guest editorial from Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in this issue of *Rural Matters*. Secretary Duncan places special emphasis on programs and partnerships that provide specialized, technical and targeted training to today’s rural high school graduates that will allow them to enter high-demand and high-wage occupations. Secretary Duncan comes from a family of educators and has devoted his life to improving education systems and practices. He has developed a keen interest in improving educational and training opportunities and programs in rural America.

RCAP is continuing to expand our training resources through the publication of a series of educational guides on a variety of water and wastewater topics. These include informational guides for water and wastewater governing boards, a rate-setting workbook, a financial-management guide, two reporting manuals that support our work with communities funded by Rural Development, and several others. All will be available on our website ([www.rcap.org/commpubs](http://www.rcap.org/commpubs)) and through our field staff. In addition, we will continue to explore opportunities to partner with other educational institutions and programs to help meet the growing need for water and wastewater utility professionals.

In the midst of our current economic situation where we hear of competing visions of ways to produce jobs and reinvigorate our economy, I hope that we can all agree that the education of our children and young adults must remain a universal priority. Rural communities must be given equal access to educational and training opportunities that lead to productive and sustainable jobs and careers. An educated, vibrant and adaptive workforce is the best means to ensure the long-term economic prosperity of America. ■

# rural developments



## News and resources from the Environmental Protection Agency

### Beat the peak with water-saving tips from WaterSense

When the mercury rises, so does residential water use. During dry summer months, outdoor water use increases, with more than 70 percent of water going to landscape irrigation in some areas of the country. This contributes to a phenomenon known as “peak water-use season.” Water use further increases on weekends, as many people use this free time to tend lawns and landscapes, wash cars, and do laundry—all high water-using tasks.

From watering lawns and landscapes to filling swimming pools, the average American household’s water use can increase from 260 gallons of water per day to about 1,000 gallons per day! Some homes use as much as 3,000 gallons on a peak day.

While using water efficiently is important throughout the year, sometimes the timing of water use can make a big difference for community water supplies—and water bills. Find tips on what you can do to reduce your summer water use here: [http://epa.gov/watersense/water\\_efficiency/when\\_its\\_hot.html](http://epa.gov/watersense/water_efficiency/when_its_hot.html).

### New online training module on water-quality standards

A new online training module intended to encourage and facilitate public involvement in the EPA’s Water-quality Standards program is now available on EPA’s website. “How to Develop and Implement Public Involvement Programs and Practices” outlines the requirements of public involvement and highlights good practices for

creating an effective public-participation process in decisions that affect water quality. Links to EPA policy, resources and tools are provided throughout the module and are compiled at the end of the presentation for further development of a tailored public-involvement process.

To experience the new module go to [www.epa.gov/waterscience/standards/academy/special/public/player.html](http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/standards/academy/special/public/player.html)

More on EPA’s Water-quality Standards for Surface Waters and related information: <http://water.epa.gov/scitech/swguidance/standards/index.cfm>

### ‘How to Develop a Multi-year Training and Exercise Plan’ released

The EPA’s Water Security Division has released a new document to assist drinking water and wastewater utilities in developing multi-year training and exercise (T&E) plans. T&E plans are useful for tracking progress and increasing preparedness capabilities at water utilities. The document also assists utilities in developing Department of Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Plan (HSEEP)-compliant training programs. The document is available for download at <http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/watersecurity/emergencyplan/upload/epa816k11003.pdf>



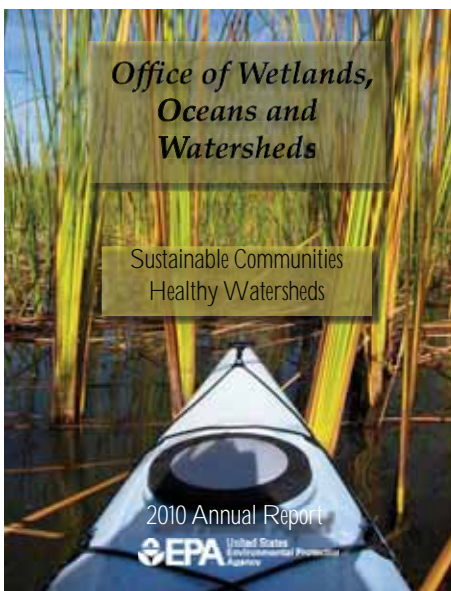
## 'Sustainable Communities, Healthy Watersheds' 2010 annual report available

The EPA's Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds (OWOW) has released its 2010 annual report titled "Sustainable Communities, Healthy Watersheds." The title reflects the two major themes of EPA's national water program.

The report contains information about the EPA's work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the development of new draft guidance on Identifying Waters Protected by the Clean Water Act (also known as the Waters of the U.S. Draft Guidance); progress in better protection of water quality in Appalachia from the harmful effects of surface coal mining operations; and advancement in the work of the National Ocean Council.

