

Summer 2018



RURAL MATTERS

The magazine of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership

Hills, Hollows, and Everything In Between

How time in rural
America can change a
perspective

The Golden Girls of Alcovy Shores

Regional Partnerships: Sustainable Rural Water Systems

A Snapshot: RCAP's work with U.S. EPA



Who is **RCAP** ?

The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) is a national network of nonprofit organizations working to ensure that rural and small communities throughout the United States have access to safe drinking water, sanitary wastewater disposal and beyond. The six regional RCAP offices provide a variety of programs, including direct training, technical assistance, and a wealth of expertise. If you are seeking assistance, contact your RCAP regional office below or contact RCAP's national office to be directed to the appropriate contact.



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National Photo Contest
Winner- People

Photo by: Jim McVeigh

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One Year Later...



By Nathan Ohle, Executive Director

of the communities that we serve, it is, and should be. One of the major problems we face today is that most people do not know that there is a water issue in many rural communities, and do not understand the importance of water for economic growth and prosperity for these communities.

Change is happening throughout rural communities, but in order to create opportunity in those communities, we must be willing to embrace the innovations that will allow communities to thrive.

In too many places across this country, the zip code where you were born impacts your ability to thrive more than almost anything else. Access to water is an issue that impacts everyone's lives. All of us have dedicated our lives to helping provide opportunities for families, and water is central to that work.

Across the US, access to water is still a fundamental issue. It is an issue that hits at the most fundamental needs, and is the starting point for any opportunity for economic growth for communities of all sizes. When you work to provide access to water, you are at the tip of the spear in rural communities. Often, the single biggest capital investment a rural community will ever make would be in their water or wastewater system. Without those operating efficiently and effectively, there is no opportunity for growth.

In my first six months in this job, I traveled across the country to visit communities and hear firsthand about the work that that RCAP is doing. It is clear that the work happening in every state across the country is incredibly important to the communities we serve.

My very first trip as a part of RCAP was to Georgia, and provides one of

the best examples of the struggles many of the communities we work with deal with. The Golden Girls of Alcovy Shores are a shining light for what makes rural communities so special. The previous water operator of Alcovy Shores tragically passed away, and when this happened, the only person in the community who knew how to run any part of the system was his wife Juanita. Juanita decided to go back and get certified as a water operator to serve her community, and recruited several of her friends to help her. Today, this group of women operate the water system and keep safe drinking water in the community. While this is a story of the commitment many rural communities make, it also highlights the need for a well-trained workforce and GIS mapping of systems so that others in the community know how to access and operate systems.

In North Dakota, RCAP is working with the town of Sanborn to install new hydrants and meters to limit water loss, saving the community thousands of dollars. More than 15 million households could be served every year with the treated water that is lost, and our work on this issue is incredibly important to small rural communities.

Innovation is naturally embedded in every rural community, it just does not always present itself in ways that most people think. Every community needs to have leadership capacity, the right infrastructure, and a local culture of innovation to ensure that they can continue to grow and thrive. Innovation is at the heart of all we do, it is in the DNA of every rural community. Rural communities understand that it takes hard work, dedication and innovative ideas to make things work with less resources, time and expertise. RCAP helps with all of that.

This issue of Rural Matters represents the culmination of my first year serving as the Executive Director at RCAP. I want to personally thank everyone from throughout the RCAP network for the opportunity to be a part of this incredible team, and for the honor of working beside you in this work.

As I have reflected on this past year, I wanted to share some of my thoughts on why RCAP is so important and where we are headed.

There truly is not a more powerful, passionate or collaborative organization working in rural communities, and the impact being felt at the more than 20,000 communities we have served in the past decade is evidence of that.

Today, more than ever, we need to be focused on the opportunities that exist for rural communities across this country, and how the work of RCAP can continue to expand those opportunities.

When most people think about rural America, water is not the first topic that comes up. Water is a basic human right, but it is not one that everyone in this country thinks about every day. For many

In Continental Ohio, Mayor Matt Miller is thinking innovatively about how his community can continue to thrive. He is engaging the community in new ways, bringing transparency and accountability in partnership with RCAP. Without our assistance, mayors and city councils may not have the expertise or understanding to push for the innovations that are needed to keep their communities safe.

In Milton, DE, the community created the first ever Sustainability Committee, tasked with satisfying current community needs without sacrificing future well-being through the balanced pursuit of ecological health and economic welfare. A community of around 2,500 has a sustainability

expertise and roll-up-your-sleeves mentality that exists in everyone at RCAP. It takes a special person to do this work, and a special network to make the impact that we are seeing across the country.

