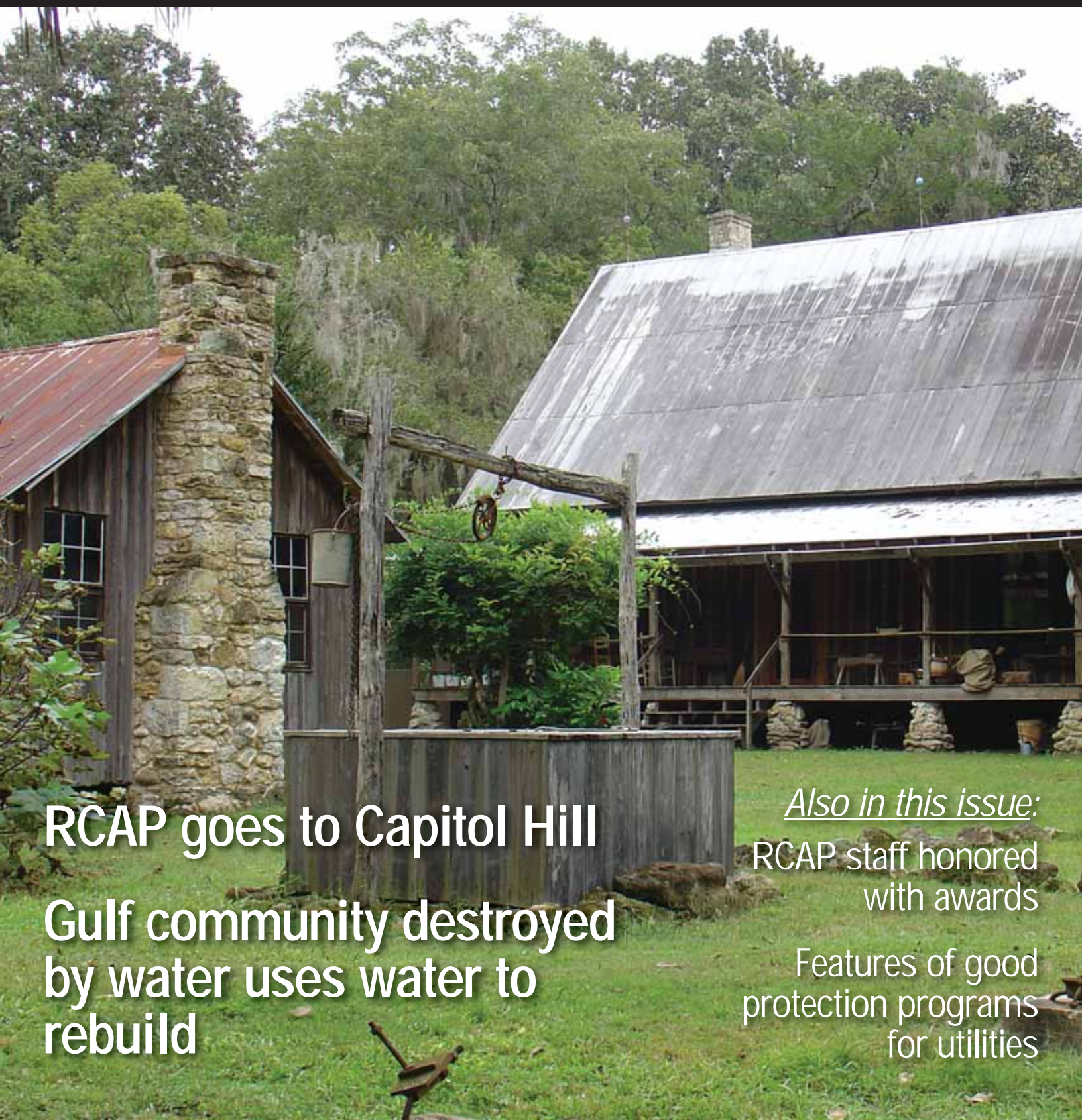


RURAL matters



2011
Issue 2

The magazine of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership



RCAP goes to Capitol Hill

**Gulf community destroyed
by water uses water to
rebuild**

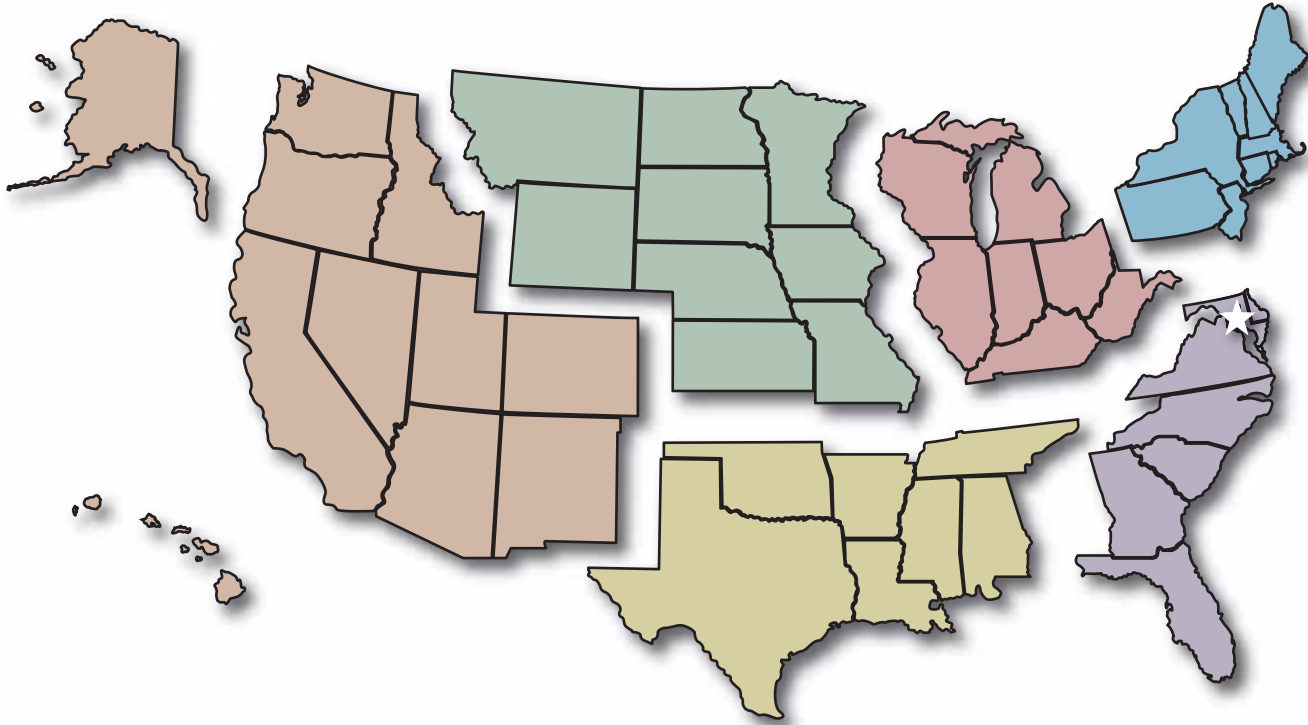
Also in this issue:

RCAP staff honored
with awards

Features of good
protection programs
for utilities



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



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RURAL matters

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Photo by Keith Weller, USDA

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Improving the quality of life in rural communities

Photo by Melissa Jones, CRG



RCAP

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CORRECTION

In 2011 Issue 1 of *Rural Matters*, in the article titled "RCAP holds national conference in Washington, D.C." (page 13), Rep. Bennie Thompson was incorrectly identified as a congressman from Missouri. He represents the 2nd District of Mississippi.

