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USDA Provides \$314 Million in Water and Waste Infrastructure Improvements in Rural Communities Nationwide.

WASHINGTON, Nov. 2, 2015 - USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced loans and grants for 141 projects to build and improve water and wastewater infrastructure in rural communities across the nation.

“Many rural communities need to upgrade and repair their water and wastewater systems, but often lack the resources to do so,” Vilsack said. “These loans and grants will help accomplish this goal. USDA’s support for infrastructure improvements is an essential part of building strong rural economies.”

USDA is awarding \$299 million for 88 projects in the [Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program](#) and \$15 million for 53 grants in the [Emergency Community Water Assistance Grant \(ECWAG\) program](#).

ECWAG grants enable water systems that serve eligible rural communities to prepare for, or recover from, imminent or actual emergencies that threaten the availability of safe drinking water. Water and Waste program recipients can use funds to construct water and waste facilities in rural communities.

The Big Sandy Rancheria Band of Western Mono Indians in Fresno, Calif., has been selected to receive a \$494,300 ECWAG grant to drill a well and connect it and another well to the water system.

The Columbia Heights Water District in Caldwell, La., has been selected to receive a \$736,000 water and waste loan to upgrade the water storage tank and related equipment at the wastewater treatment plant. The community is in an area of persistent poverty that USDA has targeted for special assistance through the [StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative](#).

Three recipients receiving funding today were given priority points through a provision in the 2014 Farm Bill that encourages communities to adopt regional economic development plans. These projects are centered on regional collaboration and long-term growth strategies. They leverage outside resources and capitalize on a region’s unique strengths.

The recipients are the West Stewartstown (N.H.) Water Precinct, the Lowcountry Regional Water System in Hampton, S.C., and the city of Waubun, Minn. All three projects involve upgrades to water and wastewater systems. The Hampton, S.C., project is in a high-poverty area designated as a [Promise Zone](#). In areas designated as Promise Zones, federal, state and private-sector partners work with local communities and businesses to create jobs, increase economic security, expand educational opportunities, and increase access to quality, affordable housing.

Six of the projects announced today will provide \$3.9 million to benefit Native American areas. These water and waste awards include the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians in Minnesota and

five projects in California, including Big Sandy Rancheria, two awards to the Cortina Band of Wintun Indians, the Grindstone Indian Rancheria and the Yurok Tribe.

Two projects will provide \$9.1 million for colonias in New Mexico. The recipients are the Garfield Mutual Domestic Water Consumers & Mutual Sewer Works Association and the La Luz Mutual Domestic Water Association. Colonias are unincorporated, low-income, mostly Hispanic U.S. communities along the Mexico border that lack adequate housing, drinking water and wastewater infrastructure.

Since 2009, USDA has helped provide improved water and wastewater services to nearly 18 million rural residents by investing \$12.3 billion in 5,174 projects.

Funding of each award announced today is contingent upon the recipient meeting the terms of the grant and loan agreement.

Here is an example of how a previously funded project has helped improve water service in a rural community. In Sparta, Tenn., antiquated equipment could not handle rainwater runoff, causing sewage to spill out of drains. In 2011, USDA provided \$2.9 million to Sparta to build a new wastewater system, ending the major sewage problem.

USDA Rural Development is accepting applications for loans and grants to build rural water infrastructure. Applications may be completed online through [RDAPPLY](#), a new electronic filing system, and at [state and local Rural Development offices](#). Public entities (counties, townships and communities), non-profit organizations and tribal communities with a population of 10,000 or less are eligible to apply. Interest rates for this program are at historically low levels, ranging from 2 percent to 3.25 percent. Loan terms can be up to 40 years.

President Obama's plan for rural America has brought about historic investment and resulted in stronger rural communities. Under the President's leadership, these investments in housing, community facilities, businesses and infrastructure have empowered rural America to continue leading the way - strengthening America's economy, small towns and rural communities.

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