The report also includes information about efforts to address nitrogen and phosphorus pollution through the development of a recommended framework for states as well as a new guidance that addresses polluted runoff from federal land-management activity in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The report can be viewed at: <http://water.epa.gov/aboutow/owow/upload/owowannualreport2010.pdf>



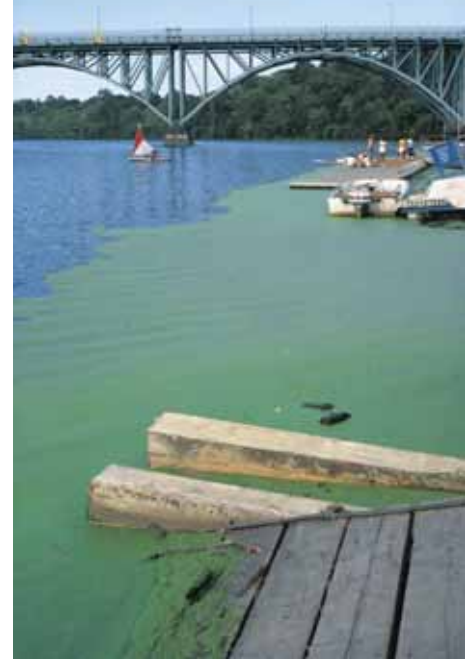
## Kopocis nominated to head EPA's Office of Water

On June 10, President Barack Obama announced his intention to nominate Ken Kopocis to the position of Assistant Administrator for the Office of Water in the EPA.

RCAP receives annual grants from EPA, which makes up part of RCAP's operations budget. With these EPA funds, RCAP employs technical assistance providers across the country who assist small, rural communities with their technical, managerial and financial needs related to their water and wastewater systems at no charge to the communities because of EPA's support. The Office of Water is the main way RCAP relates to EPA.

Kopocis has been the Senior Counsel on the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure since 2008. From 2006 to 2008, he served as the Deputy Staff Director for Infrastructure on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. From 1993 to 2006, Kopocis was the Staff Director and Senior Counsel for the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment for the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. From 1985 to 1993, he served as Assistant Counsel on the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment for the Committee on Public Works and Transportation.

Kopocis has worked on water issues in Congress for more than 25 years and has played a role in crafting and defending numerous pieces of environmental legislation, including the Clean Water Act. He also previously served as an attorney in the Government Accountability Office and at the General Services Administration. Kopocis holds a B.S. from the University of Nebraska-Omaha and a J.D. from the College of William and Mary.



## New and improved EPA website on nitrogen and phosphorus pollution

Over the last 50 years, the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution entering our waters has escalated dramatically and is becoming one of America's costliest and most challenging environmental problems. In many parts of the country, nitrogen and phosphorus pollution negatively impacts human health, aquatic ecosystems, the economy, and people's quality of life. The EPA has developed a new and improved website about nitrogen and phosphorus pollution to provide the public with information about this type of pollution—where it comes from, its impacts on human health and aquatic ecosystems, and actions that people can take to help reduce it.

EPA's new website also includes updated information on states' progress in developing numeric water-quality criteria for nutrients as part of their water-quality standards regulations. EPA recognizes that states and local communities are best positioned to restore and protect their waters, and the agency is providing technical guidance and tools to help states develop numeric nutrient criteria for their water bodies.

*continued on next page*

To facilitate state and local efforts to reduce nutrient pollution, EPA is releasing a new Nitrogen and Phosphorus Pollution Data Access Tool. The goal of the tool is to support states in their nitrogen and phosphorus analyses by providing the most current data available on: the extent and magnitude of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution; water-quality problems related to this pollution; and potential pollution sources in a format that is readily accessible and easy-to-use. With this comprehensive data, EPA, the states, and other stakeholders will be able to more quickly gather additional, less-accessible data and develop effective source-reduction strategies for nitrogen and phosphorus.

The website is available at [www.epa.gov/nutrientpollution](http://www.epa.gov/nutrientpollution)

## Other news and resources



COMMUNITY  
RESOURCE GROUP  
INCORPORATED

### RCAP staffer, resources win awards

Melissa Jones, former editor of RCAP's eBulletin, which she produced as a staff member of Community Resource Group (CRG), the Southern RCAP, on behalf of the national RCAP network, won several awards recently, some of them for her work on RCAP resources. In the 2011 Arkansas Press Women Communications Contest, Jones won first place in the writing for the web category for the eBulletin. She also won first place in the photo for a nonnewspaper category for her cover photo in *Rural Matters*. In the past couple of years, many of Jones' photographs of rural scenes have appeared on the cover of *Rural Matters* (including this issue).

## Emergency water-supply planning guide for hospitals and health-care facilities

In order to continue daily operations and patient-care services, health-care facilities need to develop an emergency water-supply plan (EWSP) to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a total or partial interruption of the facilities' normal water supply. A disruption to the water supply can be caused by several types of events, such as natural disaster, a failure of the community's water system, construction damage, or even an act of terrorism. Because water supplies can and do fail, it is imperative to understand and address how patient safety, quality of care, and the operations of a facility will be impacted.

A robust EWSP can provide a road map for response and recovery by providing the guidance to assess water usage, response capabilities, and supply alternatives.

A new guide, Emergency Water Supply Planning Guide for Hospitals and Health Care Facilities, complements the recently released Planning for an Emergency Drinking Water Supply, which was developed through a partnership of the EPA's

National Homeland Security Research Center and the American Water Works Association. The guide is a resource for reviewing the roles and responsibilities among various levels of government and essential planning steps. Because all government entities and others responsible for emergency water supplies should coordinate roles as well as identify approaches and estimate resources, planning leads to more effective and efficient operations under emergency conditions.