Director's Letter



Robert Stewart
RCAP Executive Director

Living and working in Washington, D.C., for an organization that provides rural communities with training and technical assistance on developmental needs, such as water and wastewater services, presents unique challenges. One of the foremost is staying connected to the issues and concerns that impact rural communities as they struggle to ensure that their residents have the basic services that most urban dwellers take for granted, such as safe and affordable water, wastewater and solid waste services. During my many years of working directly with rural communities, I was always amazed at the hard work and dedication shown by so many to improve their communities. Farmers, ranchers, small business owners, teachers, public safety professionals, laborers and migrant workers, retirees, and, in fact, people from all walks of life contribute to making livable and prosperous rural communities.

One of the many interesting folks I had the pleasure to work with was Glen Morgan. He was a retired professional who volunteered his time, not only to manage a small nonprofit, member-owner rural water system of some 700 connections, but he also performed most of the repair and maintenance work that was needed. When I visited the system outside New Baden, Texas, Mr. Morgan was a fit, energetic and inquisitive gentleman in his mid-70s.

My mission was to work out the arrangements whereby his system would take over the ownership and operations of a nearby, smaller utility. Most of the time, helping to facilitate the consolidation of two utilities can be a long and difficult process. Not so in this case, as Mr. Morgan had a real compassion and dedication to community service that meant he was willing to reach out and help neighbors in need. With that in place, my responsibilities were to hold some community meetings and handle all the required legal and regulatory requirements and paperwork for the consolidation.

Over the several months I was involved with this consolidation, I had the opportunity to visit with Mr. Morgan on several occasions not only to assist with that work, but also to provide some advice on other management and financial issues. One of the real pleasures of working in rural America is getting to know, on a personal basis, these unheralded women and men who are the foundations of their communities. Mr. Morgan later invited me to visit his home, and over most of that day, he told me of his life and his service to his country. He was one of only 316 survivors of the sinking of the USS Indianapolis by a Japanese torpedo in World War II, out of a crew of 1,196. As a Navy veteran myself and the son of a career naval aviator, my admiration and respect for Mr. Morgan knows no bounds. If you have a moment and are unaware of the history of the USS Indianapolis, I hope you look for this ship's story on the web.

One of the articles in this issue tells of another community leader, Betty Baxter of Pearlington, Miss. As a board member of the local water district, Mrs. Baxter has also shown the type of dedication and perseverance in the face of adversity that is characteristic of so many community leaders throughout rural America. Even in the face of a severe recession and government cut-backs, which are impacting rural America at a disproportionate level, these unassuming but dedicated individuals continue their work to improve the lives and welfare of their neighbors. ■

rural developments



News and resources from the Environmental Protection Agency

EPA to develop regulation for perchlorate and toxic chemicals in drinking water

WASHINGTON (EPA) – EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson announced Feb. 2 the agency's decision to move forward with the development of a regulation for perchlorate to protect Americans from any potential health impacts, while also continuing to take steps to ensure the quality of the water they drink.

The decision to undertake a first-ever national standard for perchlorate reverses a decision made by the previous administration and comes after Jackson ordered EPA scientists to undertake a thorough review of the emerging science of perchlorate.

Perchlorate is both a naturally occurring and human-made chemical, and scientific research indicates that it may impact the normal function of the thyroid, which produces important developmental hormones. Thyroid hormones are critical to the normal development and growth of fetuses, infants and children.

Based on this potential concern, EPA will move forward with proposing a formal rule. This process will include receiving input from key stakeholders as well as submitting any formal rule to a public comment process.

In a separate action, the agency is also moving toward establishing a drinking



water standard to address a group of up to 16 toxic chemicals that may pose risks to human health. As part of the Drinking Water Strategy laid out by Jackson in 2010, EPA committed to addressing contaminants as a group rather than one at a time so that enhancement of drinking water protection can be achieved cost-effectively. This action delivers on the promise to strengthen public health protection from contaminants in drinking water.

"Clean water is critical to the health and prosperity of every American community and a fundamental concern to every American family. EPA is hard at work on innovative ways to improve protections

for the water we drink and give to our children, and the development of these improved standards is an important step forward," said Jackson. "Our decisions are based on extensive review of the best available science and the health needs of the American people."

Monitoring data show more than 4 percent of public water systems have detected perchlorate and that between 5 million and 17 million people may be delivered drinking water containing perchlorate.

EPA will continue to evaluate the science on perchlorate health effects and occurrence in public water systems. The agency will also begin to evaluate the feasibility and affordability of treatment technologies to remove perchlorate and will examine the costs and benefits of potential standards.

More information on perchlorate: <http://water.epa.gov/drink/contaminants/unregulated/perchlorate.cfm>

More information on drinking water strategy: <http://water.epa.gov/lawsregs/rulesregs/sdwa/dwstrategy/index.cfm>

EPA submits for public comment the next round of Safe Drinking Water Act contaminant monitoring

WASHINGTON (EPA) – As part of its commitment to implement sensible protections of drinking water for communities

across the country, and as required by the Safe Drinking Water Act, EPA is proposing 30 currently unregulated contaminants for monitoring in water systems and submitting this proposal for public comment. The comment period will allow the public and other stakeholders to provide input on the selection of new contaminants for monitoring and will help determine the best path forward as the EPA seeks to collect data that will inform future decisions about how best to protect drinking water.

“Ensuring clean and safe drinking water for all Americans is a top priority for EPA,” said Nancy Stoner, acting assistant administrator for EPA’s Office of Water. “Learning more about the prevalence of these contaminants will allow EPA to better protect people’s health.”

Under the authority of the Safe Drinking Water Act, EPA currently regulates more than 90 contaminants in drinking water. To keep drinking water standards up-to-date with emerging science, the act requires that EPA identify up to 30 unregulated contaminants for monitoring every five years. This current proposal is the third Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Regulation and includes requirements to monitor for two viruses and 28 chemical contaminants that could be present in drinking water and do not currently have health-based standards.

EPA is requesting public comment on the proposed list of 30 contaminants until May 2. Following the public comment period, EPA will consider this important input before the list is scheduled to be finalized in 2012, with sampling to be conducted from 2013 to 2015. Sampling will take place at all systems serving more than 10,000 people and at a representative sampling of systems serving less than 10,000 people.

More information about the proposed list of contaminants: <http://water.epa.gov/lawsregs/rulesregs/sdwa/ucmr/ucmr3/index.cfm>.

EPA expands and enhances WCIT, a tool for the water sector

EPA has announced a major expansion and additional enhancement of the Water Contaminant Information Tool (WCIT). WCIT is a secure, online database profiling chemical, biological, and radiological contaminants of concern for drinking water and wastewater utilities.

The agency has added a compendium of 700 new contaminants with details on more than 212 analytical methods. EPA has also completed enhancements of the WCIT search feature.

Expanding the range of data in WCIT enables water utilities, public health officials and federal, state and local agencies to better plan for and respond to an “all-hazards” contamination incident.

