



National Association of Regional Councils

Environment Committee Policies and Priorities

WATER & WASTEWATER

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports increased federal funding for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, including the development of a Water Trust Fund to provide local governments and multijurisdictional regional planning organizations adequate resources to meet the current and future drinking water and wastewater needs.

Congress should invest in state, local, and regional government infrastructure to maintain a clean and safe supply of drinking water. In addition, Congress should recognize the work of regional planning organizations in their efforts to assist local governments in addressing quality and supply issues by increasing the amount of funds available for planning, technical assistance, and response to emerging water issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- NARC urges the federal government to partner with local governments and regional planning organizations to address drinking water and wastewater issues.
- NARC urges the federal government to work directly with local elected officials who understand local needs, opportunities and obligations through their “on-the-ground” perspective.

NARC supports federal drinking water and waste water funding programs that:

- Support incentives to local governments and regional planning organizations to protect environmental resources, such as simpler rulemaking, initiatives such as integrated planning and increased funding.
- Explore the creation of a Water Trust Fund (WTF) to provide dedicated, firewalled and sustainable funding to clean and safe water resources and infrastructure (both drinking and waste water) with an emphasis on aging infrastructure.
- Authorize and increase funding for both the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan and Clean Water State Revolving Loan Funds to ensure adequate resources for wastewater and drinking water storage and treatment facilities in both urban and rural regions.
- Direct a portion of water infrastructure funds to multi-jurisdictional regional planning organizations.
- Increase funding to multi-jurisdictional regional planning organizations to develop regional water allocation plans.
- Increase state pass-through funding for planning to regional planning organizations.
- Reaffirm a commitment to and fund the Clean Water Act Sec. 208 Areawide Water Quality Management Plans, which promotes efficient and comprehensive programs for controlling water pollution from point and nonpoint sources.

- Establish innovative financing programs for water and wastewater infrastructure projects such as “Regional Infrastructure Improvement Zones,” a financing mechanism that allows businesses or individuals to make contributions toward infrastructure/economic development project(s) for a tax deduction.
- Amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to authorize appropriations of sewer overflow control grants.
- Fund research to determine the impacts of climate change on water resources and infrastructure.
- Encourage funding for sustainable water infrastructure and practices such as green infrastructure.
- Provide technical assistance grants to urban, suburban, and rural areas.
- Encourage federal assistance for local governments and regional planning organizations for public education and communication on environmental needs and conservation and sustainability issues.
- Oppose measures that create mandates on local governments and/or regional planning organizations without full federal funding.

Federal drinking and wastewater policy should:

- Coordinate federal agencies responsible for water issues to maximize the impact of federal water quality programs.
- Encourage regional approaches through multi-jurisdictional regional planning organizations to resolve environmental issues that are cross-jurisdictional in nature.
- Ensure that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) role within the Sustainable Communities Partnership addresses water quality and quantity with regional solutions through established multi-jurisdictional regional planning organizations.
- Encourage and incentivize innovative water technology for reuse functions.
- Support conservation strategies and technical assistance to local governments and regional planning organizations.
- Ensure that national standards protect the safety of America’s water infrastructure systems, without hindering local activities.
- Support and incentivize the development of regional local stormwater management plans and programs for local governments that are consistent with state stormwater program goals and EPA guidance guidelines.

ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports local and regional programs to plan for and implement a diverse, clean, and secure energy future. These regional programs should inform a coordinated and integrated national energy policy vision. Regional Councils play a key role in implementing national energy policies and technologies across the country. Through long-range planning, public-private partnerships, and the development of locally-grown solutions, regional organizations can help transform the market and set the nation on a course for a clean energy future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- NARC urges the federal government to partner with local governments and regional planning organizations to resolve critical energy issues in urban, suburban and rural regions.
- The federal government should engage directly with local elected officials who understand the local needs, opportunities, and obligations through their “on-the-ground” perspective.

- Federal energy programs and funding should encourage partnerships between universities, private industries, and federal, state, regional, and local governments.

Federal funding programs should:

- Promote efforts that improve energy efficiency and conservation in the transportation and building sectors, and provide funding directly to local and regional governments.
- Expand federal incentives for the research, development, and application of technologies that will reduce energy dependency and promote energy efficiency, clean energy, and renewable energy.
- Provide funding to multi-jurisdictional regional planning organizations for regional energy planning.
- Allow federal funding to be flexible enough to meet local needs and support locally-identified and prioritized projects.
- Avoid mandates on local governments and regional planning organizations without full federal funding.

