

RURAL matters

fall 2009

The magazine of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership



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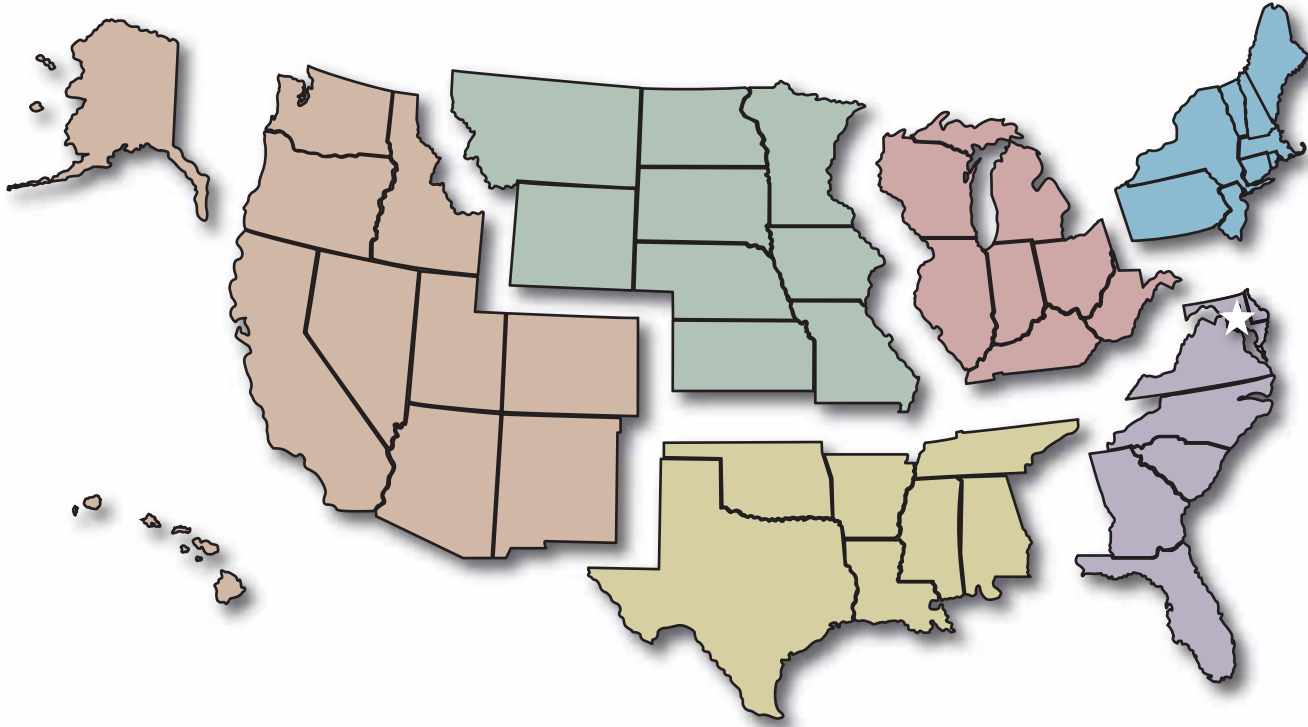
RCAP National Conference Wrap-up

Modern Rainwater Collection

Rep. James Oberstar on
Wastewater Infrastructure



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



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Improving the quality of life in rural communities

RURAL matters

The magazine of the
Rural Community Assistance Partnership

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Director's letter

As 2009 draws to a close, many of us will reflect on the events of the year and how our families and communities have weathered the biggest economic downturn that most of us have ever seen. Health care and climate change seem to attract significant attention in Washington and among the media, but the employment situation has been among the biggest concerns of rural (and urban) America this year. While some rural areas have fared somewhat better than their urban counterparts, other areas, such as those that depend heavily on natural resource or extractive industries (such as timber), have suffered. In addition, as in the past during difficult economic times, workers in rural areas tend to migrate to urban localities in search of jobs.

Fortunately, programs have been initiated to stimulate the economy and build and repair necessary infrastructure, which is the foundation for continued economic growth. The water and wastewater sector has seen tremendous new investments in infrastructure in 2009.

For instance, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) is providing approximately \$3.7 billion in loans and grants for rural water and wastewater infrastructure through the existing U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Water and Waste Disposal program.

In addition, at the Environmental Protection Agency, \$4 billion has been made available to help communities with water-quality and wastewater infrastructure needs and \$2 billion for drinking water infrastructure needs. A portion of the funding will be targeted to green infrastructure, water and energy efficiency, and environmentally innovative projects.

Initiatives are also underway in Congress to increase future funding for the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Funds. Another measure, H.R. 3202, the Water Protection and Reinvestment Act of 2009, has been introduced to provide \$10 billion annually for needed water and wastewater infrastructure. RCAP has worked toward securing small-systems provisions in this "trust fund" bill. Investment in water and wastewater infrastructure creates jobs, improves community health, and lays the groundwork for future economic development.

Among other topics we are presenting in this issue are articles on our recent national conference. RCAP staff from across the country came to Washington to attend informative sessions on how better to provide needed training and technical assistance to rural communities – assistance that seeks to improve the health and well-being of rural Americans and the communities where they live. I am especially proud of the nine staff who received awards at the conference. Please take a minute to read about these outstanding women and men who have committed themselves to helping others!

We are nearing completion of an overhaul of our website, www.rcap.org. Please visit our site to learn more about what RCAP is doing to assist rural communities.

I hope that each one of you has joyous holidays and a happy new year. Please take some time to enjoy your family and friends, to renew your faith, and to celebrate the many blessings of living in this wonderful country. ■



Robert Stewart
RCAP Executive Director



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rural developments

RCAP Executive Director addresses national conference of Rural Development staff

RCAP Executive Director Robert Stewart addressed the national conference of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development (RD) program Aug. 25 in Washington, D.C., in a brief speech. The conference was RD's policy gathering of the program's state and national staff.



In his remarks to all participants during a lunchtime session, Stewart stated that there is always a need for greater cooperation and collaboration among RCAP and other rural service-delivery organizations and the many different RD programs that serve rural America.

"We need to ensure that we do not look at any particular rural community need in isolation of other related community needs and opportunities," he said. "It is important that RD continues to work to coordinate the activities of its varied programs to pro-

vide comprehensive approaches to helping rural communities."

Stewart was one of several representatives of RD's partners who addressed the gathering during the session. RD invited the partners to speak in order to deepen its relationships with them.