Registering for WCIT is easy and free. To apply for access to WCIT, please visit www.epa.gov/wcit



EPA recognizes nation’s first WaterSense-labeled homes

Water-efficiency program aims to help homebuyers save money on utility bills while cutting their water and energy use

Water-efficiency program aims to help homebuyers save money on utility bills while cutting their water and energy use

WASHINGTON (EPA) – EPA announced Nov. 23, 2010, the first WaterSense-labeled homes in the country as part of an EPA-sponsored partnership program that seeks to protect the future of the nation’s water supply.

The WaterSense program is helping homebuyers cut their water and energy use

while at the same time saving money on utility bills. Four WaterSense-labeled new homes have been built by KB Home in Roseville, Calif., and will help families save an average of 10,000 gallons of water and at least \$100 on utility costs each year.

“To meet the environmental and economic needs of homes and communities, it’s important that we’re doing everything we can to conserve water and energy and shrink costs for American consumers,” said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. “The construction of the first WaterSense-labeled homes and the plans to build more mark the beginning of an innovative approach that gives homeowners the chance to cut their water and energy bills and protect a vital environmental resource.”

Since signing on as the first national builder to partner with WaterSense, KB Home has agreed to build three communities of homes that will earn the WaterSense label, which will be the first in the nation to meet WaterSense criteria for newly built homes. Each house includes WaterSense-labeled plumbing fixtures, an efficient hot water delivery system, water-efficient landscape design, and other water- and energy-efficient features.

Each WaterSense-labeled new home is independently inspected and certified to ensure EPA’s criteria are met for both water efficiency and performance. A WaterSense-labeled new home is built to use about 20 percent less water than a typical new home.

EPA estimates that if the approximately 500,000 new homes built last year had met WaterSense criteria, the homes would save Americans 5 billion gallons of water and more than \$50 million in utility bills annually.

More information on WaterSense: www.epa.gov/watersense

continued on next page

Effects of natural gas on drinking water safety

EPA estimates that by 2020, 20 percent of the total U.S. gas supply will come from shale oil wells. These wells are located underground in sedimentary rock and are obtained through a process called hydraulic fracturing. More commonly known as “fracking,” the process uses chemicals to loosen and recover natural gas from well pockets inside coal beds and shale rock formations.

Hydraulic fracturing is potentially harmful to drinking water resources due to a lack of regulation over what chemicals can be injected underground. The EPA Safe Drinking Water Act does not prohibit the underground injection of fluids or other agents required for oil or gas fracking operations.

EPA has proposed a detailed study to investigate any impact of hydraulic fracturing on drinking water quality to be completed in 2014.

Any experts who would like to participate in a technical workshop regarding hydraulic fracturing may sign up at <http://hfworkshop.cadmusweb.com>.

More information about hydraulic fracturing and its effects on drinking water can be found through the EPA at http://water.epa.gov/type/groundwater/uic/class2/hydraulicfracturing/wells_hydrowhat.cfm

RCAP Network News

High-ranking USDA officials visit RCAP community

The McCoy (Texas) Water Supply Corporation has received a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program loan for \$3.6 million and a \$2.4 million grant in order to improve the system's reliability. USDA Rural Development Under Secre-



tary Dallas Tonsager and Rural Development State Director Paco Valentin were present at the March 14 check-presentation ceremony.

Community Resource Group (CRG), the Southern RCAP, received a referral from the USDA Rural Development state office to assist the town. Raul Gonzalez, Operations & Management Specialist for CRG, is conducting a rate analysis for the town's water system.

The system's service area covers approximately 608 square miles in Atascosa County, the western part of Wilson County, and the northern third of Live Oak County. It currently serves 2,221 connections. The funds will be used for improvements to five of the plant sites and to add two new hydro-pneumatic plants and approximately 106,000 linear feet of distribution lines.

“Rural water systems are the backbone of rural communities, and the infrastructure needs in rural America are great,” said Tonsager at the ceremony.

Valentin added: “We must ensure water supply corporations are able to keep pace with the increase in populations of rural communities every year.”

USDA rural development granted \$126.5 million in water and wastewater loans to Texas in FY2010, reaching nearly 120,000 households.

Virginia Technical Assistance Provider nominated for state award

Douglas W. Phillips Jr., a Technical Assistance Provider with the Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project, the Southeast RCAP, was nominated for the 2011 Erchul Environmental Leadership Award, which recognizes a Virginian who has made significant individual efforts to improve the environment.

According to submission information, Phillips was nominated for the award because of his work with Southeast RCAP in helping low- to medium-income communities improve wastewater systems, including updating unsanitary or outdated sewer systems to ensure compliance with state public health regulations.

The award is named in honor of Captain Ronald A. Erchul, a retired U.S. Navy veteran and founder of the Environment Virginia Symposium, where the award winner was selected. This year's symposium took place April 6 in Lexington, Va.

Registered attendees of the symposium voted for their choice of winner, and the top ten percent of vote getters were referred to a final selection committee of previous Erchul award winners. Phillips was among 30 nominees in the first round of voting. The nominees represented a variety of government, academic, religious and civic organizations in Virginia.





RCAP regional partner wins award

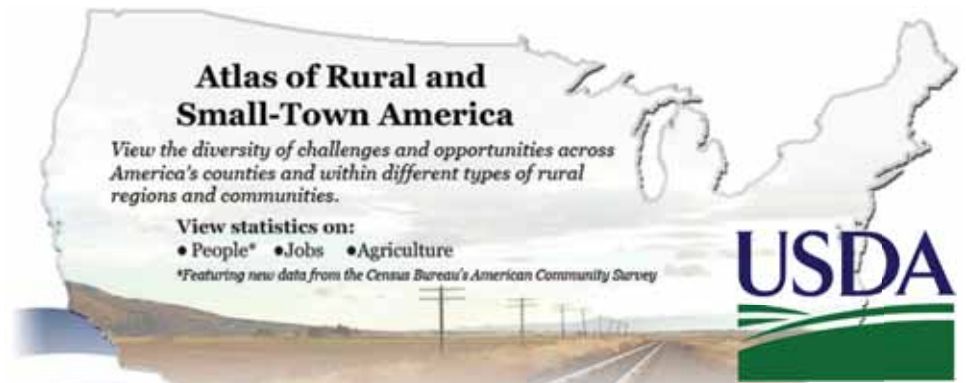
WSOS Community Action Commission was recognized for its Water Operator's Skills for Life training program by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA) and the John Glenn School of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University. WSOS is the agency that encompasses Great Lakes RCAP, which is the RCAP regional partner that carries out the water and wastewater programs in that region.

The program joined two other WSOS projects in receiving the two institutions' Best Practice Award, which recognizes initiative and effectiveness in helping low-income people become more self-sufficient.

The water operator training program was established in 2008 after WSOS saw a nationwide shortage in water operators, a position that offers a living wage to low-income WSOS clients. WSOS has held two classes, each lasting 16 weeks. There were 18 participants and graduates from each class.

Although RCAP does not fund the Water Operator's Skills for Life training, RCAP staff members were involved in post-graduation interview and resume preparation as well as career placement for the operators.

As an organization, RCAP is concerned about the shortage of water operators as a national issue in the water sector as it assists small communities in finding sustainable ways to manage their water systems and is supportive of initiatives like this program. ■



USDA introduces online Atlas of Rural and Small-Town America

WASHINGTON (USDA)—Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced on Feb. 18 the debut of an online mapping tool that captures a broad range of demographic, economic and agricultural data on rural areas across the United States. The Atlas of Rural and Small-town America, developed by USDA's Economic Research Service, provides county-level mapping of more than 60 statistical indicators depicting conditions and trends across different types of non-metropolitan regions.