Download the guide: [www.awwa.org/files/GovtPublicAffairs/GADocuments/Emergencywatersupplyplanningguide.pdf](http://www.awwa.org/files/GovtPublicAffairs/GADocuments/Emergencywatersupplyplanningguide.pdf)

Planning for an Emergency Drinking Water Supply: [www.awwa.org/files/GovtPublicAffairs/PDF/PlanningSupply.pdf](http://www.awwa.org/files/GovtPublicAffairs/PDF/PlanningSupply.pdf)

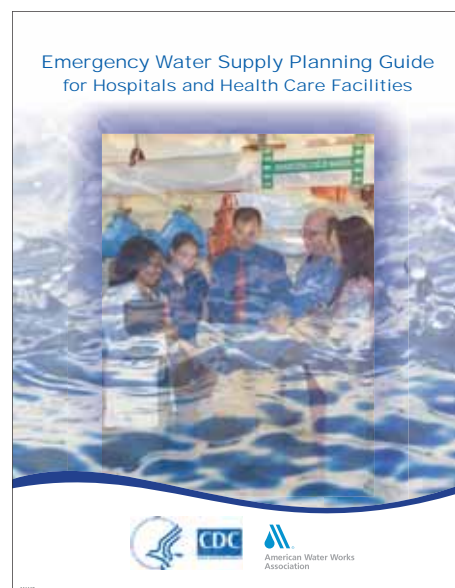


## WaterSmart Innovations conference and exposition

The fourth WaterSmart Innovations Conference and Exposition, Oct. 5 to 7 in Las Vegas, will showcase new water-efficiency technology; build and strengthen effective, interdisciplinary relationships; and promote companies working in innovative water-efficiency technology and services. At WaterSmart Innovations, a wide range of professional sessions and workshops, along with an extensive exhibition of water-saving technologies and programs from around the world, will connect attendees with the resources they need in an atmosphere of networking, collaboration and learning, to create a new wave in water efficiency.

More information:

[www.WaterSmartInnovations.com](http://www.WaterSmartInnovations.com) ■







## Obama administration affirms comprehensive commitment to clean water

WASHINGTON – Recognizing the importance of clean water and healthy watersheds to our economy, environment and communities, the Obama administration released a national clean water framework April 27 that showcases its comprehensive commitment to protecting the health of America's waters. The framework emphasizes the importance of partnerships and coordination with states, local communities, stakeholders and the public to protect public health and water quality and to promote the nation's energy and economic security.

"Clean water and healthy waterways are vital to the health and vibrancy of our communities and the strength of our economy," said Nancy Sutley, chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. "Working with our partners across communities, governments and sectors, we are taking comprehensive action to ensure Americans have the clean and healthy waters they need and deserve."

"The steps we're outlining today will be instrumental to protecting the waters of the United States and ensuring that the vital natural resources our communities depend on for their health and their economy are safeguarded for generations to come," said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. "After four decades of progress on clean water, there is still work to be done to address unfinished business and tackle new threats to our waters. American families and businesses are counting on us to maintain and improve the rivers, lakes, streams and other waters that support thousands of communities and millions of jobs across the country."

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack said that his agency "...will continue to invest in rural water and community-facility projects that help small towns ensure their citizens have access to safe and reliable drinking water."

Clean water provides critical health, economic and livability benefits to Ameri-

can communities. Since 1972, the Clean Water Act has kept billions of pounds of pollution out of American waters, doubling the number of waters that meet safety standards for swimming and fishing. Despite the dramatic progress in restoring the health of the nation's waters, an estimated one-third of American waters still do not meet the swimmable and fishable standards of the Clean Water Act. Additionally, new pollution and development challenges threaten to erode our gains, and they demand innovative and strong action in partnership with federal agencies, states, and the public to ensure clean and healthy water for American families, businesses, and communities.

The Obama administration is safeguarding clean water by:

### Promoting innovative partnerships

Federal agencies are partnering with states, tribes, local governments and diverse stakeholders on innovative approaches to restore urban waters, promote sustainable water supplies, and develop new incentives for farmers to protect clean water.

### Enhancing communities and economies by restoring important water bodies

The Obama administration is dedicating unprecedented attention to restoring iconic places like the Chesapeake Bay, the California Bay-Delta, the Great Lakes, the Gulf of Mexico and the Everglades, investing in action and helping states, local governments and stakeholders find pollution-control solutions that are tailored to their specific needs.

### Innovating for more water-efficient communities

The administration is working with policy-makers, consumers, farmers and businesses to save water—and save money—through 21st century water-management policies and technology.

### Ensuring clean water to protect public health

The Obama administration is aggressively pursuing new ways to protect public health by reducing contaminants in Americans' drinking water. It is updating drinking-water standards, protecting drinking-water sources, modernizing the tools available to communities to meet their clean-water requirements, and providing affordable clean-water services in rural communities.

### Enhancing use and enjoyment of our waters

The administration is promoting stewardship of America's waters through innovative programs and partnerships. These efforts include expanding access to waterways for recreation, protecting rural landscapes, and promoting public access to private lands for hunting, fishing and other recreational activities.

### Updating the nation's water policies

The administration is strengthening protection of America's waters and American communities. It is modernizing water-resources guidelines and updating federal guidance on where the Clean Water Act applies nationwide. The draft guidance will protect waters that many communities depend upon for drinking, swimming, and fishing, and provide clearer, more predictable guidelines for determining which water bodies are protected from pollution under the Clean Water Act.

### Supporting science to solve water problems

The administration is using the latest science and research to improve water policies and programs and identify and address emerging pollution challenges.

More information and to read the Obama administration's clean water framework: [www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/clean-water](http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/clean-water) ■



# EPA working group encourages 'climate-ready' water utilities

*Photo by Vinod Panicker,  
Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.5*

***Voice of  
small, rural  
communities  
brought  
to table  
through RCAP  
chair of group***

By Travis Mitchell

Many water utilities are not prepared for the challenges of climate change and need to be made “climate-ready,” according to a report released in December 2010 by a working group of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) co-chaired by RCAP staff member Olga Morales.

The report, produced by the Climate-Ready Water Utilities Working Group of the EPA’s National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC), outlines the possible effects of climate change on water utilities, proposes solutions for dealing with it, and encourages water utilities to become “climate-ready.”

