



2008 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

WATER RESOURCES & INFRASTRUCTURE

ISSUE

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports increases in funding levels for water resources and infrastructure, including the development of a Water Trust Fund, for regional councils and local governments to meet the current and future water needs of regions.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONGRESS

- Create, implement and adequately fund a Clean Water Trust Fund, providing dedicated funding committed to clean and safe water.
- Examine innovative financing ideas for funding water infrastructure projects such as a national sales tax and/or "Regional Infrastructure Improvement Zones," a financing mechanism that would allow for businesses or individuals to make contributions toward infrastructure/economic development project(s) for a tax deduction.
- Assure that states pass through funding for water quality planning to existing, qualified regional entities that are area-wide coordinating agencies as currently required in the Clean Water Act to develop comprehensive water quality and supply strategies.
- Increase FY09 budget funding to the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund from \$555 million – the lowest funding level in the program's history – to a minimum of \$1.35 billion.
- Increase pass through funding for planning from one percent to two percent of a state's allocation in order to sustain programs.
- Ensure appropriate funding to state and local governments for compliance with federal government clean water and wastewater mandates.
- Increase funding to multi-jurisdictional regional planning organizations involved in developing regional water allocation plans.
- Establish the "United States Commission on Infrastructure Investment" as introduced by Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR).
- Pass HR 135, the Twenty-First Century Water Commission Act of 2007, to study and develop recommendations for a comprehensive water strategy to address future water needs with membership to include a regional council representative.
- Pass HR 569, Water Quality Investment Act of 2007 to amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to authorize appropriations of sewer overflow control grants.
- Fully implement the Water Resources Development Act, which authorizes key projects throughout the nation.
- Seek coordination among all federal agencies that deal with water issues to maximize the impact of federal water quality programs.
- Encourage and incentivize innovative water technology use such as recycling waste water to go back into drinking water.

BACKGROUND

The quality and the quantity of our water supply are critical to our nation's future. According to a recent poll, nine out of ten Americans believe safe and clean water is a national priority that deserves federal investment. Drinking water and wastewater utilities will need to invest hundreds of billions of dollars in their capital infrastructure over the next two decades, according to EPA, CBO, and the Water Infrastructure Network. Projected needs range from \$485 billion to nearly \$1.2 trillion. Additionally, federal funding for clean water has been on a steady decline. Overall the federal government contribution to total clean water spending has shrunk dramatically - from 78% in 1978 to just 3% today, according to a 2007 report by Food & Water Watch. Congress, therefore, should assist states and local communities to address the growing infrastructure needed to maintain a clean and safe supply of water. Planning is a major component of any regional ecosystem assessment and information programs to guide management decisions. Congress should recognize the work of regional councils in their efforts to assist local governments address quality and supply issues by increasing the amount of funds available for planning, technical assistance, and responding to emerging water issues.

States and local governments have utilized Regional Councils because of their ability to bring together stakeholders and funding, access and experience to technical tools, and their proficiency in carrying out mandated sections of the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act. Regional Councils play an important role in bridging the gap between the bureaucracies of State and Federal agencies and the local community interests that frequently do not have the resources and expertise to adequately address the complexities of water quality issues.

Without continued financial support of regional planning services and water quality studies by the Federal government, many projects would have to be supported entirely by local funds, which are already cash-strapped and facing budget deficits. In order for Regional Councils to continue their programs to stay in Federal compliance of clean water standards, they will have to come up with new and innovative ways to deal with the lack of Federal funding.