"The new atlas will complement USDA's efforts in promoting rural development and well-being by helping policy makers pinpoint the needs of particular regions, recognize their diversity, and build on their assets," said Vilsack. "The atlas is part of a broad USDA initiative to make relevant data easily accessible to the public, including researchers, journalists, public officials, and other professionals."

Nearly 50 million people – 17 percent of the U.S. population – live in non-metropolitan America, covering approximately 2,000 counties. Economic and social challenges facing rural areas and small towns differ greatly from those affecting larger U.S. cities and vary substantially from one nonmetro county to the next.

The atlas allows users to geographically compare selected states or regions using data on population, age structure, race and ethnicity, income, employment, agricultural well-being, and other measures. Maps can be filtered to show only counties of a certain type, such as those with high levels of manufacturing or with persistent poverty. For example, this option could be used to show high unemployment in manufacturing-dependent counties.

This web-based product assembles the latest county-level statistics from the U.S.

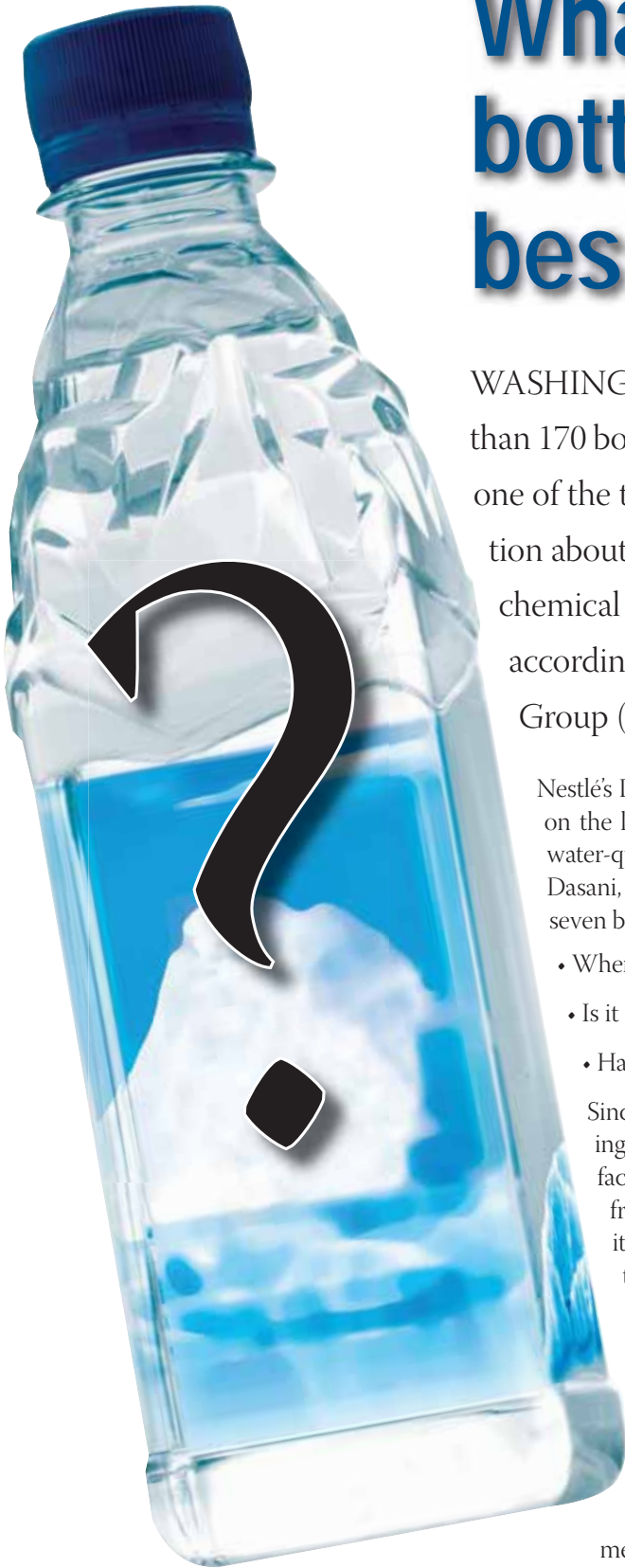
Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, USDA, and other federal sources. Of particular note, the atlas incorporates data from the first full set of county-level data in the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). Data from the various agencies are combined in four broad categories that users can select:

- People—county demographic profiles, including age, race/ethnicity, education, family composition, population change, migration, and immigration.
- Jobs—conditions and trends affecting the labor force, such as employment change, unemployment, industry, and occupational structure.
- Agriculture—indicators of farm structure and the well-being of farm households, including farm size, income, sales, and tenure.
- County typologies—ERS county classifications based on the rural-urban continuum, economic structure, and other key locational features, such as, landscape amenities, occupation types, persistent poverty, or population-loss status.

Users can click on a county and view a pop-up box showing data on all the indicators in each of these four categories. In addition, users can view an indicator (e.g., employment data) for the entire country, or they can zoom into specific regions, states, or sub-state areas and pan across the U.S. at different scales on the map. Maps can be downloaded for use in documents and presentations, and data are accessible via downloadable spreadsheets.

The Atlas of Rural and Small-Town America is available online at www.ers.usda.gov/data/ruralatlas ■

What's in your bottled water – besides water?



WASHINGTON (EWG) – A survey of websites and labels of more than 170 bottled waters sold in the U.S. found only three – and only one of the top 10 domestic brands – that give customers information about the water's source, the method of purification and any chemical pollutants that remained after the water was treated, according to a report released Jan. 5 by Environmental Working Group (EWG).

Nestlé's Pure Life Purified Water discloses its water source and treatment method on the label and offers a toll-free number that consumers can call to request a water-quality test report. But the nine other top domestic brands – Coca-Cola's Dasani, Pepsi's Aquafina, Crystal Geyser, and – strangely – six other of Nestlé's seven brands – don't answer at least one of the three key questions:

- Where does the water come from?
- Is it purified? How?
- Have tests found any contaminants?

Since July 2009, when EWG released its Bottled Water Scorecard, documenting the industry's failure to disclose contaminant scores and other crucial facts about their products, bottled water producers have been under fire from consumer and environmental groups. The Government Accountability Office has taken the industry and the Food and Drug Administration to task for lax inspection and disclosure practices.

Unlike the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which has jurisdiction over the nation's drinking water and requires each water utility to make public the results of yearly water-quality tests, bottled water companies are under no such requirement from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which regulates the industry.

EWG's new survey of 173 bottled water brands finds a few improvements but still too many secrets and too much advertising hype. Overall,

18 percent of bottled waters fail to list the source, and 32 percent disclose nothing about the treatment or purity of the water.

“The industry’s lack of information on source, purity and treatment of bottled water isn’t some coincidence,” said Jane Houlihan, EWG’s senior vice president for research. “Bottled water companies try hard to hide any information consumers may find troubling. They don’t tell where the water comes from and what pollutants they may have found. Their ads depict mountain streams and natural springs. Yet nearly half the time, according to the industry’s own statistics, they’re bottling tap water.”

Municipal tap water is the source for 47.8 percent of bottled water, according to the Beverage Marketing Corporation’s annual report for 2009.