Federal Energy Policy should:

- Promote a balanced commitment to conserving energy, protecting the environment, developing new technologies and strengthening the economy.
- Encourage regional approaches to resolve cross-jurisdictional environmental issues.
- Coordinate among federal agencies to assist in implementing energy policies and programs.
- Encourage conservation and increased energy efficiency among all geographic regions and economic sectors.
- Support the use of alternative, renewable, and diverse energy sources, including nuclear, wind, solar, wave, biofuels, geothermal and natural gas, and ensure that financial incentives for renewable energy production are structured to best encourage the development of such industries.
- Support research into clean coal technologies to reduce greenhouse gases.
- Support enhanced energy transmission and “smart” grid technologies and programs.
- Urge the expansion of green jobs through workforce training in emerging energy and environmental skills.
- Support state, regional and local programs aimed at reducing high energy costs.
- Encourage the integration of energy into plans that build livable/sustainable communities.

GREENHOUSE GAS & AIR QUALITY

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports federal funding to incorporate and encourage multi-jurisdictional regional planning organizations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality for communities and regions. Since the passage of the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C.), regional planning organizations have played a critical role in the nation’s efforts to ensure clean air through short and long-term planning and program implementation. NARC is committed to ensuring regional planning organizations have the tools and resources they need to address greenhouse gas and air quality concerns.

Federal air quality policy should:

- Balance a commitment to conserving energy, protecting the environment, developing new technologies and strengthening the economy when addressing environmental concerns.
- Ensure federal environmental decisions are based on well-founded, peer-reviewed scientific evidence.

- Recognize and include local governments and multi-jurisdictional regional planning organizations as partners in national efforts to reduce greenhouse gases and improve air quality.
- Encourage regional approaches to resolve cross-jurisdictional environmental issues.
- Adopt flexible policies to aid in the reduction of greenhouse gases and air quality issues.
- Encourage predictable market solutions to reducing carbon emissions.
- Provide states, local governments and regional planning organizations the incentives and resources to support cost effective planning and management programs to meet federal goals in greenhouse gases reduction and air quality.
- Allow states, local governments, and regions the authority to set reasonable standards and establish flexible mechanisms to achieve those standards.
- Provide for greenhouse gases reduction and related activities through federal legislation, not regulation.
- Recognize there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution for greenhouse gases reduction or air quality improvement, and allow flexibility for local government implementation.
- Encourage the integration of environmental strategies into plans that build livable communities.
- Coordinate federal agencies regulating air quality and/or greenhouse gases reduction to avoid conflicting regulations and/or actions.
- Evaluate regularly the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to ensure they are necessary and attainable.
- Ensure NAAQS standards are accompanied by proven technologies and sufficient time to assist in implementation.
- Allow greenhouse gases reduction or air quality standards to be flexible enough to consider regional conditions and unique situations.
- Avoid mandates on local governments and regional planning organizations without full federal funding.

Federal funding programs should:

- Direct a portion of proceeds from any market-based program to units of local government and multi-jurisdictional regional organizations to support emissions reduction efforts.
- Provide urban, suburban and rural regional planning organizations resources and tools to integrate greenhouse gases reduction and air quality improvement into planning objectives.
- Direct funding to regional planning organizations to evaluate, plan and prepare for the environmental impacts.
- Allocate funding for both adaptation and mitigation initiatives on the local and regional levels.
- Include opportunities for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Councils of Governments (COGs) to incorporate sustainability practices (e.g. linking transportation and land use planning) in their plans to reduce greenhouse gases.
- Encourage and give credit for voluntary reductions in air pollution.
- Support the development and application of technologies that will reduce, capture and/or store greenhouse gases and other air pollutants.
- Encourage strategies to buffer the effect of greenhouse gases reduction (e.g. energy cost increases) on lower-income populations.
- Provide CMAQ funding to metropolitan planning organizations.

Federal policies should support research & education efforts and programs that:

- Increase available research on the effects of greenhouse gases and air quality issues on U.S. regions.

- Fund local governments and regions to educate residents, stakeholders, and communities about environmental challenges.

Federal Policies Should Support:

- Funding for regional data collection
- Funding for GIS and the use of regional scenario planning tools