"We spent a lot of time trying to define what a climate-ready water utility looks like," Morales said. "Climate change creates an opportunity for the water sector as a whole to take a step back and reassess 'business as usual'."

Morales is a Rural Development Specialist-Environmental in New Mexico with the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), the Western RCAP. Besides heading the working group that produced the report, she was a member of the NDWAC, which she was recently invited by EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson to chair. To both groups, she brings not only her expertise of water utilities but also the voice of small, rural systems.

According to the report, water utilities have the potential to be negatively impacted by increasing temperatures, changes in precipitation, rising sea levels, and more frequent and severe storms. Water utilities are likely to face growing customer demand and increased usage due to shifts in population and economic activity, the report also says.

The report states that, "Climate science is evolving, and uncertainty regarding the timing, nature, direction, and magnitude of localized climate-change impacts (weather, ecological, and other) is, and is expected to remain, high. At the same time, because utility investments are often capital-intensive, long-lived, and can require long lead times to ensure system reliability and maintenance of desired service levels, building climate considerations into utility decision making is a current necessity."

Morales believes that RCAP, as a leading national technical assistance provider, has the necessary expertise and skill set to work particularly with small-sized utilities to help them become "climate-ready."

"Climate change has the potential to challenge many things, including those which have been established based on historical trends, such as the current regulatory framework," she said. "Climate change

looks different, feels different and has the potential to impact regions in different ways. Therefore, planning for and reacting to climate change should be done regionally. Climate change calls for an integrated approach."

As a member of the NDWAC, Morales is able to build on her work with RCAC.

"Being part of this council gives us, RCAP, the opportunity to bring forward the challenges and issues that small utilities face in their daily operations," she said.

One of the main objectives of the working group's report is to promote awareness of climate-change challenges in the water sector and to motivate the sector to meet those challenges. The report identifies characteristics of a climate-ready utility, identifies effective products and training methods, and encourages the implementation of these strategies.

In developing an "Adaptive Response Framework," the working group identified needed resources (tools, training, and products) to support, and incentives to promote, successful implementation. The needs for resources are organized in five categories: internal understanding and education; partnership building; climate impact assessment; climate adaptation support; and stakeholder communication.

The working group also recommends the EPA follows five steps:

- helping utility managers better understand the evolving nature of climate-change challenges;
- improving knowledge of "no-regrets" and low-cost operational, infrastructure and non-structural choices;
- better incorporating and addressing climate-related uncertainty in long-range planning;
- understanding the cost and benefits of climate-change adaptation and mitigation for small systems; and



- attracting and establishing effective partnerships in the independent sector.

Although climate science continues to evolve, the report explains that the high cost, intensive planning and longevity of water system projects make it necessary to incorporate climate-change strategies into these projects.

With all of these considerations, the working group said it understands "the struggle many utilities face to meet their current obligations, the uncertainty of localized climate change impacts, and the lack, for certain utilities, of technical, financial, and managerial capacity."

Keeping those issues in mind, the working group's recommendations focus substantially on the actions necessary to overcome these obstacles and to create water systems that will remain operational in the face of climate change.

The working group's report is at <http://water.epa.gov/drink/ndwac/climatechange/upload/CRWU-NDWAC-Final-Report-12-09-10-2.pdf> ■

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*Mitchell was the spring 2011 RCAP Communications Intern. He graduated with a degree in journalism from American University in May.*

# *Natural resources group's new report identifies how climate change will impact water supplies and waterways in cities*

As the nation grapples with a record year of storms, drought and weather-related devastation, a new report released July 26 by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) reveals climate change is leaving American cities open to a range of water-related vulnerabilities—from drought to sea-level rise and increased rainfall—regardless of region or size. The report looks at ways communities facing these new extremes are trying to protect their water supplies and waterways.

“This report makes clear that some of the first, most profound and far-reaching impacts of climate change are water-related, affecting the water we drink, fish, and swim in,” said Michelle Mehta, an attorney for NRDC’s Water Program and a principal author of the report. “In the future, we can expect increased violent storms, drought and rising seas, so communities nationwide, regardless of size, should get plans up and running to reduce their unique vulnerabilities and prepare for impacts.”

The report, “Thirsty for Answers: Preparing for the Water-related Impacts of Climate Change in American Cities,” found that climate change will impact water supplies and waterways in communities across the country, with geography often determining the specific effects. The report has compiled the results of more than 75 scientific studies, data generated

by government agencies, and information gathered by other nonprofit organizations to analyze how the impacts of climate change on water supplies and waterways could affect 12 target cities:

- Boston
- Chicago
- Homer, Alaska
- Los Angeles
- Miami and the Florida Keys
- New Orleans
- New York City
- Norfolk, Va.
- Phoenix
- San Francisco
- Seattle
- St. Louis

The report provides a snapshot of projected climate-change impacts in regions across the country: Rising sea levels threaten vital infrastructure and saltwater intrusion to freshwater supplies in cities on the East, West and Gulf Coasts. Severe storms in the Midwest and East Coast are likely to become more intense and more frequent, causing floods and erosion, and threatening drinking water quality. In the West, a combination of increased temperatures, decreased precipitation and less snowpack contributes to a future shortage of water supply for people and aquatic life.

The report describes various steps cities are taking to become more resilient to the

effects of climate change, providing examples of steps that communities across the country should consider. These include steps by San Francisco, Seattle and Phoenix to prepare for water shortages. Seattle Public Utilities has identified a series of system modifications and supply options based on research conducted by the University of Washington. It also plans to save 15 million gallons of water a day by 2030.