Fiji Natural Artesian Water boasts of drawing “rainfall... purified by equatorial winds after traveling thousands of miles across the Pacific Ocean.” H2Om Natural Spring Water promises a mystical “energetic interaction with the element that sustains your life.” And Oregon Rain Natural Virgin Water says its water originates “Over the Pacific Ocean, where fresh, cold air from the North Pole meets warm air from the equator, clouds dripping with naturally clean, pure water are produced. These clouds travel from the ocean, avoiding populated areas and arrive over the Willamette Valley.”

Major water bottlers are trying hard to look green. Stung by environmentalists’ warnings about out-of-control plastic garbage and source water depletion, they have launched expensive ad campaigns encasing their water in “greener” plastic like Dasani’s “Plantbottle” and Poland Spring’s “Eco-Shape” container. So far, consumers have been underwhelmed: bottled water volume dropped by 1 percent in 2008 and another 2.5 percent in 2009.

“Water bottlers are clearly having difficulty reading the writing on the wall or else there would already be clearer writing

on their labels,” said Leslie Samuelrich, Chief of Staff for Corporate Accountability International. “The public is calling on corporations like Coke to label the source of its water. State governments are calling for it. Congress is calling for it. The longer the industry avoids transparency, the more it forces the hand of civil servants to advocate the consumer’s right to know.”

“EWG’s latest survey further highlights how far bottled water companies will go to obscure the truth behind their expensive gimmick,” said Food & Water Watch Executive Director Wenonah Hauter. “More than ever, consumers are better off sticking to a type of water whose source and quality is required by law to be reported to the public – that from the tap.”

EWG’s report encourages consumers to drink tap water. “It costs far less than bottled water and doesn’t come wrapped in plastic waste to clog landfills, clutter streams and rivers and build up in the ocean.” ■

Full report: <http://static.ewg.org/reports/2010/bottledwater2010/pdf/2011-bottledwater-scorecard-report.pdf>

EWG is a nonprofit research organization based in Washington, D.C., that uses the power of information to protect human health and the environment.
www.ewg.org

Weaning Congress off the bottle

A major water utility is urging the U.S. House of Representatives to eliminate purchasing bottled water in order to reach its goal of slashing \$35 million in Congressional spending, according to a report by Corporate Accountability International.

George S. Hawkins, general manager of the Washington, D.C.-based DC Water, wrote a letter to new Speaker of the House John Boehner offering free water testing and reusable bottles for lawmakers.

Boehner has proposed cutting \$35 million of unnecessary spending from the House’s budget. *Change.org*, an online grassroots platform that partners with nonprofit and advocacy groups to provide campaign tools and resources, has posted a petition that allows concerned citizens to throw their support behind ending bottled water purchases on Capitol Hill.

According to the petition, bottled water is no safer than tap water, can be up to 1,900 times as expensive, and uses significant amounts of energy. The petition also points out that nearly one million tons of plastic water bottles are discarded as litter each year.

If the petition takes hold and tap water is introduced to Congress, lawmakers, who make decisions about RCAP’s funding, will get a taste—literally—of one of RCAP’s main goals, which is to ensure that everybody in America has clean, safe tap water to drink.





By Travis Mitchell

Messages from rural America brought to Capitol Hill

RCAP staff and board members come to Washington, D.C., for annual legislative visits

RCAP staff members from across the country came to Washington, D.C., from Feb. 14 to 18 to visit lawmakers on Capitol Hill and advocate for continued funding for RCAP's water and wastewater programs.

More than 90 staff members from the six RCAP regional partners traveled to Washington and conducted almost 200 visits with members of Congress and their staffs. These numbers include visits made by RCAC staff who came a few weeks earlier to visit with their lawmakers.

Visits were aimed at sharing rural success stories and persuading lawmakers to continue funding the grants that RCAP competes for each year. These grants fund RCAP's work in providing technical, managerial and financial assistance to around 2,000 communities across the United States annually.

Successful delivery

"In a rather difficult economic environment, our partners were able to successfully relay the message that water and waste water infrastructure is important to development in rural America," said Robert Stewart, RCAP Executive Director.

This was the fourth year that the RCAP national office has organized these visits, and the 2011 attendance was the largest to date.

"My goal was to educate the decision makers," said Bud Mason, State Coordinator for Illinois RCAP. He said he views RCAP as a "toolbox" for the communities and the lawmakers, and visiting Congress is integral in raising awareness of RCAP's work.

"I think a lot of [lawmakers] don't realize what we are or what we do," he said. "My goal is to be on these people's speed dials when they have a problem."

Ari Neumann, RCAP's Director of Policy Development and Applied Research, said this year's legislative visits were especially timely. They came the week of a near budget crisis on Capitol Hill.

Chris Gelvin, who took part in the visits, agreed. She is a board member of WSOS Community Action Commission, the agency that oversees the Great Lakes RCAP.



"I just had this sense that things were very much at a gridlock," she said.

Just days following the visits, the House held a late-night marathon debate followed by a rare early-morning weekend vote to approve a plan to eliminate dozens of federal programs and offices while slashing agency budgets by as much as 40 percent, drawing out more than \$60 billion in deficit savings.

Gelvin said she had never seen Congress as chaotic as it was that week. She said at the beginning of the visits, progress was slow but that things improved as the week unfolded.

"By Thursday it felt more like we are going to figure this out," Gelvin said, referring to RCAP funding in the federal budget. "There was more a sense of there might be room for compromises that kept good programs going," she said.

RCAP relies on three sources of funding—the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Agriculture, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Each year Congress decides whether to continue to fund the programs that support RCAP and what level of funding the programs should receive.

It was Mason's first time attending the legislative fly-in. He said that, while it was nothing like he expected, he found Capitol Hill staff to be "very receptive" despite their busy schedules.

"I was able to get pretty up-close and personal with some details on things," he said.

Driving the point home

The fly-in event began Monday with an early-morning briefing at the hotel from national office staff and RCAP's lobbyist, Robert Rapoza, who instructed the staff about their visits.

"We have a bigger task than we've had in past years," said Rapoza, who explained that Congress had not finished work yet on the current fiscal year and had not even looked forward to the coming fiscal year.

"We are going in to difficult times for federal agencies," said Rapoza. "It's going to require cards and letters [to members of Congress], which you've been doing, but you're going to have to continue that."

Neumann spoke to the audience on the practical details of making visits and encouraged staff to tell personal stories about their work when visiting congressional offices.

Stewart reminded the group that RCAP is the only organization doing its type of work week-in and week-out in communities across the country and to convey this message in their visits.

"This is a unique service we provide, which helps with economic development and job creation in rural areas," he said.

On the final day of the visits, three RCAP representatives—Stan Keasling, Marcie McLaughlin and Deb Martin—spoke at a briefing for congressional staff members. All are members of RCAP's national board of directors. Keasling gave an introduction to the needs of rural life, and all three shared stories from their regions about how different funding sources help to improve rural communities.

Gelvin, who works with the United Way, said she enjoyed spreading the word about RCAP and the continued funding of health and essential services in low-income communities.

"All of those things are part of the fabric of my community," she said. "You can't keep them in separate buckets."

Gelvin also emphasized the importance of making lawmakers aware of water and wastewater issues across America.

And while Mason stressed the importance of one-on-one visits in promoting RCAP as a resource, he said it was even more necessary to follow up with leadership on the state level and to continue working hard each day.

"I think what is most important, though, is to do what we do and do it well," he said.



Mitchell is RCAP's Communications Intern.

