

Why Hawaii Needs a National Clean Water Trust Fund

The United States's wastewater infrastructure, aging and increasingly unable to handle the pressures of modern society, is in serious danger. When pipes break and sewers overflow, communities, the environment, and our economy all suffer.

Recognizing that states across the country were faced with clean water spending requirements well beyond their ability to support, the federal government created the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. The fund, established in the late 1980s, provides states with federal grant money that they then use to make low-interest loans to communities for clean water projects.

Unfortunately, funding for the program has atrophied since it became fully operational in 1991. Since that year, funding has been cut by half (nearly two-thirds when adjusted for inflation), leaving states scrambling to deal with growing backlogs of maintenance and improvement projects. Broken pipes and sewer overflows spill more than one trillion gallons of untreated sewage every year and contaminate our beaches, waterways, and estuaries.

Given the fickle year-to-year funding of the SRF and the urgency of our clean water troubles, we need a new solution. A federal clean water trust fund would provide a steady, reliable, and equitable source of funding for needed projects across the country. By sidestepping the contentious appropriations process, a trust fund would safeguard our clean water infrastructure, our environment, and our economy.

Funding Gap: Hawaii's water infrastructure requires completion of 103 projects costing \$788.6 over the next few years, as shown on its most recent Intended Use Plan and Program Priority List. These needs substantially outpace its federal allotments, totaling a sum 95 times its 2007 allotment of \$8.3 million.

Federal contributions to Hawaii's clean water funding efforts have decreased by 47.8 percent since the Clean Water SRF was fully implemented in fiscal 1991 and 65.9 percent when adjusted for inflation.

"There is definitely a growing backlog of need... probably the quality of systems is suffering. The burden comes upon the taxpayers with rate hikes." – Kevin Yoshioka, Grants Management Supervisor with the Hawaii Department of Health, Wastewater Branch.

Water Quality: According to a 2000 EPA assessment, 69 percent of river miles suffer from impaired water quality. Additionally, of assessed estuaries, 14 percent are inadequately healthy to support fish consumption, 15 percent do not support shellfish consumption, and 26 percent are unsafe for swimming.

Beach Closings: A report by the Natural Resources Defense Council shows nationwide beach closings and swimming advisories were at an all-time high in 2006. Hawaii's closure and advisory events lasting six weeks or fewer skyrocketed between 2005 and 2006, from 2,228 in 2005 to 6,507 the next year, including two extended and two permanent events.

Job Creation: One billion dollars in federal infrastructure investment leads to approximately 47,500 new jobs. Addressing Hawaii's currently listed wastewater infrastructure needs would spur 5,914 employment opportunities.

For more information, download the full report, *Clear Waters: Why America Needs a Clean Water Trust Fund*, and analyses of all 50 states at: www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/clearwaters

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