"We need to look for ways that RD's partners – nonprofits such as RCAP – can work in a coordinated and collaborative basis with all RD programs: Business, Housing and Community Facilities and Utilities," he said. Stewart called for an increased emphasis on comprehensive development approaches that are supported by additional resources.

New EPA Office of Water administrator begins work



Peter Silva began as the new Assistant Administrator for Water at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on July 27, 2009, heading up the Office of Water, which

is charged with implementing the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act. He was appointed to the position by President Barack Obama and confirmed by the Senate.

Silva has more than 32 years of public sector experience in the water and wastewater fields, with extensive knowledge of U.S.-Mexico border issues.

At his confirmation hearing in May, Silva said the biggest challenges he expected

to address were: jurisdictional issues on which waters in the United States should be regulated by the Clean Water Act; nonpoint sources of pollution and nutrient runoff; and new and emerging contaminants.

In his testimony, Silva said, "Despite the considerable progress we have made in the last three decades, we now see additional challenges have arisen in the areas of nonpoint source pollution and in new emerging pollutants of concern."

"We also have a unique opportunity to work with stakeholders at all levels of government as well as nongovernmental organizations in crafting new solutions for this new generation of issues," he added.

Prior to joining EPA, Silva was a senior policy adviser on lower Colorado River issues for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. Before that, he served for six years as the vice chair of the California Water Resources Control Board, having been appointed by both Governors Gray Davis and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Preceding this, Silva was the deputy general manager of the Border Environment Cooperation Commission housed in Juarez, Mexico.

Silva's other experience includes ten years with the City of San Diego (both the Clean Water Program and Water Utilities Department), four years in charge of the San Diego office of the International Boundary and Water Commission, and five years with the California Regional Water Quality Control Boards in Los Angeles and San Diego.

Silva has a B.S. in civil engineering from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona and is a registered civil engineer in California.



EPA administrator announces plan to retool and reinvigorate Clean Water Enforcement Program

WASHINGTON (EPA) — EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson announced Oct. 15 at a House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing that the agency is stepping up its efforts on Clean Water Act enforcement. The Clean Water Action Enforcement Plan is a first step in revamping the compliance and enforcement program. The plan seeks to improve the protection of the nation's water quality, raise the bar in federal and state performance, and enhance public transparency.

"The safety of the water that we use in our homes – the water we drink and give to our children – is of paramount importance to our health and our environment. Having clean and safe water in our communities is a right that should be guaranteed for all Americans," said Jackson. "Updating our efforts under the Clean Water Act will promote innovative solutions for 21st century water challenges, build stronger ties between EPA, state, and local actions, and provide the transparency the public rightfully expects."

The plan outlines how the agency will strengthen the way it addresses current water pollution challenges. These challenges include pollution caused by numerous, dispersed sources, such as concentrated animal feeding operations, sewer overflows, contaminated water that flows from industrial facilities, construction sites, and runoff from urban streets.

The goals of the plan are to target enforcement to the most significant pollution problems, improve transparency and accountability by providing the public with access to better data on the water quality in their communities, and strengthen enforcement performance at the state and federal levels. Elements of the plan include:

- Develop more comprehensive approaches to ensure enforcement is targeted to the most serious violations and the most significant sources of pollution.
- Work with states to ensure greater consistency throughout the country with respect to compliance and water quality. Ensure that states are issuing protective permits and implementing enforcement to achieve compliance and remove economic incentives to violate the law.
- Use 21st century information technology to collect, analyze and use information in new, more efficient ways and to make that information readily accessible to the public. Better tools will help federal and state regulators identify serious compliance problems quickly and take prompt actions to correct them.

Last July, Jackson directed EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance to develop the plan in response to data showing that the nation's water quality is unacceptably low in many parts of the country.

More information on the plan: www.epa.gov/compliance/civil/cwa/cwaenfplan.html

New resources

Promoting mutual aid and assistance in emergencies

Promotional posters on mutual aid and assistance in emergencies in the water sector are available from the EPA.

Released in March, the posters describe mutual aid and assistance in the water sector, how and why it works, who supports it, and where to find additional resources. The posters can also be printed for display (up to 4' x 6') or as a handout (8.5" X 11") at conferences and other events.

One type of mutual aid/assistance mechanism that is becoming more well-known is WARN – a water/wastewater agency response network. The poster promotes the benefits of WARN and provides steps on developing one.

Download as a PDF at www.epa.gov/safe-water/watersecurity/pubs/poster_warn.pdf (2 MB).

Website on watersheds

The EPA recently launched a new website called "Watershed Central" to help organizations and other stakeholders find key information for implementing watershed management projects.

The site includes guidance, tools, case studies and data resources that integrate EPA programs to help users share information, analyze data, and initiate or strengthen their own watershed efforts. The site also helps users find environmental data, watershed models, local organizations, guidance documents, and other information. There are links to watershed technical resources, funding sources, mapping applications, and information specific to individual watersheds.

Watershed Central includes a feature called a wiki, a place where users can submit and edit content that is constantly updated by the watershed community (similar to Wikipedia). The wiki includes case studies, information on watershed organizations and various watershed management tools. Watershed practitioners are encouraged to use this wiki to share tools, scientific findings, expertise, and local approaches to watershed management.

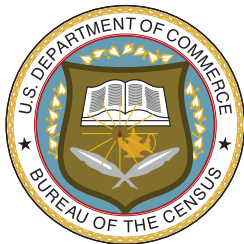
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Watershed Central was developed to bridge the gap between user needs and the variety of resources offered by EPA and other groups.

Visit Watershed Central at www.epa.gov/watershedcentral

Census news

Are you doing anything for the 2010 census?



The RCAP national office in Washington, D.C., is designated as a Census Information Center by the U.S. Census Bureau. As such, the national office is requesting information on any activities RCAP staff or regions are doing in relation to the 2010 census.

Some examples of the types of activities you should submit are:

- displaying and/or distributing 2010 census promotional materials at work
- linking to the 2010 census website from your organization's website
- placing 2010 census articles in your newsletters or other resources (please send a copy)
- working as a census taker (even if separate from your official RCAP duties)

Please submit a short description of your activities to Dave Clark at dclark@rcap.org.

Census Information Centers are an integral part of the Census Bureau's data-dissemination network. Their primary focus is making census information and data available to under-served communities that may not have access to census data through other means of the data-dissemination network. The RCAP national office has many Census Bureau resources in its library that are available to the RCAP network.

Guidebook on rural census data available

A Compass for Understanding and Using American Community Survey [ACS] Data: What Users of Data for Rural Areas Need to Know introduces the ACS to those who use social, demographic, economic and housing data for rural communities.