Through a hurricane's floods, a town seeks a rebirth

Mississippi community destroyed by water uses water to rebuild itself

By Stephen Padre

Down in the bayou, along the Gulf Coast, sits the small town of Pearlington, Miss. Moss hangs low from the mighty oak trees in the quiet, still air. The town's sleepiness today belies what it has been through in the past several years. Part of its quietness is the result of the town losing many of its residents, not by choice but by force of extraordinary circumstances.

Pearlington is one of those places that defines itself by a major event. For this town, it was Hurricane Katrina, which hit the U.S. Gulf Coast in late August 2005 and became the costliest natural disaster in American history. Little Pearlington, sitting on a remote corner of Mississippi's short panhandle, was slammed by the enormous hurricane. But like other small communities on Mississippi's Gulf Coast, Pearlington was overlooked and forgotten

as the nation's attention focused on the crisis unfolding in New Orleans, less than 40 miles away. Surrounded by major bodies of water—the Gulf of Mexico, Louisiana's Lake Pontchartrain, and a river on one side—the town was flooded and nearly destroyed by Katrina.

Today, Pearlington's residents speak of the time before Katrina and the time after Katrina. The hurricane did its damage through water. The sea came inland and swept houses away or left debris on property, leaving it uninhabitable.

But the town has another history, both before and after Katrina, that is also all about water. For two periods of a few years before the hurricane and since then, Pearlington has been receiving assistance from Community Resource Group (CRG), the Southern RCAP, as the town works to

construct new drinking water and wastewater systems.

"I never thought I would spend my entire career [with RCAP] working with this community," said Tom Johnson, the Senior Operations Management Specialist for CRG who has worked with Pearlington's leaders for more than 14 years.

This is an unusually long lifecycle for an RCAP project in a community. Most technical assistance providers like Johnson spend three to five years providing technical, managerial or financial assistance for a system before moving on to help other communities in need.

Pearlington's leaders first contacted CRG in late 1997 because it had an inadequate wastewater collection or disposal system. Many homes were discharging raw sewage directly into the Pearl River or various





bayous. The state Department of Environmental Quality had sampled various sites in the area and found the water of the river and bayous contained high levels of fecal coliform bacteria.

From 1997 to 2000, and starting again in May 2005, Johnson worked with leaders to create a water district and secure funding from various sources to install a sewer system. While the area had functioning water wells, it was decided to also install a drinking water system. By July 2005, the district had a fully designed sewer system ready for bids from contractors as well as enough funding from several sources to get the project started.

Then Katrina hit.

Five years later, as Betty Baxter sat near where her home once stood, her eyes welled up with tears as she recounted how Katrina destroyed houses and devastated Pearllington. After she talked about the frightening days of flooding following the storm, she drove visitors around town in her car and stopped at her property. Now it is just an empty lot after the house she and her husband had lived in was razed because it was too damaged in the flooding to rebuild. Only the enormous, moss-draped oak trees sit peacefully around what Baxter said was her living room and dining room.

"People lost everything they had—everything, except what they had on their backs," she said.

Baxter was not alone in what she suffered. Prior to the hurricane, there were 871 homes and buildings in Pearllington. Katrina destroyed more than 700 of them and heavily damaged the others.

Baxter is currently the secretary of the water district and since Katrina has taken a key leadership role in pushing for completion of the water and sewer systems. She is

73, and her husband is 80. Since Katrina, they have lived 30 miles away from the coast. She knows they must make a choice. They can return to Pearllington and rebuild their house and their life there, but they are getting too old to start over again. Or they can remain where they are.

Baxter has invested too much time and effort in the water system through her service on the district's board to leave her work now. She wants to see her town get its water system so it can continue to build itself up from the devastation of Katrina.

"I'm not a quitter. I feel like I am obliged to stick it out and see that they get a water

and sewer system," she said. "I live in Pica-yune, but my heart is here."

Johnson said Katrina set the town's work on its water system back years. But he has continued his work with the town as well.

"We don't know where we would have been without Tom," said Baxter.

As a result of the hurricane, most of the funding that had been lined up with Johnson's help for Pearllington's project disappeared. Mississippi's governor diverted grant funds to rebuild the infrastructure on the coast. Pearllington's water district had already spent more than \$800,000 on designs, easements and other preparations for its water system.

The district had hoped to obtain enough of the post-disaster rebuilding funds as grants to complete its project, but this did not happen. So the district is applying for a \$1.5 million loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development to finish the work.

Nevertheless, 14 years later, the system is beginning to operate, and CRG, through Johnson, will work with the system until all construction ends and the system's daily operation is running smoothly. Customers' homes were being hooked up weekly to the system late last year.

"This is truly an example of where CRG/RCAP has worked from the start until today with a project helping them form [a district], secure funding, write manuals and procedures, and everything else," said Johnson. "I feel that in the last 14 years I have been required to use all the experience I had prior plus educate myself and learn many other things to get this system to where it is." ■

Padre is RCAP's Director of Communications and editor of Rural Matters. He visited Pearllington in October 2010.



Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, Pearllington hopes to pull itself out of the flood waters of Hurricane Katrina. In addition to installing a new water system, one way it is doing this is with the establishment of a community center. The building was built by a charity as a gift to the town. Betty Baxter, the secretary of the water district, stands by the center's dedication plaque.



RCAP field staff honored with awards for service

By Travis Mitchell

Nine staff members employed by RCAP 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.

Winners of the awards were announced during a lunchtime 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 ROOKIE AWARD

The Outstanding Rookie Award was given to a staff member who has been with the RCAP program for two years or less but who has made contributions over and above what would be expected for a new staff member.

Awarded to: Marshall Yandle, Technical Assistance Provider with Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project, the Southeast RCAP (based in North Carolina)

"With less than two years on the job, Marshall has excelled in providing small-community outreach and assistance efforts through a variety of meetings and workshops," explained Stewart. "His astute understanding of the needs of rural communities, especially many of North Carolina's most at-risk populations, and his ability to accurately articulate those issues already

**Outstanding
Rookie:
Marshall Yandle**

**RCAP
Hall of Fame
Inductees:**

H.B. Calvert

Julie Ward

Blanca Surgeon

has made him a respected voice for rural communities in his state.”

Yandle said it feels great to receive the award.

“NRCRAP staff have supported me a great deal since I began working here in April 2009 and have encouraged a great deal of flexibility and new ideas, cultivating an environment of creativity,” he said. “The knowledge and support that I have received from my coworkers at NRCRAP has been immeasurable, and I certainly couldn’t do the job I do without them.”

Yandle said he strives to promote community leadership and ownership in the projects he assists with.

“They see the work I do, and they will ultimately be living with the results. So they are engaged at every level, helping me go door-to-door for surveys or well testing, to organizing community meetings or meeting with elected officials. It is their quality of life at stake, and they should always understand the reasoning behind the advice I give them,” he said.

Most of all, Yandle says he loves that his job allows him to explore new places and get to know great people and the issues that affect their lives.

“The first visit to a new place is exciting because you wonder what it looks like

and who the people are,” he said. “I’ve met some great folks in North Carolina, listened to their stories, and learned about their way of life. It makes the projects more real, and it’s great to make new friends and be able to learn from each other.”

RCAP HALL OF FAME

Inductees into RCAP’s Hall of Fame have made significant positive contributions to RCAP in their years of work. All are long-time staff members.