Olga Morales, co-chair of the Climate-Ready Water Utilities Working Group of the Environmental Protection Agency’s National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC) and an RCAP staff member, notes that the report does not address medium-sized or small utilities, which she and other RCAP staff work with and which represent more than 90 percent of the nation’s utility systems.

The working group Morales co-chaired produced a report on “climate-ready” water systems late last year (see related article on page 10).

“As part of the climate-ready water utilities resource-development working group, I have challenged both EPA and the scientist group to develop a tool that can be used on a regional level to help communities to both assess and adapt to climate-change impacts,” said Morales. “Climate change will not zoom in on a specific utility, regardless of size. The impact will be at a regional level, and the approach to address it should be at the same scale.”

She explained that, in cases where large water utilities are part of an impacted region, they can serve as the sentinels to smaller utilities in the region.

“Climate change does not call for re-inventing the wheel. What it calls for is reinforcing the spokes. If the utilities can operate in a resilient manner, they should be able to react to any climate-related challenges,” she added.

NRDC’s complete report is available online at: [www.nrdc.org/water/thirstyforanswers.asp](http://www.nrdc.org/water/thirstyforanswers.asp) ■

# New books examine role of water and changes to come

## The Big Thirst

Water is everywhere, but it's too often taken for granted. Whether it's used in the kitchen, the bathroom, or in a farm field, water has and will always be essential to life. In his new book, *The Big Thirst*, author and investigative reporter Charles Fishman explores the human relationship with water.

*The Big Thirst* celebrates the history and great value of water. Fishman contrasts society's fascination and curiosity of water with the widespread lack of appreciation and disrespect for the proper management and use of water.

Fishman's book was profiled in a recent story by National Public Radio. During the interview, Fishman pointed out some of the lesser-known uses of water in daily life.

"[We use] 10 gallons of water an hour every hour of every day just to power our computers and our refrigerators and our washing machines at home," Fishman told NPR.

Fishman points out other sources of water waste, such as the fact that one out of every six gallons of water acquired, treated and pumped by water utilities in the U.S. leaks back into the ground before it can be consumed. Fishman argues that water-utility technology must improve in order for this sort of waste to end.

Fishman examines parts of the world already gripped by water shortages and offers a view into the future of clean and reliable water. Profiles include parts of India, where people must line up daily for buckets of clean water, and Las Vegas, a city currently experiencing one of the biggest water shortages in America.

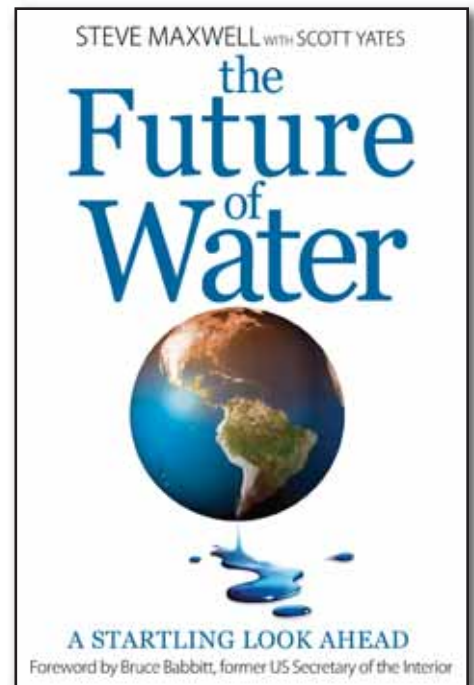
For more on the book, see the full feature from National Public Radio. You can listen to the full audio story, view highlights from the interview and read an excerpt from the book.

Find it all here:  
[www.npr.org/2011/04/11/135241362/the-worldwide-thirst-for-clean-drinking-water?sc=fb&cc=fp](http://www.npr.org/2011/04/11/135241362/the-worldwide-thirst-for-clean-drinking-water?sc=fb&cc=fp)

## The Future of Water

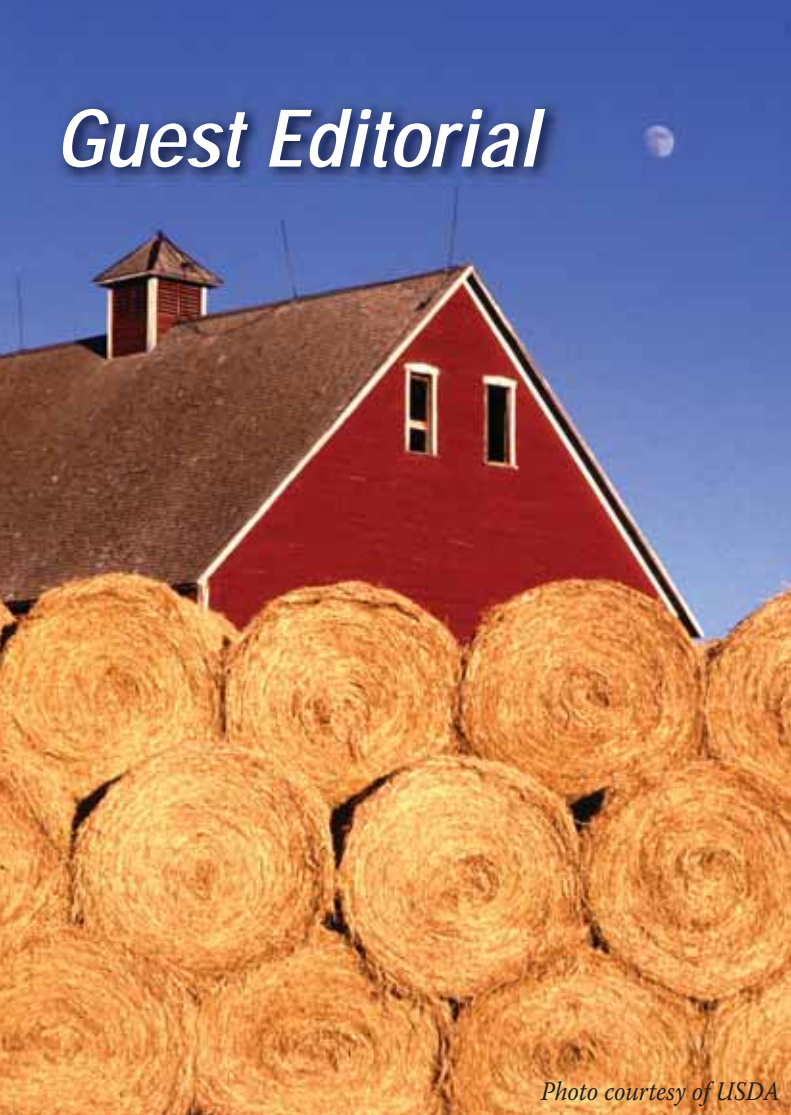
The American Water Works Association (AWWA) has announced the release of a new book focusing on significant future changes in how society deals with water. According to AWWA, the book, titled *The Future of Water: A Startling Look Ahead*, examines the coming change in the way the world views, values and accesses water.