The ACS is a nationwide survey that provides communities a fresh look at how they are changing. It is a critical element in the Census Bureau's reengineered decennial census program. The ACS collects and produces population and housing information every year instead of every ten years.

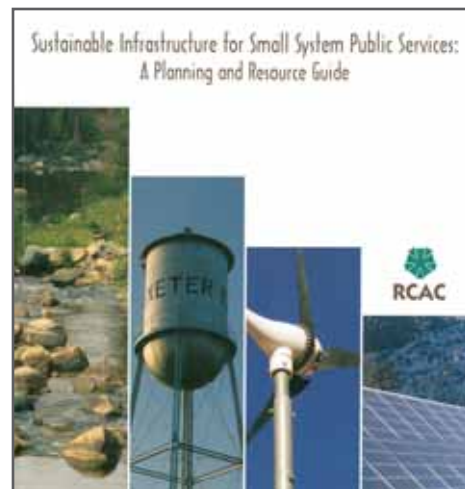
Using the device of a single case study, this handbook illustrates a variety of aspects of the ACS and shows how results from the ACS are both similar to and different from data formerly gathered in conjunction with the decennial census.

The guide is at www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/ACSRuralAreaHandbook.pdf (PDF; 1.1MB).

Website for operators of small water systems

Smallwatersupply.org is a website with resources for operators of small water supply systems. Its simple structure and basic design is aimed at the many small operators who have little web experience.

The main features of the site are a database of online documents, a calendar of events, and a blog. The document database and calendar are searchable using various criteria and will be continuously updated. The blog features updates on industry happenings, guest posts from experts, and highlights from technical assistance providers from around the country.



New 'green infrastructure guide' for small utilities

Sustainable Infrastructure for Small System Public Services: A Planning and Resource Guide is a new book published by the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), the Western RCAP.

On the purpose of the guide, its introduction states: "Rather than presenting theories, this guidebook provides informational material, worksheets, examples, case studies and resources on water conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy for small utilities."

Written by RCAC staff members, this "green infrastructure guide" is a starting point for very small (fewer than 1,000 connections) to medium communities (up to 5,000 connections) to integrate and initiate green elements into their facilities and projects. It assists communities in identifying specific actions they can take as they make sustainable and long-term choices.

The guide was produced for utility decision makers, staff and community residents wanting to operate increasingly efficient small utility systems. Its 94 pages encompass three chapters on water conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy sources.

The guide can be downloaded from the RCAC website at www.rcac.org/assets/green_infra/gig.pdf (PDF; 2.33 MB).

Obama signs executive order related to federal use of resources

Demonstrating a commitment to lead by example, President Barack Obama signed an executive order Oct. 5 that sets sustainability goals for federal agencies and focuses on making improvements in their environmental, energy and economic performance.

The executive order requires federal agencies to increase energy efficiency, conserve water, reduce waste, and support sustainable communities, among other goals.

In requiring federal agencies to “improve water use efficiency and management,” the executive order asks for:

- reducing potable water consumption intensity by 2 percent annually through fiscal year 2020, or 26 percent by the end of fiscal year 2020, by implementing water management strategies including water-efficient and low-flow fixtures and efficient cooling towers;
- reducing agency industrial, landscaping, and agricultural water consumption by 2 percent annually or 20 percent by the end of fiscal year 2020;
- identifying, promoting, and implementing water reuse strategies that reduce potable water consumption;

“As the largest consumer of energy in the U.S. economy, the federal government can and should lead by example when it comes to creating innovative ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase energy efficiency, conserve water, reduce waste, and use environmentally-responsible products and technologies,” said Obama. ■



Indiana challenges its communities to become ‘CLEAN’ environments

Since 2006, ten Indiana communities have come “CLEAN.”

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management’s (IDEM) Comprehensive Local Environmental Action Network (CLEAN) awards the communities the CLEAN designation. CLEAN is a voluntary, performance-based program that rewards Indiana’s local governments for going above and beyond mandatory environmental responsibilities in their municipal operations. Potential environmental impacts associated with municipal services are addressed through a quality of life plan. Efficiency, long-term cost savings and improved environmental compliance are added benefits.

The communities that have earned the designation are Ogden Dunes, Lawrence, Indianapolis, La Porte, Michigan City, Crown Point, Richmond, Tell City, Fishers, and Valparaiso.

“CLEAN is an environmental program, but efficiency and cost savings are a huge benefit from the initiatives they implement,” said IDEM Commissioner Thomas Easterly. “Fuel conservation, energy conservation and resource management are common measures, but each community is unique in many aspects and our program provides flexibility.”

IDEM’s CLEAN Community Challenge program manager assists local governments in the planning, development and implementation of a comprehensive quality of life plan – an environmental management system. Communities also choose the activities that fit their goals. The program is designed to be flexible in these ways.

Some of the environmental improvement initiatives that CLEAN communities have committed to implementing include: reductions in fuel, electricity and paper use; recycling in municipal buildings; purchasing environmentally friendly products; implementing a unique tire retread program; establishing more trails and greenways; and incorporating native vegetation into municipal projects.

Any Indiana community with a positive compliance history can be a CLEAN community. Town and city officials and employees receive technical assistance from IDEM to develop five environmental improvement initiatives, which they work on over a three-year period. Each initiative includes a measurable goal and a detailed action plan for accomplishing that goal.

Additional information can be found by calling IDEM’s CLEAN program at (800) 988-7901 or by visiting www.cleancommunities.IN.gov ■

RCAP staff gather near Washington, D.C., for national conference

Training event develops skills of staff from RCAP's six regions

RCAP staff from Hawaii to Puerto Rico and from Washington to Florida, and most states in between, came together for several days of training and learning in mid-September at the organization's national conference outside Washington, D.C.

Held Sept. 15 to 17 at a hotel in Arlington, Va., the conference brought together 130-some staff members from RCAP's six regions. Most participants were Technical Assistance Providers (TAPs) and their State and Regional Coordinators and Program Managers. Also in attendance were members of RCAP's Board of Directors, regional CEOs, national office staff, and staff of RCAP's funders – EPA, USDA Rural Development, and the Department of Health and Human Service's Office of Community Services.

"RCAP staff are some of the most knowledgeable TAPs in rural America, and the training they received during this conference allowed them to further hone their skills," said RCAP Executive Director Robert Stewart. "The support from our funders





Photo by
Stephen Padre

in providing trainers on topical issues was outstanding. And perhaps most importantly, this conference provided a unique opportunity for staff from across the country to meet and share experiences.”