When I traveled down to Texas to visit some of the communities hit hard by Hurricane Harvey, this hard work came to the forefront. As we talked to Mayors and visited the systems, it was clear that the team was doing incredible work. I asked our Texas State lead that day what allowed them to survey 171 water and wastewater systems in four days after the hurricane. His response? HARD WORK.

Just as impressive has been the work of the team in Puerto Rico. Team members were literally

response to the damage inflicted by the hurricanes as the only water, wastewater and solid waste technical assistance provider on the island full-time.

Hard work is ingrained in all that we do. It also builds trust, a crucial element to our work.

The point that always comes back to me as I meet communities and partners across the country, is the importance of the RCAP network's relationships. Relationships with the more than 20,000 communities the network has served in the past decade...relationships with state and federal partners...relationships within the network. When in Alaska, I was able to see firsthand the strength of our relationships with state partners, universities and communities. This is the biggest asset each of us have, and what makes this team so special.

We are at a critical time in our country. A time when there are proposed cuts to rural programs, cuts to infrastructure projects, housing and economic development programs that are vital to rural communities across the country. RCAP's work every day in providing those services to the communities we serve is vital to their prosperity. This is truly the strength of this organization.



National Photo Contest Winner- Rural Landscapes. Photo by: Andrew Nordbye

committee, looking at local solutions to create opportunity in a small community.

The thing that sticks out the most about my travels is how hard everyone is working. It is clear that what sets RCAP apart is the passion,

servicing communities in response to Hurricane Maria while their own homes were without electricity, and their families were dealing with the many issues caused by the hurricane. They continue to work with communities across the island in both recovery and

It has been an incredible first year! I look forward to another fantastic year, and to hearing and seeing more of the incredible work happening across the country!

Nathan Ohle

RCAP Executive Director



What Being Open to Rural America Taught Me

Feature Article

Written By:
Malini Sekhar

What if the best shot we have at healing what divides us as a country is honestly examining our own beliefs and misconceptions? One area I recently explored was rural America and my own misgivings around it.

As a woman of color who grew up in a suburb of Maryland which was pretty homogenous at the time, I felt pretty certain that rural communities in America would not be welcoming to someone like me. Over time and thanks in part to the more troubling stories showcased in the media, that impression only deepened. I imagined communities with very little diversity and hard-line beliefs that I wouldn't agree with. I figured—why go where I might not be wanted

or understood? It might be best if we just left each other alone.

At the same time, books I have been reading like Brene Brown's *Braving the Wilderness* and my own reflection, have urged me to dig a little deeper into those impressions to discern what is really true.

"What if what we experience close up is real, and what we hear on the news and from the mouths of politicians who are jockeying for power needs to be questioned? It's not easy to hate people close up." Brown writes.

Through my work on a technology discovery sprint in partnership with New America and the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP), I had a chance to take a closer look. While exposure to rural areas wasn't extensive by any means, I got the opportunity to make field visits to rural communities in California, Missouri and Iowa. As part of our team's work, we also spoke to RCAP's technical assistance providers that work with rural areas in Alaska, New Mexico, Virginia, Vermont, Puerto Rico and more. I was a bit anxious around the visits, but ultimately my curiosity and call to look beneath the surface won over. I realized almost from the beginning that my assumptions were in for a rude awakening.

Rural America is bigger than I thought and cannot be ignored or left behind.

According to the Census Bureau, approximately 60 million or one in five Americans live in rural America. While urban areas are home to more than 80 percent of the population, 97 percent of the land area of the country is rural with 19.3 percent of the population residing there.

Just a broad sketch of what defines rural America suggests that realizing our nation's highest ideals must include every part of our country.

Surprisingly, the time I got to spend in a small village in south India where my mom grew up, offered some familiarity during my recent visits. While quite different in scale, there are some parallels to the challenges and opportunities that I observed and were identified to me in rural communities in the U.S. There are often higher incidences of persistent poverty, issues around access to capital, education, healthcare, modern technology and fading infrastructure. Brain drain is also a challenge where young people depart for better opportunities leaving older adult populations to sustain their communities. You also have a group of individuals who juggle three or four jobs, who are incredibly committed and enterprising in an effort to keep their towns going. They know their neighbors and have great pride and love for where they are from.