Inductees:

H.B. Calvert, Technical Assistance Provider with the Midwest Assistance Program (MAP), the Midwest RCAP

“H.B. has contributed nearly 20 years to improving RCAP’s ability to meet the diverse needs of our projects’ communities,” said Stewart. “No project has ever been too difficult for H.B.; he tackles each one with unequaled enthusiasm and professionalism that has earned him a highly deserved place in the RCAP Hall of Fame.”

Calvert said it feels great to receive the prestigious award.

“To be placed in the company of those elite individuals who have won this award before me is truly humbling,” he said.

Calvert said he finds great satisfaction in all of the hard work he does in the field.

“When a community demonstrates improvement due to our endeavors and you see the relief on a mayor’s or city clerk’s face when a solution is reached, it makes it all worthwhile and very rewarding,” he said.

Calvert strives to recognize a specific need in a community and to provide assistance and tools to satisfy that need and said that working within RCAP and the MAP organization allows him the flexibility to think outside the box in order to develop and implement new procedures and ideas.



“I believe our small rural communities deserve to enjoy the same quality of life as their urban counterparts by having a safe, reliable water supply and adequate wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal,” he said.

Calvert was a speaker at one of the workshops during RCAP’s national conference, offering some of his wisdom from his years on the job in an orientation to employees who are new in their jobs at RCAP.

Julie Ward, Rural Development Specialist with WSOS Community Action Commission, the Great Lakes RCAP



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Cover photo

The photo on the cover of this issue of *Rural Matters* is one of the winners of RCAP's national photo contest. In fall 2010, the RCAP national office held a photo contest to challenge RCAP staff across the country to "picture RCAP" – to illustrate their work or what RCAP does in photographs. Another purpose of the contest was to continue to encourage field staff of RCAP's six regional partners to share stories from the communities they work with—in the form of photos instead of the traditional written case studies.

The contest culminated at RCAP's national conference in late November 2010 in Washington, D.C., where the winners were announced.

The cover photo was the winner in the rural landscapes and nature category, which invited entries showing the physical environments where RCAP works. It was taken in September 2008 by Joan Douglas, State Manager for Florida for the Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project, the Southeast RCAP. It shows Dudley Farm, Newberry, Fla.

Upcoming issues of *Rural Matters* will feature the contest's other winners.

"Julie has done it all: technical assistance provider, regional program manager, RCAP board member, fund developer, grant administrator, trainer and so much more," said Stewart. "She has been at the forefront of all of WSOS's and RCAP's programs and initiatives and continues to seek out new ways to improve our delivery of programs and services to rural communities."

Ward said the best thing about her job is developing a relationship with the communities she serves.

"[Community members] call and tell you not to come to a meeting because the roads might be bad. [They] bake Christmas cookies for you...and refuse to take any action the engineer recommended until they talk to RCAP," she said.

She added that working with small communities "can be the most frustrating but also the most rewarding" part of promoting education on improving rural development.

Blanca Surgeon, Rural Development Specialist with the Rural Community Assistance Corporation, the Western RCAP

"Over the past 15 years, Blanca has dedicated her talents not only to rural communities in New Mexico, but also to numerous state and national councils and committees that seek to improve living conditions in rural communities," Stewart said. "Blanca has been especially active in the colonias of New Mexico and with attempts to regionalize or consolidate activities among small water and wastewater service providers."

Surgeon said she strives to provide a bridge between the realities of the communities she serves and the realities of the agencies that provide funding for the work being done.

"I treat people with respect and consideration no matter their position or location," she said. "I motivate people to see solu-



tions and to believe in themselves so that they work toward solutions."

Surgeon said her favorite part of the job is planning at the local level with a community's residents and experiencing the problem she is there to help.

"I love to see their faces when we develop a plan to assist them, when they have the information they need to make a decision, and when they set clear next steps," she said. "There is a lot of hope in the room every time we meet and complete a step or made significant progress. I feel their enthusiasm, and I become passionate about the next steps to the point that it does not feel like work."

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

Mitchell is RCAP's Communications Intern. Photos by Stephen Shapanka



By Lauren Wisniewski
and Michelle Edwards

Key features of an active and effective protection program in your utility

The Environmental Protection Agency presents ways to improve service and security

If we are to learn anything from the recent earthquakes in Haiti, New Zealand and Japan, it is that a disaster – natural or otherwise – can strike at any time and cause widespread damage and chaos. And if something enormous like an earthquake or tsunami can hit without notice, then smaller disruptions to utilities and services are also entirely possible and can come with or without warning. It's a stark reminder to be prepared and put protections into place before an event occurs.

continued on next page

Water contamination and service disruptions in particular can have serious economic, public health, safety, environmental, and psychological impacts on rural communities. This article is meant to assist owners and operators of drinking water and wastewater utilities in preventing, detecting, responding to, and recovering from adverse effects of hazards, such as natural disasters and vandalism. This article describes the basic elements of a protection program and is intended to be used by the water sector as a framework in developing utility-specific approaches.

The key features of a protection program

1. Integrate protective concepts into organizational culture, leadership, and daily operations
2. Identify and support protective program priorities, resources, and utility-specific measures
3. Employ protocols for detection of contamination
4. Assess risks and review vulnerability assessments (VAs)
5. Establish controls for facility and information access

6. Incorporate resiliency concepts into physical infrastructure
7. Prepare, test and update emergency-response and business-continuity plans
8. Develop partnerships with first responders, managers of critical interdependent infrastructure, other utilities, and response organizations
9. Develop and implement internal and external communication strategies
10. Monitor incidents and threat-level information

These key features were put forth by the Environmental Protection Agency's National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC) in 2005 and were updated to reflect the goals and objectives of the Water Sector-specific Plan published in May 2007. The features were developed by NDWAC's Water Security Working Group, which included members representing a broad range of water security perspectives, including participants from small drinking water and wastewater utilities. The working group developed the key features to emphasize actions that have the potential to improve the quality and reliability of a utility's service and enhance its security.

Utilities differ in many ways, including size, water source, treatment capacity and budget. The goal in identifying common features of active and effective protection programs is to achieve consistency in outcomes among utilities while encouraging development of utility-specific approaches and tactics. The key features are sufficiently flexible to apply to all utilities, regardless of size, and are consistent with the management philosophy of continuous improvement.

The key features are based on an integrated approach that incorporates a combination of physical, chemical, operational and design controls; partnerships; and public involvement and awareness to increase overall program performance. This approach encourages utilities to address their security in all of the elements of their infrastructure and consider the full scope of potential system failures and key threats. Integrating the key features into a plan helps rural utilities efficiently and effectively mitigate the public health, economic, environmental and social consequences of various adverse events and can lead to overall improvements in a utility's operations.

Benefits to rural utilities

Rural utilities can see many benefits by integrating the key features into program planning and daily operations. Some examples include:

- Increased protection of public health
- Reduced water service disruptions
- Ability to more quickly detect, respond to, and recover from any adverse event, including natural disasters
- Increased program efficiency and effectiveness
- Enhanced water security capabilities and infrastructure protection



- Increased access to resources during an emergency through mutual aid and assistance
- Improved access to grant funding for water security improvements
- Better coordination among all levels of government and emergency responders
- Increased public confidence
- Increased employee awareness of safety and security
- Better understanding of the interdependencies among the water sector and other critical infrastructure sectors

Case studies

The EPA conducted several in-depth case studies to increase awareness of the benefits of implementing an active and effective protection program and to document implementation of the key features.