Author Steve Maxwell has been involved in water industry consulting and investment for 20 years. In *The Future of Water*, he introduces some of the biggest challenges facing water, such as population, economics, energy, climate and pollution.



*The Future of Water* also looks at changes in home uses of water and imagines a future where yards and plants can grow on seawater and appliances like washing machines or dishwashers require little to no water. The book also delves into the future of agricultural and industrial water use. Other topics include how water storage, utilities and business are likely to evolve in the coming years.

*The Future of Water*, by Steve Maxwell with Scott Yates, is available in AWWA's online bookstore at [www.awwa.org/bookstore](http://www.awwa.org/bookstore), and through major online book-sellers. ■



*Photo courtesy of USDA*

# Education is at the heart of rural economic development

By Arne Duncan  
U.S. Secretary of Education

For decades, many rural communities have struggled with poverty, loss of industry, and migration of residents to urban areas. I have traveled to nearly every state in the union and have witnessed the challenges faced by many distant and remote communities. When I return, I remain optimistic about the future of rural America.

Rural communities will revitalize and, in some cases, reinvent themselves by investing in their residents so they have the skills that are in demand. This process begins with education.

Even in the most distressed rural communities, rural schools have tremendous strengths. Class sizes are generally small, the schools are the center of a community's life, and high school graduation rates are high in many rural areas. But we know that rural communities need to improve. Rural students are less likely than their peers nationally to attend college and earn degrees, and their communities and local economies are paying a terrible price.

According to the National Center on Education Statistics, more than half of the nation's school districts (56 percent), nearly one third of public schools (31 percent), and almost a quarter of students (23 percent, or 11.3 million) reside in rural areas. That is a lot of brain power and economic potential.

In today's knowledge-based economy, rural children and adults can no longer afford to pass on opportunities to access some form of postsecondary education. President Obama has set an ambitious goal for America to again lead the world in the proportion of college graduates – university, college, and community college degrees – by 2020.

A high school diploma is no longer enough to fully realize the American dream. Some level of career training beyond high school is needed for nearly every good job that can support a family today.

Organizations such as the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) are working to improve the quality of life in rural America. I commend RCAP and its partners in the water industry for working to address the lack of education that has perpetuated generational poverty in many economically disadvantaged rural communities.

According to the American Water Works Association, many of today's youth are not prepared to perform technical work in the water industry. Career and technical education is not adequate in some areas, and math, science, and literacy skills are low.

Community colleges are the closest contact to postsecondary education in many rural communities. To support these schools, President Obama is investing \$2 billion over four years in the Community College-Career Training grant program.

I am encouraged that RCAP is working with the Rural Community College Alliance and the American Association of Community Colleges to promote the establishment and re-establishment of associate-degree programs in water and wastewater operations at community colleges.

RCAP's Executive Director, Robert Stewart, estimates that there are only a few dozen associate degree programs in water treatment operations and utility management nationally. He points to Crowder College in Missouri as one example where

students can pursue career certificate programs and, if they choose, pursue an Associate of Arts degree in environmental health technology with transferability accepted at many four-year colleges. More are needed to meet the growing demand for water treatment professionals in rural areas.

RCAP has identified current and future labor shortages in the water industry due to an aging workforce. Among its work of providing technical assistance and training to small, rural water systems, RCAP is offering training and resources in post-secondary education institutions to solve these dilemmas.

By partnering with schools, vocational and technical centers, and community colleges, RCAP is assisting these institutions with preparing rural children and adults for skilled jobs in the water industry that currently exist and are expected to increase in rural areas. These are the types of partnerships that President Obama is encouraging in other industries as well.

We need more business and nonprofit partnerships designed to lead to industry-

recognized credentials, work-study and internship positions that serve as career pathways. The Obama administration is making unprecedented investments in education, including support for improvements in career and technical education and career pathways.

We have a vision for transforming career and technical education, supported by a new Rigorous Programs of Study initiative that spans secondary and post-secondary education and concentrates on high-demand, high-wage occupations. Statewide articulation agreements that lead from secondary to post-secondary schools and into careers must become the norm, and employers will be much more engaged in designing programs of study and promoting industry-recognized credentials. In short, we want to refine and scale what works.