Rural America is a lot more diverse than I realized.

Before my visits, I thought most rural communities looked and acted similarly. That couldn't be further from the truth. First and foremost, rural parts of this country differ vastly in physical landscape—from coastal lands to plains to remote mountainous areas. There is also a considerable amount of diversity in the people who live in these areas. Certainly, there are folks that would fit your visions of a typical rural American. Yet there are also ethnic communities, tribes, immigrant farmers, migrant workers and other smaller groups who consider rural areas home. We learned about migrant worker communities that are considered "hidden" and economically disadvantaged because they are embedded within an area with a higher median household income. There are tribes in remote parts of Alaska that are cautious of outsiders visiting them from what we can only guess are not so great previous experiences. Even one of the members of my discovery sprint team recently moved to a farm in rural Washington and is raising livestock and growing vegetables.

I heard enough stories in my four-week project period to realize that my assumption around diversity in rural areas was almost laughable, as the demography continues to change. And while I do not want to dismiss the issues around race and inclusion that are deep and often painful realities for minority groups that live in rural areas, I suspect that it is also a dynamic that varies by location and continues to evolve.

It's easy to take your access to water and related systems for granted.

For many of us who live in urban and suburban areas, as long as water comes out of our pipes when we want

it to and our toilets flush, we don't usually take time to think about how that all comes to be. Or at least, that was the case for me. So as to not bury the lead—most small communities around the country must figure this out for themselves.

RCAP is a national network of nonprofits across the country who provide technical assistance, financial resources, and training to set-up and improve local capacity, and access to safe drinking water and solid waste systems in small rural communities in every state and Puerto Rico. As a non-engineer, I admit that I geeked out a little in learning more about these systems and how gravity and nature were factored into how more ideal systems are designed.

Our field visits and conversations with RCAP's partners shed light on the many different issues that come up. There are drinking water contamination issues that come up with chemicals used in farm lands and/or pollutants from nearby factories; saltwater intrusion; water tank and infrastructure maintenance needs; private well maintenance; and local wastewater treatment challenges just to name a few. There are also serious problems that arise when there are natural events like floods and hurricanes. Much of this is managed by the mayors, general managers, and/or town councils of small towns that might not have any prior experience with water and wastewater systems.



Understanding this gave me a whole new respect for the leaders of small communities, supporting organizations like RCAP and the federal agencies that help fund some of this work through grants and other assistance.

The desire for less government is not as clear as it seems.

On the one hand, most of the communities we visited benefited from government support to improve their systems. On the other hand, some government regulations and requirements can make that a challenging necessity. As an example, we heard from a man who played many different roles in his town, from

water operator to maintaining the streets, to donating land for the new firehouse. This place is his home and despite other economic opportunities elsewhere, he has stayed and is committed to supporting his hometown. He talked about new drinking water regulations that are important, but are also expensive to remediate. Without government assistance, they have to consider increasing water bills and yet, already about 20% of residents regularly do not end up paying their current water bills on time. While the policy and regulation to safeguard drinking water is well-intentioned, it doesn't seem to factor in the growing economic realities of communities like these.

Even during my time working on innovation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, we would

technology, innovation and the future of work factored in? How would better, more reliable broadband internet connection improve livelihoods and draw in economic opportunity?

What if policymaking that affects rural America was more informed by the end users? What if more rural residents started to recognize the inevitability and potential in change and outside collaboration to make their communities even stronger? How might the spirit of some of the incredibly hardworking, resilient, enterprising individuals who keep small towns going, be harnessed to spur greater opportunity and innovation? What if they were connected to more training, exposure to new ideas, access to capital and the tools they need, to not just help their communities survive but thrive? I don't have any answers here but these are a few questions that came up for me during my visit that are being explored and I hope will be explored further.

And to be clear, this is not really new thinking, here's an example of research that points to untapped opportunities for rural innovation especially as it relates to the arts.

Zooming in and spending time with rural communities in America left me surprised, humbled and inspired. I'm so grateful to have had the chance to challenge my judgements and be offered a welcoming and gracious window to learn more. As I wrapped up this exploration, I came across a powerful OnBeing podcast conversation entitled, "The Call to Community in a Changed World," between journalist Anand Giridharadas and Whitney Kimball Coe of the Rural Assembly.

