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Fact Sheet

Overloaded and Underfunded: Representative McNerney's District's Aging Infrastructure Needs a Clean Water Trust Fund

America's clean water systems – the pipes, sewers, and treatment facilities that keep our society afloat – are in serious trouble. The federal government estimates that every year we fall more than $20 billion short of what is needed to maintain and improve our water infrastructure.[1]

States and localities, grappling with tight budgets and projected future needs far beyond projected funding capabilities, have traditionally relied on the federal government to support continued access to this essential public resource. However, money for the federal Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which supports state and local efforts, is drying up, leaving governments, utilities, and citizens struggling to clean up the mess.

Across the country, the consequences of inadequate infrastructure investment are already being felt – as many as 75,000 times a year, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, which says that sewage overflows from poorly-designed or degraded systems emit 1.26 trillion gallons of untreated filth annually.[2] These overflows, which cost more than $50 billion a year in cleanup costs, are not sent to some faraway wilderness; they are spilling into our local streams and beaches, our homes, and the source water we eventually drink.[3]

"Bottom line, we've slowed down on infrastructure projects."

– Wally Sandelin, Lodi public works director, on the consequence of infrastructure expenses rising at more than twice the rate of inflation[19]

In Your Backyard: Watch your step, warned Lodi officials. A segment of its 40-year-old sewer pipeline is in terrible condition. It is crumbling and full of holes. It's so bad that a construction worker fell into the sewer last October when the piping he was working on collapsed. Fortunately, the six-foot fall left him with neither injury nor mess: The wastewater had been diverted during the repair work.[4]

That's not the end of Lodi's clean water woes. Its wastewater treatment plant could be contaminating groundwater used for drinking and farming, according to a state water authority.[5] The city is trying to correct these problems, and it has borrowed nearly $60 million to finance upgrades to its sewer system.[6]

To cover these costs, residents are paying an infrastructure replacement fee, which caused their sewer rates jump by 70 percent a few years ago. Nevertheless, they are likely to see another rate hike soon. Lodi's sewer and

water systems are facing a $17 million operational deficit,[7] and its wastewater treatment plant needs $31 million in upgrades.[8] In the neighboring county, the city of Pleasanton has even greater needs at $68 million.[9]

Stockton also faces a funding crunch. A bad contract with a private water corporation left the city's sewer utility stretched dangerously thin, according to the municipal utilities director. For years, the company had understaffed the system, deferred maintenance and neglected repairs.[10] Now that the sewers are under public control, the city has a lot of slack to pick up.

To meet its future sewage demands, Stockton plans to spend $24 million within the next three years,[11] but that's just the tip of the iceberg. By 2025 the city will need more than $1 billion worth of wastewater improvements.[12]

Meanwhile, residents continue to bear the costs of maintaining and repairing the area's clean water infrastructure. Without increased funding, consumer utility rates will continue to increase as communities struggle to meet their current and future needs.

"Everyone recognizes the need for clean water. It doesn't matter where you live or what your political persuasion is. We all need clean water."

– Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton[20]

EPA's most recent assessment of the nine watersheds in the region – San Joaquin Delta, Panoche-San Luis Reservoir, Suisun Bay, Coyote, San Francisco Bay, Middle San Joaquin-Lower Merced-Lower Stan, Lower Calaveras-Mormon Slough, Lower Cosumnes-Lower Mokelumne and Pajaro – found 199 individual impairments to water quality, including sedimentation, pathogens and fecal coliform bacteria.[13]

Across California: Statewide, EPA says that 93 percent of California's assessed river miles and lakes suffer from impaired water quality. Additionally, 78 percent of waters do not support fish consumption, and nearly all of the state's bays and estuaries are seriously hampered.[14]

Yet while the needs are apparent, the funding to keep our water clean and safe is drying up. Overall federal contributions to the state's clean water funding efforts have decreased by 47.8 percent since 1991; nearly 66 percent when adjusted for inflation.[15]

California's water needs outpace its current ability to fund projects by a large margin. The state's most recent Clean Water State Revolving Fund Intended Use Plan lists 691 projects at a total cost of $10.5 billion over the next five years. In 2007, the state received $76.5 million in federal funding – enough to finance 1/137th of its needs.[16] EPA, meanwhile, estimates California's current wastewater spending needs at $18.17 billion.[17]

Time for a Federal Clean Water Trust Fund

Given the fickle year-to-year availability of clean water funding and the urgency of our needs, we have to find a new solution. Our problems are not just local; watersheds are linked, and one community's water flows downstream to become another's. Neither are our resources; water belongs to all of us, and clean, healthy, affordable public

"We cannot continue to operate in a deficit – that's not good business practice."

– Larry Hansen, Lodi councilmember[18]

water is every community's right. The best answer would cover California and the entire nation, ensure steady, reliable funding to meet future needs, liberate the process from partisan bickering, and avoid penalizing ratepayers.

A federal clean water trust fund would do just that, guaranteeing clean water for generations to come. By sidestepping the contentious appropriations process, a trust fund would safeguard our infrastructure, our environment, and our economy – all without adding to the national debt. For more information on keeping clean water a reality, consult Food & Water Watch's report *Clear Waters: Why America Needs a Clean Water Trust Fund*, available at www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/americaswater/clearwaters.

Endnotes

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[13] "Surf Your Watershed." Office of Water, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Available at: http://cfpub.epa.gov/surf/locate/index.cfm

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[16] "State of California Clean Water State Revolving Fund Final Intended Use Plan for State Fiscal Year 2006/2007." State Water Resources Control Board, California Environmental Protection Agency, May 1, 2007. Available at: www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/srf/docs/final2007iup.pdf

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[19] Thigpen, Daniel. "Lodi water, sewer rats likely to rise again." *The Record* (Stockton), April 16, 2008.

[20] Doyle, Michael. "House approves McNerney's water bill." *The Record* (Stockton), March 9, 2007.

For more information:
web: www.foodandwaterwatch.org
email: foodandwater@fwwatch.org
phone: (202) 683-2500