

Why Illinois 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: Illinois suffers from a significant funding gap, with 188 projects on its proposed fiscal 2008 Intended Use Plan and current wastewater spending needs of \$693.5 million over the next three years. The state's 2007 federal clean water allotment, meanwhile, amounted to a mere \$48.4 million.

Federal contributions to Illinois' 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.

"Our forecasts show that demand will remain strong in the future. In the wastewater program, for instance, the 1996 [EPA] Needs Survey pegged wastewater 'needs' in Illinois at \$12.2 billion, and despite a strong SRF program, that number had grown to \$13.5 billion by 2004. If you look at our demand in terms of a three-year window for projects proceeding in the program (projects for which a Facility Plan has been submitted), we have a three-year 'need' of \$693.5 million, a number that would support an annual program in excess of \$200 million: and that is significantly over our \$140-\$150 million annual average." – Geoff Andres, Illinois Department of Environmental Quality

Water Quality: According to a 2004 state assessment, 38 percent of river miles and 60 percent of lakes suffer from impaired water quality. Additionally, none of the state's Great Lakes waters fully support fish consumption, and 75 percent are considered 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. Illinois experienced 591 closure or advisory events lasting six weeks or fewer in 2006, up from 585 in 2005. 2006 also saw the state issue two permanent closures, up from one the previous year.

Job Creation: One billion dollars in federal infrastructure investment leads to approximately 47,500 new jobs. Addressing Illinois' currently listed wastewater infrastructure needs would spur 32,941 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

Food & Water Watch

1400 16th St. NW, Suite 225 • Washington, DC 20036
 tel: (202) 797-6550 • fax: (202) 797-6560
foodandwater@fwwatch.org
www.foodandwaterwatch.org