Two reflections from them pretty much summed up my journey:

"And I think what's happened to us is that we're not committed to each other as a people, so it's almost like we are in this kind of situation where any disappointment that we encounter in our fellow citizens is like a reason to break up, and any deviation from deeply fulfilling each other as fellow citizens is like a tragedy. And part of commitment as a citizen is embracing other people's dysfunction, and embracing other people's incompleteness, because you know you have your own."—Anand Giridharadas

"... we have this blind spot where we think we need to be addressing these big, global issues, and we forget what is ours to do in the moment. What is yours to do does not necessarily have to be to bridge all divides across the country. It doesn't have to be to end the opioid epidemic. What is yours to do could just be right in front of you."—Whitney Kimball Coe



encounter internal teams genuinely wanting to develop innovative solutions and policies to solve problems for the public without necessarily understanding the day-to-day experience of their end user.

While talking to different communities, I did also wonder how much they recognized that their infrastructure set-up and improvements were being supported by federal dollars. All to say, the role and perception of government intervention and overreach was also much less clear cut than I had assumed.

There are opportunities to unlock potential and innovation.

Amidst some of the very real challenges facing rural communities in America, I couldn't help but notice some bright spots and potential. The small town main streets of the past may no longer be viable to maintain, but how can they be reimaged with



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Snapshot:

Training:

Through recent EPA programs, the RCAP network conducted more than 230 trainings for water system board members, water operators and utility staff. These trainings served approximately 1,653 water systems. We estimate that more than 2,800 water operators received training on topics including but not limited to:

- water distribution and quality
- compliance with regulations, including new lead and copper rules
- operator math
- operator certification
- sampling and flushing

230

trainings for water system board members, water operators and utility staff.

The RCAP network provided many trainings in partnership with the American Water Works Association (AWWA).

1,653

 water systems served.

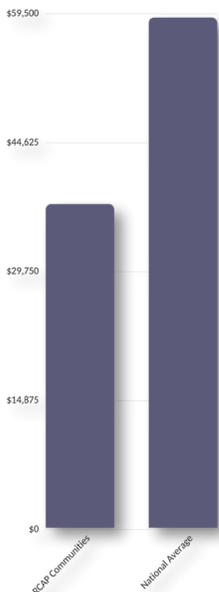
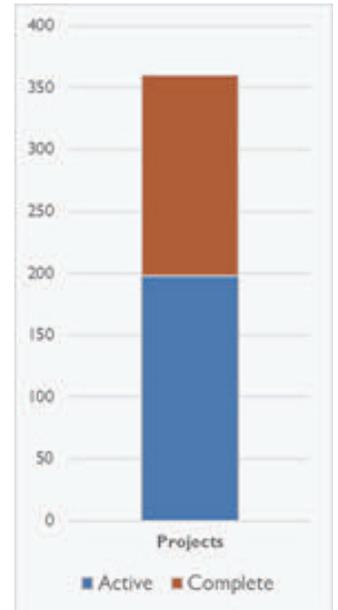
As of early May 2018, the RCAP network had

198

active projects and had completed

162

projects through U.S. EPA's recent technical assistance programs.



Projects on average served communities of about **4,000** people. More than **37 percent** of the population served by these projects were people of color. Nearly **4 percent** were American Indian or Alaska Natives.

Low-income residents made up more than **20%** of the population in communities served.