The conference was two and a half days of intense training, geared mostly to TAPs to help them build new skills and develop existing ones for their work in the field with communities. An optional half-day workshop on energy audits at small utilities followed the conference.

21 sessions offered

Most of the program was in the form of 90-minute sessions on topics ranging from asset management to workforce issues and sessions that featured RCAP funders speaking about their agencies’ latest developments. Most sessions featured two or more presenters speaking on various sub-topics.

“We sought to make this conference a valuable learning experience for all of the RCAP staff,” said Joy Barrett, RCAP’s Director of Training and Technical Services, who oversaw the program part of the conference. “We wanted to introduce

some cutting-edge topics to experienced technical assistance providers and also to provide new staff with a comprehensive exposure to RCAP’s work.”

Comments about the sessions provided on the conference’s general evaluation form revealed that the sessions on GIS tools, asset management and Rural Development programs were among the most-liked and rated most valuable to participants in their work.

One participant wrote on an evaluation form that the session on decentralized wastewater treatment was most valuable “because it allowed input from the Technical Assistance Providers

on positive outcomes on situations you have in the field. This allowed other TAPs a chance to see several different ways to handle similar situations.” Other participants said they also appreciated the opportunity to learn from their peers, while some said hearing from experts outside the RCAP network needs to be done more at future conferences.

Greetings from funders

The conference opened with a general session at which representatives from RCAP’s funding agencies spoke.

USDA Rural Development

Dallas Tonsager, Under Secretary for Rural Development (RD) in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, opened his greetings by saying he appreciates what RCAP staff do to help communities. Tonsager said he had been a resident of a small community himself for 40 years, and as a result, “You’ve won me. I’m on your side.” The statement garnered applause from the audience.

Tonsager said RD is “critical for rural America, especially for rural communities.” RCAP is part of the RD’s efforts to help rural areas, the native of South Dakota said.

According to Tonsager, President Barack Obama, who nominated Tonsager to his post in March, understood rural America from the beginning of his presidency. “He very much cares about it,” said Tonsager.

The Under Secretary outlined his seven focal points in his new position, which he started in May. For the next several years, he said, his mantra is to create new businesses in rural areas.

One of the focal points that relates to the work of RCAP staff in the field is regional collaboration. “Local communities need to work together,” he said, explaining that collaboration is an essential element of work in rural areas. “You are fundamentally part of that because you work with communities.”

Another focus area is bringing broadband Internet service to rural areas as a way to build a national rural communications

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Photo by
Stephen Padre



Photo by
Stephen Padre

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system. Tonsager acknowledged RCAP's application for a \$36 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service and the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration through the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program.

The initiative is also meant to spur the development of businesses in rural areas. "We are constantly encouraging people throughout rural America to invest in new opportunities," said Tonsager.

Looking for strategic partners is another one of Tonsager's focus areas, and RCAP is well positioned to be part of this, as his remarks demonstrated. "I look forward very much to working with you in the future," he said. "My very best in the mission you all are on in support of rural America."

EPA

Cynthia Dougherty, Director of EPA's Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water, followed Tonsager's remarks by saying the country is facing great challenges in helping small systems maintain sustainability and compliance with the Safe Drinking Water and Clean Water Acts.

According to Dougherty, sustainable communities are a priority of EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, and having clean drinking water is part of that.

"Your continued support is needed," she said, noting that RCAP has been well-represented on various EPA groups.

"We appreciate the partnership we've had for a number of years, and we hope we can continue to work together," Dougherty said, adding thanks to RCAP for its assistance in working with EPA on the Check Up Program for Small Systems (CUPSS), an asset management tool for small drinking water and wastewater utilities.

In one of EPA's priority activity areas that Dougherty described, she said EPA is working to safeguard public health by:

- Providing training and technical assistance to help utilities maintain compliance under current laws
- Renewing its emphasis on capacity development and operator training
- Making sure the public has access to information about the quality of its water

- Reviewing existing regulations and looking at new regulations

Another one of EPA's priority activity areas is supporting sustainable drinking water systems and infrastructure, which involves creating livable communities. According to Dougherty, the key to sustainable systems is to make sure that small systems have technical, managerial and financial capacity.

HHS OCS

Lynda Perez, Director of the Division of Community Discretionary Programs in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, was the third representative of RCAP's funders to speak. She noted that the Office of Community Services (OCS) is what first funded RCAP, and since its founding, OCS has provided an uninterrupted funding stream.

Perez said it was good to be with the people who work so hard. "You are the bridges between the bureaucracy and the states," she said, describing RCAP staff in the room as the ones who create the projects. "Thank you for being the face of government that cares."

"Our funding is where the gap is," said Perez, which prompted applause from the

audience. She said OCS's funding is for RCAP to provide assistance to communities, including helping them to access other funding sources. "Your job is to be educated enough to help these communities to go out and find these funds."

She included a request to RCAP staff to keep reports on OCS funds being used and to document where gaps are. "You write the program," she said. "We don't write the program."

Other speakers

Other speakers bringing greetings included Tom Curtis, Deputy Executive Director of Government Affairs at the American Water Works Association, and Jim Taft, Executive Director of the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators.

The general session on the conference's final day featured David Clark, Director of Environmental Programs in the RCAP national office, speaking on outcomes and indicators.

He sought a shift in the mindset of staff in how they report on their projects in order to more clearly demonstrate to RCAP's funders what difference the organization is making in its work. Clark attempted to

inject some humor and lightheartedness into the subject by comparing RCAP's outcomes from certain inputs to the outcome of ruining his life that his mother said would occur if he listened to certain types of music when he was younger.

Capitol Hill visits

The conference's location just outside Washington, D.C., was chosen to allow participants to also take some time to visit their congressional representatives on Capitol Hill. Many participants scheduled appointments to speak to their state's delegation on funding to RCAP and the needs of rural utilities.

Christian Nill, Senior Community Development Specialist for RCAP Solutions, the Northeast RCAP, visited the office of Eric Massa (D) of New York's 29th District, where Nill lives. It was Nill's first congressional visit as an RCAP staffer.

Nill said his meetings with two members of Massa's staff were longer than he expected, and he welcomed them as an opportunity



Photo courtesy of Harold Hunter

Harold Hunter (seated) and Tom Fulton, two staff members of Community Resource Group (CRG), the Southern RCAP, visit Rep. Ralph Hall, R-Texas (standing, left), at his Capitol Hill office during the RCAP national conference. Hall requested information on CRG and its projects in his district.

to present his work with RCAP and even make some personal connections. His first meeting was with Massa's assistant for environmental affairs, and then, as he was leaving the office, he was called back for another short meeting with the congressman's senior policy adviser.