The Seattle-King County, Wash., Community Case Study documented 23 practices implemented at this location that related to the key features. The Chicagoland Water and Wastewater Preparedness and Business Resiliency Pilot explored interdependencies between the water sector and other interdependent sectors. It also started a dialogue for collaboration among the water sector and other key sectors in the Chicago area on issues affecting water sector vulnerabilities and business resiliency.

The Hospital and Water Sector Interdependency Summit: Keeping Patients Safe was designed to promote a better understanding of public-private sector interdependencies, foster a greater understanding of water infrastructure and potential impacts from loss of service, and identify resources needed to respond to and recover from a water emergency.

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Available resources and additional information

There are many resources readily available to assist the water sector in implementing the key features. Most of these resources are available to utilities at no or low cost. Following are examples of the resources available on EPA's website (www.epa.gov):

- Funding
 - Grants to fund water security improvements
- Self-assessment
 - Key features self-assessments measures
 - Vulnerability Self-Assessment Tool (VSAT)
- Contamination detection
 - Water Security Initiative (WSi)
 - Water Laboratory Alliance (WLA)
 - National Environmental Methods Index for Chemical, Biological and Radiological Methods (NEMI-CBR)
 - Water Contaminant Information Tool (WCIT)
- Emergency response
 - Incident Command System (ICS)/National Incident Management System (NIMS) Training
 - Emergency Response Tabletop Exercises for Drinking Water and Wastewater Systems (TTX Tool)
- Threat monitoring
 - Water Information Sharing and Analysis Center (WaterISAC)
 - State and local fusion centers
- Additional resources:
 - Water Security Product Guides
 - Mutual aid and assistance resources (e.g., WARNs)

For additional information on the key features and the available resources for water sector utilities listed above, please visit the EPA's Water Security website at www.epa.gov/watersecurity or contact WSD-outreach@epa.gov



EPA also conducted two key features case studies in 2010—the *Mid-Atlantic Utility Case Study* and the *New England Utility Case Study*. They built on previous case studies but were smaller in scope. EPA developed a questionnaire based on the key features and conducted interviews of two water sector utilities.



redundancy in the system for those identified points. There is also extra capacity at the utility's treatment facilities that could be used if there were a disruption in operations at another facility. Furthermore, the utility has interconnections with an adjacent county to provide water during an emergency. All of these procedures help the utility guard against service disruptions.

The objectives of the case studies were to:

1. document how drinking water and wastewater utilities have successfully incorporated one or more of the key features into their operations
2. provide examples of specific protective practices that can be replicated by other drinking water and wastewater utilities
3. highlight benefits to utilities of implementing the key features

Following are the highlights of each case study. The names and specific locations of the utilities have been omitted for security purposes.

Mid-Atlantic utility case study

The Mid-Atlantic utility has implemented many practices that incorporate the key features. Water security is funded by the locality's capital improvement plan (CIP) according to the priorities identified in its vulnerability assessment (feature 2). Major capital improvement projects are primarily bond-funded, while maintenance and operations are funded by water/sewer rates and fees.

The utility incorporated resiliency into its physical infrastructure (feature 6) in several ways. It conducted an assessment of critical points of failure and provided

Additionally, the county has signed a multi-jurisdictional agreement with an adjacent county and city to provide water and emergency assistance for drinking water and wastewater (feature 8). During a two-year drought, the county used the agreement to provide water to the neighboring county. The utility meets annually with the other jurisdictions and tests the interconnections with the other jurisdictions monthly to ensure they are working properly.

The utility also has developed partnerships with first responders, managers of critical infrastructure, and response organizations (feature 8). It maintains close working relationships with other critical infrastructure partners, including electrical utilities, oil suppliers and chemical suppliers. The utility also formed relationships with critical water users, including the local hospital and dialysis centers, and established a system to alert critical and large water users in the event of a water emergency.

Building relationships with interdependent sectors and critical customers allows the utility to identify interdependency issues that may impact both the utility's and its customers' business continuity. Additionally, the utility has established partnerships with the state emergency management agency and the FBI's Emergency Response Team through tabletop exercises, which ensure that they are better prepared to work together if an incident should occur.



The utility has experienced many benefits from implementing the key features. Dedicated funding has allowed the utility to make necessary security improvements. The addition of security cameras has helped to eliminate vandalism, and the audio on the cameras has assisted employees with the maintenance of pump stations. Redundancy in the system has reduced service disruptions, which increases customer satisfaction. Finally, the utility's multi-jurisdictional agreement increases system redundancy and improves emergency response time.

New England utility case study

The New England utility also has incorporated the key features into its protection program. The utility identifies its program's priorities through strategic planning and supports them with a combination of capital improvement funds, rate increases, and security grant funds (feature 2). The program has a dedicated funding source by means of a separate budget for security and emergency management. The utility has been systematically replacing its aging infrastructure and making security improvements by gradually instituting a series of small rate increases, instead of borrowing or deferring rate increases.

It has established facility and information access controls and is preparing to install a new security system (feature 5). It will include hardening of assets, motion detectors, enhanced video surveillance, and relocating the security room and servers. Additionally, the utility controls 95 percent of the land surrounding the reservoir and prohibits public access to the watershed with security patrols and by levying fines.

The utility has prepared, tested and updated its emergency-response, recovery and business-continuity plans (feature 7). Approximately 85 percent of all employees have completed Incident Command System (ICS) 100 and 800 training, and managers have taken the ICS 400 training.

The utility also has participated in several water security tabletop and field exercises.

The utility is a member of its state water/wastewater agency response network (WARN) and interacts regularly with its critical customers and interdependent infrastructures (Feature 8). The state WARN has completed one tabletop exercise and is considering setting up response teams in the WARN to do initial screening and evaluations for situation reports. Furthermore, the utility's transmission and distribution staff communicate with the local health sector, including hospitals and dialysis centers, and have meetings with wholesale customers to keep them informed of the utility's activities.

The New England utility has experienced some challenges in implementing its protection program. The utility lost substantial revenue due to lower consumption during the recent recession. It reduced the impacts of this with rate increases and grant funding.



The utility has experienced several benefits of implementing the key features. Its security initiatives have made employees more conscious of safety and security. The employees are better informed, more observant of outside activities, and more sensitive to the potential consequences of their actions. Additionally, ICS/NIMS training emphasized the fact that utilities are first responders and demonstrated the need for training and equipment to support this function.

Finally, the utility's representative stated that security and emergency management should be approached from an all-hazards standpoint instead of being based solely on malevolent acts. Protection programs need to be tailored to specific regional issues, such as flooding and hurricanes in New England, in order to be effective.

Case study results

The Mid-Atlantic and New England case studies highlight various activities that utilities have undertaken to implement the several of the key features. These activities include:

- Assessing program priorities and critical points of failure to maximize effectiveness
- Funding identified priorities with a dedicated source of funding and grant funds
- Building redundancy into the system where vulnerabilities are noted to guard against system outages
- Developing partnerships with critical customers and interdependent sectors to increase preparedness and resiliency
- Rehearsing emergency response plans with partners to ensure efficient coordination during an emergency situation

These case studies also emphasized the importance of utilities approaching security and emergency management from an all-hazards standpoint, tailoring the protection program to specific regional issues.

Wisniewski is an Environmental Protection Specialist in the EPA's Office of Water, Water Security Division. Edwards is a Senior Environmental Analyst for Computer Sciences Corporation.



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