Work with U.S. EPA

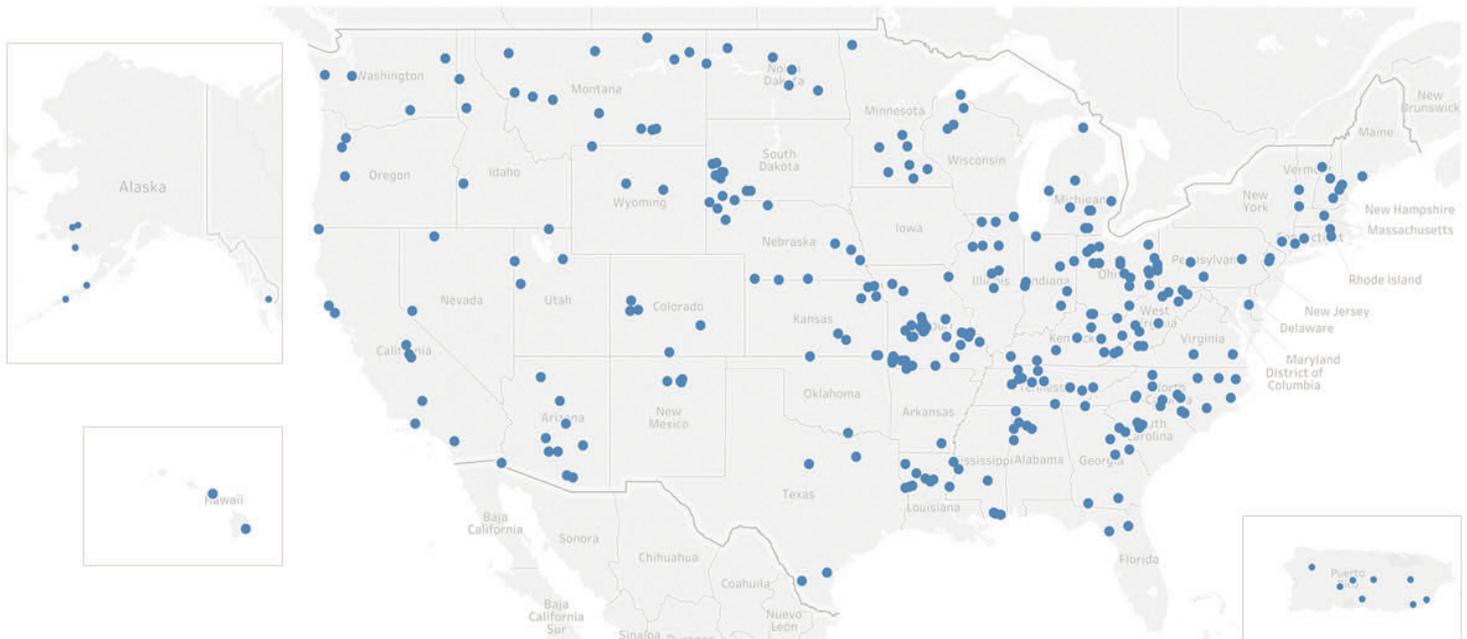
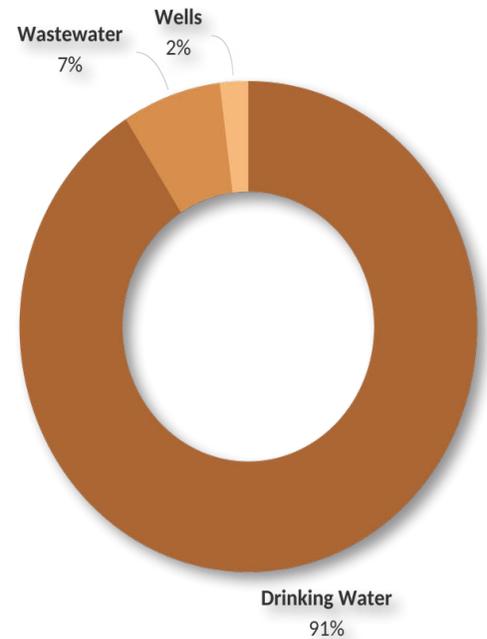
Technical Assistance:

Through recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) programs, the RCAP network is currently helping or has helped approximately **360** communities across the country, working with systems that serve more than **540,000** households and a total population of about **1.4 million**.

Recent programs include 2016-2018 programs for drinking water and well assistance as well as 2017-2019 programs for drinking water, waste water and wells.

More than **87%** of assistance projects involved helping small drinking and waste water systems comply with state and federal regulations. Other types of assistance provided include:

- help improving operations and maintenance or management and finance practices,
- facilities development,
- community and leadership development,
- help with emergency preparedness, response and recovery plans, and
- help protecting source water.



RCAP's Recent U.S. EPA Technical Assistance Projects

Note: Includes active and complete projects from Oct 2016 to Feb 2018



Written By: Phil Reed

The Golden Girls of Alcovy Shores



Alcovy Shores Water and Sewer Authority (ASWSA) is a system serving approximately 280 customers on the shores of Jackson Lake in Jasper County, Georgia. Like many lakeside communities a fair percentage of its customers are seasonal but there is one thing that sets Alcovy Shores apart from almost any other public water system. It is managed and operated entirely by five women all of whom are also senior citizens. They are Mary Anne Hyde, Juanita Gazaway, Ruth Wimberley, Rosemary Thompson and Regina Young and they call themselves “The Golden Girls of Alcovy Shores.”