"I mentioned a few of the communities I've worked with recently in District 29," Nill wrote in a report on his visit that he delivered in October at an RCAP Solutions staff meeting. "And I described the types of assistance I provide: Project funding for water and sewer. Public participation. Community needs assessment. Local decision-making. Board training." The legislative assistant was impressed, Nill said.

"All together it was a pretty good meeting," said Nill. "I hope it will help the organization," he added, noting that congressional contacts are invaluable and many times lead to community referrals and new and additional work for RCAP staff like him.

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Photo by Stephen Padre

“Now that we have a personal connection, we have to cultivate that connection,” Nill said. One of Nill’s recommendations that he included in the report on his visit was to “be sure to follow up afterwards with a nice letter or e-mail to the people you met with... You are on their radar screen; now stay there!”

Exceptional RCAP staff honored

One of the key gatherings of all participants was a lunchtime banquet on the event’s second day. The main purpose of the banquet was to honor staff who had been nominated by their fellow regional staff and chosen to receive RCAP’s national awards. A total of nine staff members who work in four of RCAP’s regions received awards, which were given in five categories.

“One of the most important activities of any organization is to recognize the outstanding performance of its employees. The only problem with RCAP is that there are so many deserving staff who work tirelessly every day on behalf of rural communities,” said Stewart. “The luncheon where these were presented was a real highlight of the conference. It was quite moving to hear every award winner speak so eloquently about their commitment to this work and about the collaboration with their peers that made it all possible.”

(See the following article about the staff who were honored with awards.)

Stewart said he was very pleased by the turnout for the conference and the high quality of the training sessions. “My thanks go out to Joy Barrett, Stephen Padre [national office staff] and the members of the RCAP Training Work Group for pulling together such an outstanding event.”

PowerPoint presentations and other materials for some of the conference’s presentations can be downloaded at www.rcap.org/conference/sessions.htm

RCAP field staff honored with awards for service

Nine RCAP staff members were honored with awards for exceptional service in their positions on Sept. 16 at a banquet lunch during RCAP’s national conference.

The honorees are staff in four of RCAP’s regions. Each was presented with a glass award etched with his/her name and a framed certificate.

This is the first time RCAP has presented awards at the national level. RCAP staff across the entire network were invited to nominate their fellow staff members in five award categories. Technical Assistance Providers and State/Regional Coordinators were eligible. The honorees were chosen by a panel of RCAP board members chaired by ex officio panel member and RCAP Executive Director Robert Stewart.

Stewart said RCAP is fortunate to have so many talented and experienced staff working to improve living conditions in rural areas. “The nine staff members whom we honored for their service are outstanding examples of the hard-working professionals we have in every state across America,” he said.

“As I review their many accomplishments and as I reflect on these fine and honorable individuals, I feel so fortunate to work with such men and women whose commitment and care for rural communities is unsurpassed,” he continued.

Stewart said the RCAP board is happy to honor staff members who have continuously demonstrated their ability to provide critically needed technical assistance and

training to small and low-income communities. “Each of these awardees demonstrates an exceptional level of dedication and perseverance to their work and to the communities that they serve.”

The following are the Outstanding Service Award recipients:

This award was given to RCAP staff members who repeatedly go 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. Recipients are 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.

Melissa Melton, Technical Assistance Provider with WSOS Community Action Commission, the Great Lakes RCAP

“From the moment you meet Melissa, you know that she is someone whose passion and dedication to her work is complete and unwavering,” said Stewart. “She is never hesitant to tackle a new challenge and invariably succeeds beyond everyone’s expectations.”

Melton said she is deeply honored to receive such an award. “It is heartwarming that my commitment and hard work are recognized,” she said.

She strives to provide great service to the communities she works with. “I always feel that they are all shortchanged because there’s only one of me, and there’s just

never sufficient time to accomplish all of our goals," she explained.

Among her variety of accomplishments is assisting with the preparation of grant applications for solid waste, leadership development, entrepreneurial workshops, and the rural community development initiative. Her work has resulted in millions of dollars of funding for rural communities in Kentucky.

According to Melton, the part of her work that rarely feels like work is working with utility staff in her communities. "Organizational identities quickly become blurred, and I'm just another team player trying to attain the community's goals," she said.

**Harold Hunter, Sr.,
Development
Management
Specialist with
Community
Resource Group, the
Southern RCAP**

"You'd have a hard time finding a harder-working and more respected professional than Harold," said Stewart, who described Hunter's ability to understand and support every aspect of the development, financing, construction, operation and management of utilities as phenomenal. "The number of communities he works with, the level of support he provides to Rural Development staff in Texas, and the amount of funding he has helped to obtain for projects is truly remarkable."

"It's my goal to have a community feel that we not only resolved a problem but became such good friends that they invite us to participate in an annual community event," said Hunter.

Because of his longevity in his position, Hunter said one thing that comes easiest

to him in his work is analyzing problems in communities and recommending an agreeable solution.

He said he is honored by the recognition he received for doing his job. "At the same time, it's humbling to know that there are so many others in the network who do what I do that did not receive recognition."

**Olga Morales-Sanchez,
Rural Development Specialist-
Environmental with Rural Community
Assistance Corporation, the Western
RCAP**

Morales-Sanchez said there are rewards that come constantly for Technical Assistance Providers like her when they complete projects, when they're able to make a difference in their communities, and when a community's residents recognize their work. "But to be recognized by your own coworkers and by this wonderful organization is an incredible feeling," she said.

"Each of these award-ees demonstrates an exceptional level of dedication and perseverance to their work and to the communities that they serve."

"Working in the Colonias area, where the poverty rate is one of the highest in our nation, and being able to make a difference gives me the drive to get up everyday to continue to identify resources and in some cases create opportunities outside that traditional system," she added.

Stewart said Morales-Sanchez has done a fantastic job recently in continuing to work with some of the most difficult projects in her state. "She went far beyond our normal expectations by tackling complex regionalization initiatives, including working to have legislation passed that created a new water authority, the Lower Rio Grande Water Authority." ■



*Melissa Melton,
Harold Hunter and
Olga Morales-Sanchez
with Robert Stewart,
RCAP Executive Director.
Photos by Stephen Padre*

Read about the other award winners in the next issue of Rural Matters.