Education is the only sure pathway out of poverty and the only sustainable strategy for economic prosperity. It is also at the heart of rural economic development. ■

## About the author

Arne Duncan was nominated to be Secretary of Education by President Barack Obama and was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on Jan. 20, 2009.

In his confirmation hearings, Duncan called education "the most pressing issue facing America," adding that "preparing young people for success in life is not just a moral obligation of society" but also an "economic imperative." "Education is also the civil rights issue of our generation," he said, "the only sure path out of poverty and the only way to achieve a more equal and just society." Duncan expressed his commitment to work under the leadership of President Obama and with all those involved in education "to enhance education in America, to lift our children and families out of poverty, to help our students learn to contribute to the civility of our great American democracy, and to strengthen our economy by producing a workforce that can make us as competitive as possible."

Prior to his appointment, Duncan served as the chief executive officer of the Chicago Public Schools from June 2001 through December 2008.



# RCAP field staff honored with awards for service

## *Profiles of remaining honorees*

By Travis Mitchell

Nine staff members employed by RCAP's regional partners were honored with awards for exceptional service in their positions during RCAP's national conference Nov. 30 to Dec. 2, 2010, in Washington, D.C. Profiles of four of the honorees were in *Rural Matters* 2011 Issue 2. This article profiles the other honorees.

Winners of the awards were announced during a banquet held at the conference, which was a training event for RCAP technical assistance providers and other staff from all of RCAP's six regional partners. Honorees were each presented with a glass award etched with his/her name and a framed certificate.





RCAP staff members across the country were invited to nominate their fellow staff members in five award categories. All Technical Assistance Providers and State/Regional coordinators were eligible. The honorees were chosen by a panel of national RCAP board members and RCAP Executive Director Robert Stewart.

“For the second year in a row, the RCAP network has put forth an outstanding class of staff who are worthy of special recognition for the work they do,” Stewart said.

“These men and women give their all each day to improve the lives of rural Americans yet rarely receive and never expect any form of recognition other than the immense satisfaction of a job well done. Each of these honorees is representative of the dedicated and expert staff across the country whom RCAP has to assist communities with their challenges,” said Stewart. “The RCAP board of directors is pleased to recognize the exceptional level of dedication and perseverance to their work that these honorees have.”

## Outstanding Service Award

This award was given to RCAP staff members who repeatedly went above and beyond the call of duty in serving their communities, building their capacity and helping them achieve the outcomes that are critical to their future health and development. The recipients were staff members who give more than 100 percent in the service of their communities and whose commitment and dedication to RCAP’s mission is obvious to all.

***Awarded to: Michael Murray, technical assistance provider with Maryland Rural Development Corporation (MRDC) under Southeast RCAP (SERCAP)***

“Because he goes above and beyond the call of duty in providing services to his project communities, each of Michael’s project communities wants him for themselves,” said Murray’s supervisor, Joyce DeLaurentis. “We at MRDC and SERCAP appreciate so much all of the energy, commitment and personal engagement that he dedicates to every aspect of his work.”

Murray described himself as a people person and said he enjoys going into communities and working side-by-side with elected officials and town employees.

“Working with Maryland’s rural communities is not a task at all, especially when you have been invited to their community days and special events, picnics and Christmas parties,” he said.

DeLaurentis noted that Murray’s track record of leveraging funds is “absolutely remarkable.” He has worked with more than 20 communities (some with multiple projects) and has leveraged more than \$27 million in funding in his nine years as a technical assistance provider.

Murray said that he tries to expand his knowledge in his profession. He is working in two areas that are new to him – with a community that has an arsenic problem in a water-treatment source and with the

issue of hydraulic fracturing in far-western Maryland.

“I strive to make a good, lasting impression with the people, the communities and all the agencies that I work with and to let them know that we (RCAP) are here for the duration,” he said.

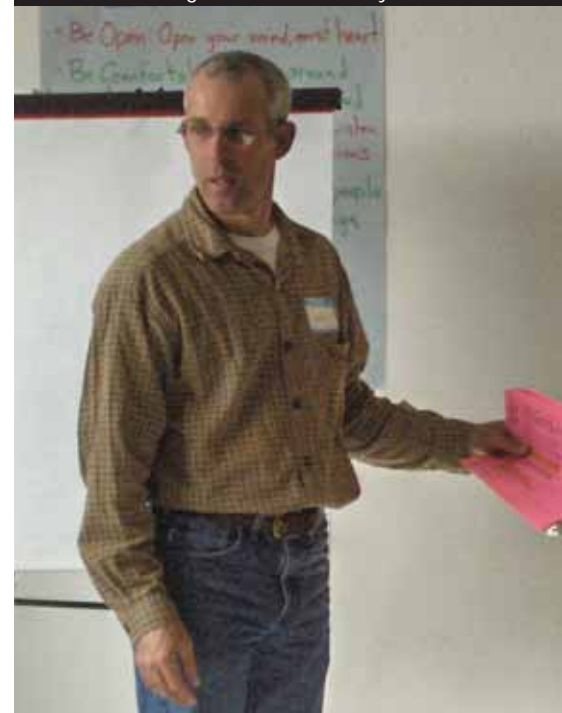
***Awarded to: Jay Mashburn, a Rural Development Specialist-Environmental with the Rural Community Assistance Corporation, the Western RCAP***

Upon receiving the award, Mashburn said he is very proud to be recognized but also emphasized the hard work of his peers. “There are lots of hardworking, talented folks in the RCAP network,” he said. “I have always been very proud to be one of them.”