RCAP has been involved with the ASWSA from its inception. SERCAP board member, Winfred Owens provided assistance with the legislation which was passed

“The Golden Girls of Alcovy Shores are asking these questions because soon they will all be ready to relax on Mary Anne’s dock and watch the sunset on the lake with a pitcher of margaritas...”

to create the authority when he was working with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Since then Georgia RCAP has

provided assistance with a number of projects and improvements over the past 20 years and have a current project open that will help solve some water pressure issues and remove an old stand-pipe storage tank which is near to reaching the end of its useful life.

When Georgia RCAP first worked with the ASWSA to provide assistance with the construction of a new water storage tank Mary Anne Hyde was a board member and office manager for the system and the operator was a man named Butch Gazaway. Butch was a hard worker and took pride in his job which he often discussed with his wife, Juanita but when an unfortunate accident took his life his widow, Juanita stepped in to help temporarily because she knew enough about the system from listening to Butch talk about his work. She didn't plan on being the new operator but her knowledge proved to be a great benefit and her dedication to her community led her towards a career she hadn't imagined. Soon she had studied and become a certified water operator and has been operating the system ever since. She performs flushing, valve tests, handles the small repairs as needed and works with local contractors for some of the larger problems that have occurred and performs the monthly sampling tests for EPD.

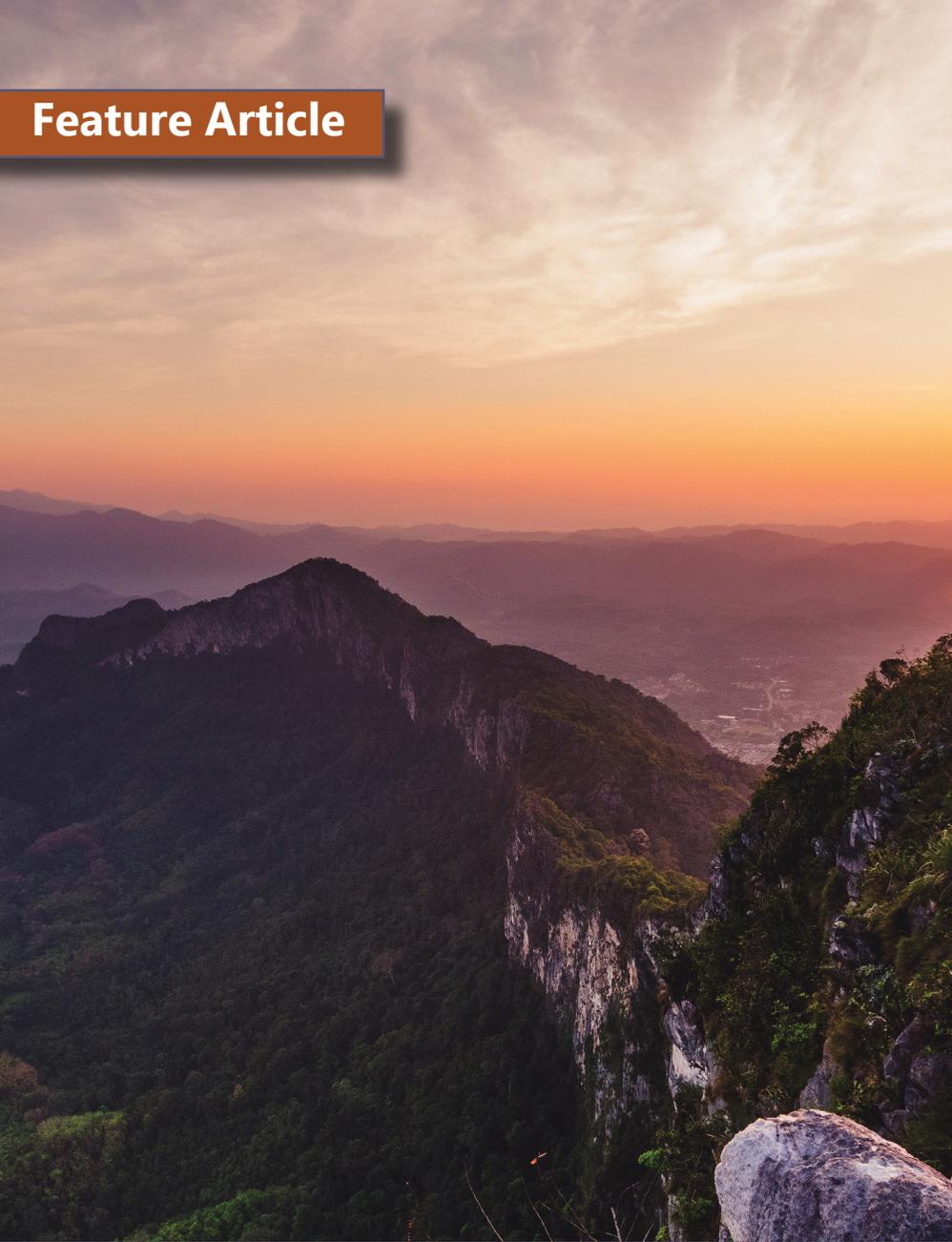
Ms. Hyde still works part-time with the ASWSA as the financial manager for the system. Two of the other ladies, Ruth Wimberley and Rosemary Thompson share the day-to-day management the system and prepare the monthly billing statements, field customer calls and requests, collect payments, etc. Regina Young is the newest addition to the team and she has been learning from Juanita how to operate the system and plans to become a certified operator.