Nation's staggering wastewater needs require a long-term federal commitment

Rep. James L. Oberstar

The following editorial is by Rep. James L. Oberstar of Minnesota. The Democrat represents the 8th District, a large portion of the state's northeastern side, which includes Duluth and large rural areas.

Wastewater infrastructure plays a vital role in maintaining our nation's economic, environmental and public health. Yet it is an area that has been sorely neglected over the past decade.

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, which I chair, recognized the central role that upgraded wastewater treatment systems and facilities play in keeping the nation's waterways clean when it passed the Clean Water Act in 1972. However, an unwillingness to invest in an aging national infrastructure has left our wastewater systems stressed and broken. Their current state of disrepair threatens to erase the gains made through implementation of the Clean Water Act and places the public's health at risk. Wastewater treatment facilities have been forced to make do with what they have.

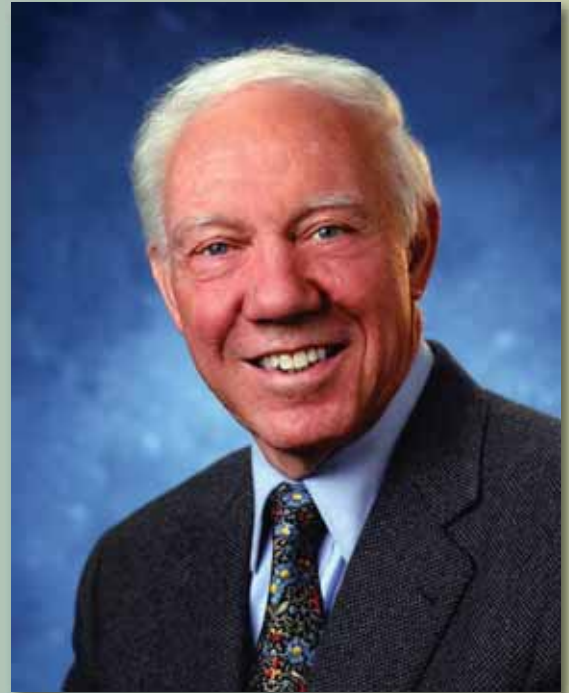
This includes the use of inefficient technologies and operational approaches that have been in use for decades.

Wastewater treatment facilities are also among the largest consumers of energy across the country. The EPA estimates that \$4 billion is spent annually on energy costs to operate water and wastewater utilities. The Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration estimates that water utility energy consumption is 30 to 60 percent of a city's energy bill. In these stressed economic times, municipalities may be wasting valuable financial resources on two fronts: Not only are they devoting significant resources to energy costs, but they are saddled with an increasing share of the costs for maintaining their crumbling wastewater infrastructure.

We can do better. The commitment of this Congress and the Obama administration to address the economic downturn presents multiple opportunities to address many of the challenges facing our wastewater infrastructure. The House of Representatives, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, has already committed to providing a significant increase in resources to resuscitate these vital systems. While it is not the figure that the Transportation Committee initially recommended, it is a start, and I am hopeful that there will be opportunities for revisiting the funding level in the future. This funding will enable localities with projects that are shovel-ready to build and repair their wastewater infrastructure systems. This will yield jobs and long-term environmental payoffs.

The economic recovery package also provides grants for communities to incorporate sustainable technologies and approaches into their wastewater treatment systems. Wastewater treatment facili-

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Rep. James L. Oberstar was elected to Congress in 1974 and is now serving in his 18th term. He began his career in politics in 1963 by working for Rep. John Blatnik, who assigned Oberstar as a clerk for the Subcommittee on Rivers and Harbors.

In 1970, Blatnik became chairman of the Committee on Public Works, and Oberstar became the committee's administrator. Today that committee is known as the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and Oberstar is its chairman.

The committee's jurisdiction includes improvement of rivers and harbors and inland waterways. Its agenda for this Congress includes investing in the country's infrastructure to restore our economy, relieve congestion, ensure U.S. competitiveness, and improve the daily lives of citizens; ensuring the safety and security of the nation's critical infrastructure; and addressing global climate change and renewing our commitment to clean water and environmental stewardship.

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ties can be more energy-efficient – and potentially energy-independent. Sustainable technologies and approaches exist for increasing water efficiency and conservation, mitigating stormwater runoff through infiltration, and promoting “green” planning, design and construction. All of these can yield a more effective, more efficient and more sustainable approach to achieving our environmental and public health goals.

The wider use of efficient technologies can have very real impacts on the operating costs of a treatment facility, and, in turn, on the fiscal situation of a community. Very small changes in either operations or equipment can result in significant energy savings. Small moves toward energy efficiency can yield large positive financial impacts. For example, the EPA notes that a 10 percent reduction in energy usage at water utilities could result in \$400 million and 5 billion kilowatt hours in annual savings.

Not only does energy efficiency result in energy cost savings, it also means that wastewater utilities will be responsible for fewer greenhouse gas emissions. As a sector of the economy responsible for a high proportion of energy use, increases in energy efficiency can result in demonstrable progress in mitigating climate change.



Progress toward energy efficiency is something that is happening now. Some municipalities are already saving on energy costs. For example, Bath Water District in Bath, Maine, is saving more than \$30,000 a year as a result of new, variable-frequency drives on two of its pumps. The new drives adjust the speed of the pumps according to the volume of water they need – as opposed to a single speed. This technology has saved Bath about 376,000 kilowatt hours annually since the upgrades in 2003 – the same amount of energy used by 35 homes in a year. This upgrade also has a tangible, climate-related impact: The energy savings translate into a reduction of more than 208 tons of carbon dioxide a year.

Similarly, the municipal wastewater treatment plant in Charlemont, Mass., installed a 15 kilowatt photovoltaic solar array in

2005 that has reduced its energy costs by 54 percent. The project consists of 96 solar panels mounted on eight poles connected to three inverters. In addition to the financial savings the solar panels generate for the plant, the solar panels reduced the facility’s carbon dioxide footprint by nearly 17 tons in the first two years of operation. These are real and tangible savings for communities.

Unfortunately, wider use of these technologies and approaches has been hindered by a lack of awareness within water and wastewater utilities on the potential savings. It is my hope that in the not-so-distant future, these technologies and approaches will be mainstream.

In addition to promoting energy efficiency, sustainable wastewater infrastructure has secondary or indirect benefits. Switching out 30-year-old equipment with more energy-efficient technologies will promote the development of new designs and increased product manufacturing. This results in job growth beyond traditional construction and engineering employment traditionally associated with wastewater infrastructure.