Outstanding Service Award: Michael Murray



Outstanding Service Award: Jay Mashburn



Mashburn also noted the importance of empowering communities to achieve their own visions for improvement.

“Small, rural communities are filled with lots of good people working hard to do

*continued on next page*

continued from previous page

the right thing. State and federal agencies are filled with lots of good people working hard to do the right thing," Mashburn said.

Mashburn was the focus of a *Rural Matters* RCAP staff member profile in 2010 issue 4 (page 11).

## Outstanding Mentor Award

The RCAP mentor award was given to Technical Assistance Providers or State/Regional Coordinators who have made a difference in the program through their expert guidance, valuable knowledge and ability to act as nurturing, encouraging leaders.

### ***Awarded to: Kurtis Strickland, Rural Development Supervisor with Ohio RCAP under the Great Lakes RCAP***

"Kurtis is always looking for ways to improve our work and to share new information, tools, techniques and approaches with other staff," said Stewart. "As the Great Lakes RCAP training coordinator, Kurtis has excelled not only in training other staff but also in using his considerable talents to prepare detailed reference materials and to train rural communities throughout the region."

"Without the excellent mentors who helped me...I would have never devel-

oped the skills and knowledge that I have," Strickland said. "To receive a national award from an organization such as RCAP, which I have such respect for, means a lot to me."

Strickland said he strives to give 100 percent in his work and is motivated by his passion in helping small, rural communities acquiring funding for their projects.

"Helping small communities construct, repair, or replace aging infrastructure is fulfilling. These are huge projects for most small communities, and often overwhelming for them," he said.

At the same conference where he was presented with the award, one of Strickland's entries in the RCAP photo contest won in the category of "audience favorite." His winning photo appeared on the cover of *Rural Matters* 2011 issue 3.

### ***Awarded to: Dennis Siders, Regional Director with the Midwest Assistance Program (MAP), the Midwest RCAP***

"Before he retired [on Aug. 5, 2011], Dennis's impact on training and mentoring new employees at MAP was outstanding. He had a deep and sincere desire to ensure that all MAP staff worked to improve their skills to better serve rural communities in his region," Stewart said.



Outstanding Mentor Award: Dennis Siders

"After almost 20 years of working for Midwest Assistance Program and RCAP, it's very gratifying to be recognized by my peers," Siders said.

Siders said he felt that one of his responsibilities as a regional director was to help his staffers mature in their work and learn leadership qualities.

"I am old enough to be a father figure to most of my staff, and seeing them learn how to assist communities and become successful is very rewarding," he said before his retirement. "If I can help my staff provide better service and be more productive, that will grow our organization and provide more opportunities for rural communities."

## The Bill French Bridge-Builder Award

This award was given to an RCAP staff member who has been successful in building his state RCAP program, whether in reputation and credibility or in funding. He has advanced his state program to a higher level of operations through new and enhanced relationships with funding and/or primacy agencies or other partners, new services offered to communities, and/or new grants or contracts obtained.

*Kurtis Strickland (right) accepting the Outstanding Mentor Award from Robert Stewart.*



***Awarded to: John Rauch,  
RCAP Coordinator with the Great  
Lakes RCAP***

“John has been instrumental in making the Ohio RCAP program the outstanding state program in the RCAP network,” Stewart said. “With a combination of vision and hard work, he has developed a variety of new programs that all work together to provide outstanding services to Ohio’s rural communities.”

Rauch said it was a “very great honor” to receive the award and directed most of the credit to the staff of the Great Lakes RCAP.

“Our work is helping people with environmental needs, and we improve the quality of life in rural communities,” Rauch said.

Rauch sees his work as being about finding the most affordable long-term solutions to water and sanitary needs.

“As our scope of services has increased, so has our impact to rural citizens,” he said. “The rural citizens depend on us to help them do the right thing.”

Rauch said his favorite part of the job is capacity development for both staff and small community water systems. He also enjoys being able to build relationships through his work.

The Bill French Bridge-BUILDER Award: John Rauch



Stan Keasling (left) with other Housing Assistance Council award winners (photo courtesy of HAC)

“I have a 3-by-5-foot map of the United States behind my chair in the office and glance at that as I am talking to a colleague in some other part of the country,” he said. “Truly, I have been very blessed to be able to associate with such great people working for a common cause across this land.”

**Housing Assistance  
Council's Skip Jason  
Community Service Award**

In addition to the above RCAP staff awards, Stan Keasling, CEO of the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC; the Western RCAP) and chair of RCAP's national board of directors, won an award from the Housing Assistance Council (HAC). RCAP's national training conference was held in conjunction with HAC's 2010 National Rural Housing Conference.

On the final evening of HAC's portion of the joint conference, Keasling was presented with the Skip Jason Community Service Award from HAC. This award recognizes people whose efforts have improved the housing conditions of the rural poor in their communities. The award acknowl-

edges people who work “in the trenches” and usually go unrecognized outside their communities.

“Stan is an incredibly energetic and talented professional who has devoted his life to improving living conditions of low-income families in rural America,” said Stewart. “Always mindful of the enormous need for affordable housing in rural America, Stan has continually sought after and implemented new programs, resources and approaches that have made the dream of home ownership a reality for so many rural families throughout the western United States.”

RCAC provides water and wastewater technical assistance under the banner of the national RCAP network. In addition, it has a separate but extensive housing-assistance program in its region of the western United States, and this work falls under the direction of Keasling as RCAC's CEO. Keasling is a regular attendee at HAC's conferences. ■

*Mitchell was RCAP's spring Communications Intern. Photos by Stephen Shpanka.*



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