While Alcovy Shores is unusual in the personnel that manage and operate the system they are the same as most small water systems in many other ways such as the commitment and dedication of managers and operators to ensure that their friends and neighbors and relatives have clean safe water. It can sometimes be a thankless job but these ladies and those like them that operate other small



systems don't do the job for thanks and praise. They do it because they are dedicated to their communities. As more and more operators are beginning to reach retirement age who will be the next generation to take over for them? The Golden Girls of Alcovy Shores are asking these questions because soon they will all

be ready to relax on Mary Anne's dock and watch the sunset on the lake with a pitcher of margaritas and they want to be sure the ice in the pitcher was made from the same clean safe water that they've been providing.



Shared Vision

Facilitating Partnerships to Sustain Rural Communities

Written by: Ashley Zuelke

Imagine you are responsible for providing safe drinking and wastewater disposal for your community of 500 residents.

You volunteered to oversee your town's water utilities on top of your full-time job. You and the town council have charged a rate for years that will only cover some of your operating costs because water bills account for a proportion of residents' paychecks that they feel is already too high. Some are unable to pay on time, if at all. Many of your residents are on fixed incomes. The capacity you projected you would need overshot the mark when you secured funding years ago to build your system; it costs too much to maintain as the local economy has shifted from one centered on a manufacturing plant to home health and other services. Your water operator of more than 20 years plans to retire. And the water going to your customers and leaving your wastewater treatment facility must meet federal and state standards that require careful diligence in the limited hours you can give. One more violation could mean a crisis.

But this is your town. You want your children to be able to build a life here, too.

The scenario above captures only a snapshot of the challenges technical assistance providers with the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) see America's small communities facing. RCAP also sees solutions. Regional partnerships, shared services, and – in some cases –

physical merging of water systems have allowed many communities we have worked with reach a new, more sustainable status quo.

For more than 45 years, the RCAP network has worked directly with small communities to help build their technical, managerial and financial capability to provide the water and wastewater service integral to livable communities. Having helped more than 20,000 communities in the past decade alone, RCAP's experience allows it to provide not only technical expertise, but also connections to government agencies, non-profit partners, and other communities experiencing similar issues.

Small systems serving fewer than 10,000 people make up 97% of



the United States' Public Water Systems. That means approximately 151,000 water systems are likely experiencing challenges related to dramatic socioeconomic and environmental changes.

With that in mind, RCAP continues to play a large role in assisting those communities and helping policy makers understand the implications of these challenges. For the smallest communities across the country, the scale of assistance required is daunting, and is why RCAP is drawing on its network's experience and expertise to:

- provide policymakers with greater information regarding the regionalization of small systems and their needs (via a forthcoming white paper);
- provide community leaders with tools and information to set a new vision for their community's water future; and
- present case studies and

successful implementation of various forms of regional partnerships to help communities understand what's been done and what could work for them.

“...found the same probability of a violation in a system serving fewer than 500 as a system serving up to 100,000.”

While offering technical assistance and training for small systems, RCAP's specialists have been at the forefront of assisting communities

deal with the challenges described above. In New Mexico, the state government mandated consolidation and coordination to combat water scarcity. In Ohio, systems found they would better serve their customers and offer more affordable rates if they connected with a neighboring system or purchased water from them. And in several states across the country, small systems may find themselves in the position of choosing between maintaining services and violating regulations. RCAP analysis in 2014 found the same probability of a violation in a system serving fewer than 500 as in a system serving up to 100,000. However, the data indicated that systems had a higher percentage of reporting and monitoring violations the smaller they were. This may show the potential for greater regional collaboration in monitoring and reporting to avoid violations.