In my own Congressional district, the port of Duluth is a primary example of the economic and employment benefits that can accrue through a green economy and infrastructure. As wind farm sites have developed throughout the Midwest, Duluth has become one of the primary



gateways for the import of wind turbine components. In fact, the port has added space and capacity to store equipment, such as wind blades, which can be more than 100 feet long. Duluth's role and experience in the "green economy" is a telling example of the positive multiplier effects that can result through the promotion of a more sustainable infrastructure.

In order to remain a global economic leader, the United States must improve its water and wastewater infrastructure and promote advanced and energy-efficient technologies, and the Transportation Committee has taken an important step in that direction. Earlier this year, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 1262, the Water Quality Investment Act of 2009, which I sponsored. This legislation, which awaits action in the Senate, renews the longer-term federal commitment to addressing our nation's substantial needs for water infrastructure.

Specifically, H.R. 1262 authorizes \$13.8 billion in federal grants over five years to capitalize the Clean Water State Revolving Funds that provide low-interest loans to communities for wastewater infrastructure. The legislation reauthorizes \$250 million in grants over five years for alternative water source projects and authorizes an additional \$1.8 billion over five years in grants to municipalities and states to control combined sewer overflows and sanitary sewer overflows

The United States must have clean, potable water, but the current needs of the nation's water infrastructure are simply staggering. Making the investment required to keep America's water available and abundant is a critical priority for Congress and the Obama administration. Passage of H.R. 1262 will have a significant beneficial impact on the quality of the nation's water and environment, the protection of public health, and economic relief for thousands of unemployed or underemployed workers. Rest assured that I will continue to work with the administration and my colleagues in Congress to make implementation of this legislation a reality. ■



Photo courtesy of Jordan Vandal

A voice from on the ground in Minnesota

"Congressman Oberstar's support for the 8th District and rural communities is evident when the Energy and Water Appropriations Act is passed," said Jordan Vandal, a Resource Development Adviser for Midwest Assistance Program (MAP), the Midwest RCAP. "This act provides funding for many programs. One in particular is the Army Corps of Engineers 569 Environmental Infrastructure Assistance Program. This program provides communities the potential for grant funding for infrastructure projects."

Vandal, like other RCAP Technical Assistance Providers, works with rural communities that need financing for infrastructure projects, and these funds come from federal, state or local sources. Minnesota offers a variety of funding opportunities for loans and grants or a combination of both for projects, including the Army Corps of Engineers program. Several RCAP projects in Oberstar's district have received funding from this program.

One community that Vandal is working with is Effie, a small municipality in an area where the dominant industries are lumbering and tourism. It is situated northwest of Duluth in north-central Minnesota. All of the community's homes and businesses use on-site septic systems that are in various stages of age and disrepair.

MAP is currently working with Effie residents – 95 people in 56 households – on a project to upgrade their wastewater systems. MAP staff are assisting the community in procuring financing through MAP's Revolving Loan Fund for Wastewater upgrade/expansion and in reviewing ordinances and its sewer budget.

MAP staff have also offered to assist the city in assembling an asset management plan.

In 2007 and 2008, MAP worked with Effie as it planned to finance construction of a new municipal wastewater treatment system at a total cost of \$1.8 million. This was over \$500,000 more than the original estimate. MAP assisted in the preparation of funding documents and with project development and coordination.

MAP was able to help the city secure revolving loan fund financing, complete a sewer utility emergency response plan and vulnerability assessment, and set up a projected sewer budget.



Modern rainwater collection provides potable water for a Virginia community

Douglas W. Phillips, Jr.

The Virginia community of Morton Lane had a problem. It needed another source of water to supplement an old community well as it was revamping its water and wastewater systems. The solution literally fell from the sky.

Photo by Rasmey MauRaymond

Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project began working in Morton Lane in 2002 to provide new housing to residents who lacked complete indoor plumbing and lived in substandard housing. This project eventually led to a joint effort among local and state governments, community action agencies and contractors in order to provide innovative solutions to the small community's water and wastewater needs.

Situated in the foothills of mountainous Greene County, about 30 miles north of Charlottesville and on the far eastern side of Appalachia, Morton Lane is a low-income minority community.

Maxine Morton and her relatives, who in total numbered 11 community residents, lived in a cluster of three mobile homes. Before the project, they shared a pit privy and had never had any sewage disposal system or running water in their substandard dwellings. The residents also shared a well that was drilled about 15 years prior to the start of the project. But the well could not meet the residents' demands and was not fully piped to the houses.

The project determined that the residents were eligible for a complete – demolish and rebuild – rehabilitation.

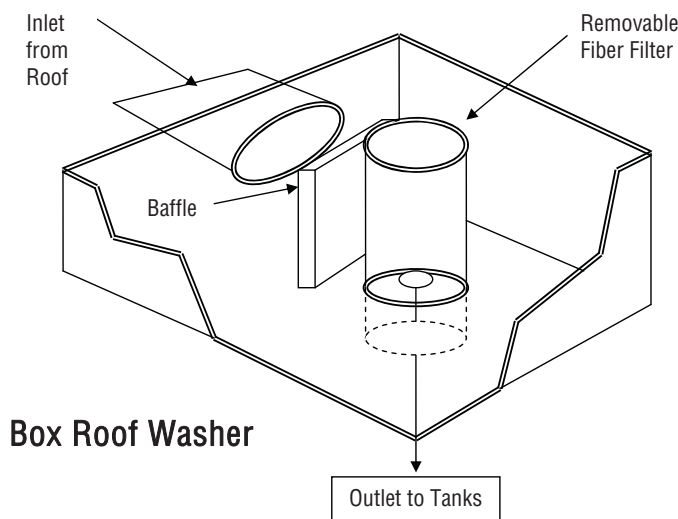
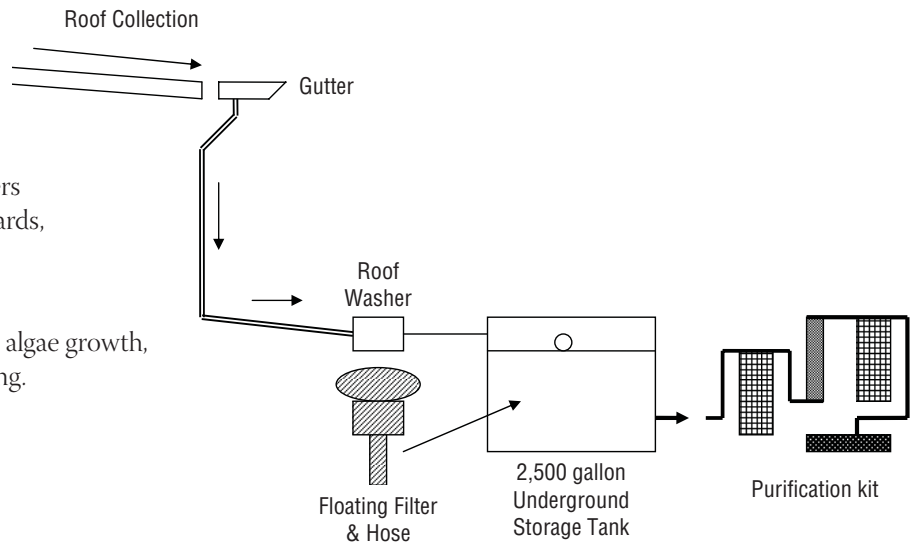
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Technical Assistance Provider Douglas Phillips tests the soil in Morton Lane.

Basic components of a rainwater harvesting system

- Catchment surface (roofing material)
- Conveyance system – gutters and downspouts – to channel water from the roof to the tank
- Leaf screens; roof washers; and first-flush diverters (standpipes): These can be in the form of leaf guards, funnel-type downspout filters, strainer baskets, cylinders of rolled screens, or filter socks.
- Storage tanks: They need to be opaque to inhibit algae growth, have screened vents, and be accessible for cleaning.
- Delivery system and pressure tanks
- Treatment/purification



All four tanks are polyethylene underground storage tanks.

The delivery system for Morton Lane consists of parallel SSHM-2 Berkeley booster pumps, one for the well side and one for the rainwater side of the pump house.

Following this is the disinfection train, which consists of parallel sets of sediment filters – a 5-micron fiber cartridge filter followed by a 3-micron activated charcoal cartridge filter. These are followed by an ultraviolet light.

There is a float switch in Tank 1 to protect the rainwater delivery pump. The float opens a solenoid. A similar float switch is in the well tank to protect the well-side delivery pump. A float there opens a solenoid to recharge the tank.

Operation and maintenance

Appropriately designed rainwater harvesting systems require very little maintenance. However, like any household component, they should be checked periodically to ensure an efficiently and appropriately operating system. The following comes from the *Virginia Rainwater Harvesting Manual*, compiled by The Cabell Brand Center.

Gutters:

Periodically flush to clear organic matter and eliminate clogs.

Downspouts:

Check occasionally and remove debris, especially at connection to the gutter.

Roof washer filters:

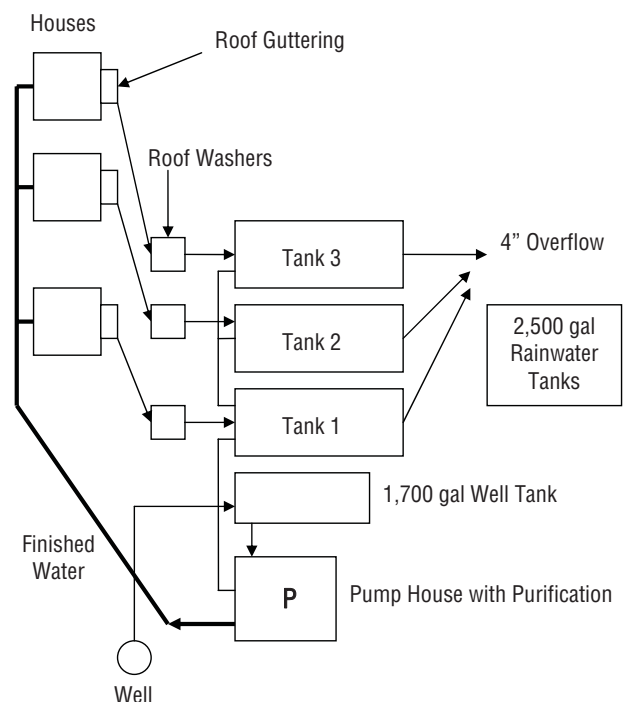
Periodically clean. Replace cartridge yearly.

Tanks:

If a first flush filter is not used, clean annually to remove organic debris.

UV light:

Manually clean the quartz sleeve.



Southeast RCAP became involved in the project at the request of the Skyline Community Action Program. This local community action agency asked that Southeast RCAP provide technical assistance, engineering and field construction help. Its involvement enabled Skyline to meet its family home rehabilitation funding requirements for water and wastewater services.

Three homes were constructed for the families, but poor soil conditions prevented individual onsite septic fields. Many alternative onsite schemes were evaluated, including mounds, drip disposal

and constructed wetlands. A solution was found by obtaining a county easement approval on a neighboring lot where a conventional mass drain field with a pumping system could be built.

Douglas Phillips, the Technical Assistance Provider from Southeast RCAP working on the project, did the full engineering design for a dual septic tank, pumped effluent and treatment field and submitted it to the county health department.

Solution from the sky

As for the problem of providing sufficient water for the new homes, a solution needed to be found to augment the existing well. Phillips helped procure funds to hire a company to design and install an innovative rainwater collection system using a modern roof washing, filtering and disinfection process.

The system consists of a roof wash collection and filtering component, underground storage tanks and valves for blending the system with water from the well. The system is further constructed so that it is sustainable. This means that with minimal homeowner maintenance, the system will operate indefinitely without a need to drain the tank to clean it or regularly replace its parts and filters. (See diagrams on previous page.)

Cabell Brand, a member of Southeast RCAP's board of directors, has been instrumental in promoting the use of rainwater harvesting as a responsible conservation method. He promotes this technology as one viable solution to the problem of eliminating homes that lack complete indoor plumbing.

According to the *Virginia Rainwater Harvesting Manual*, compiled by The Cabell Brand Center, "Rainwater harvesting offers an affordable, simple, sustainable, and reliable alternative water source. Not only does rainwater harvesting supply water for indoor and outdoor use, it protects the environment from detrimental nonpoint source pollution by reducing rooftop runoff."

As the project neared completion in 2008, Phillips and the contracted company established detailed standard operating and maintenance as well as emergency procedures. A list of spare components was included. Everything was posted in the pump house, and efforts were made to educate the residents on the basic operation of both the potable rainwater system and the onsite wastewater pump.

Skyline Community Action Program director Kim Smith said to Southeast RCAP: "We are so thankful that you all have worked on this project and that you have worked hard at the site as well." ■



Workers install the rainwater harvesting collection tanks and mixing mechanisms, which are buried underground (top). Installation of the roof washers (bottom). Photos courtesy of Douglas Phillips.



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