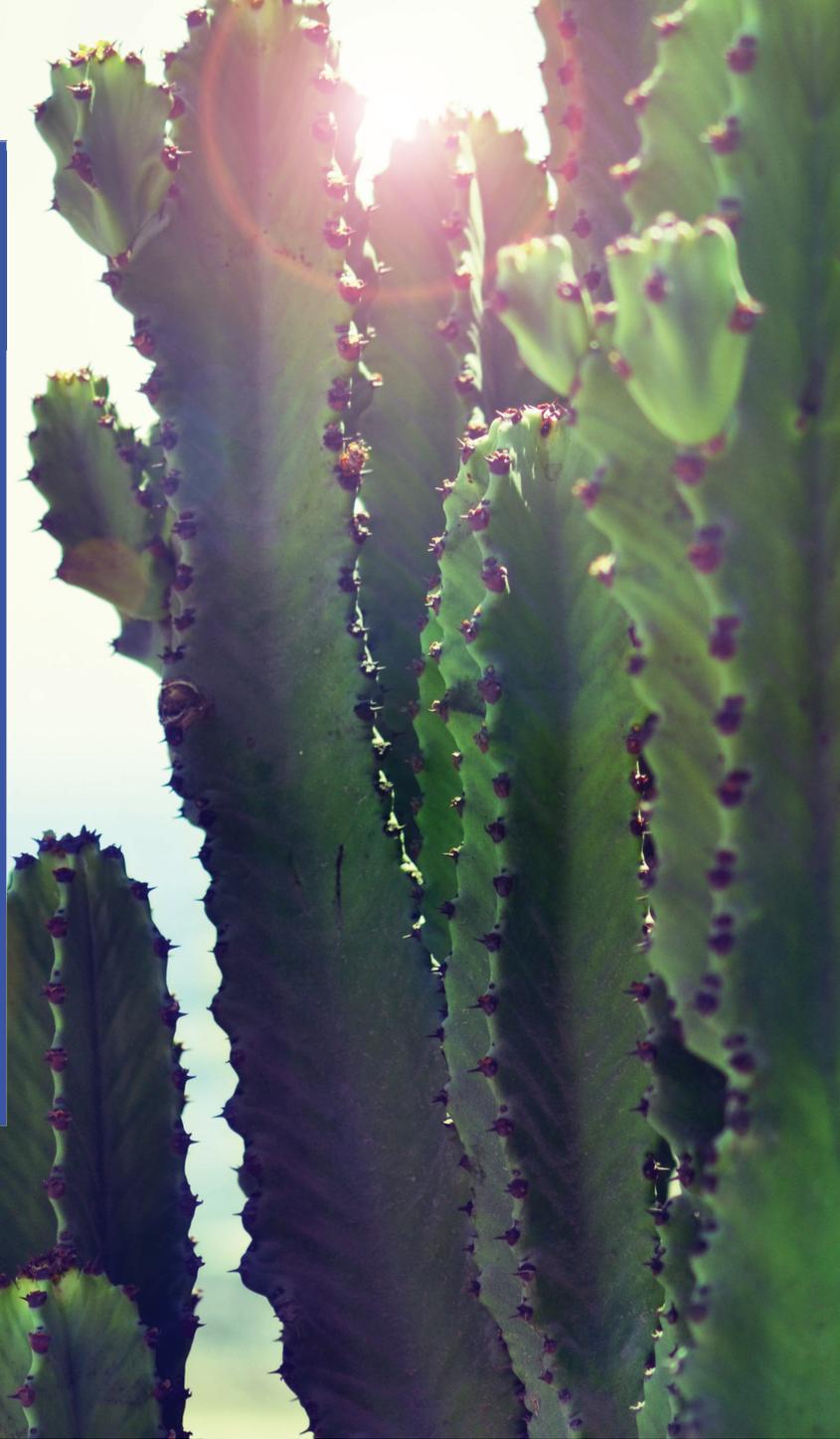
There are complexities to local decisions around regionalization, or regional partnerships. For example, certain geographies may not allow for deep partnerships, but with advances in technology and communication, some shared service and expertise may be possible. Small systems everywhere face challenges because of scale – a town of 500 or 5,000 may have similar infrastructure and needs, but it will cost the smaller town much more per ratepayer to maintain and make upgrades to the system. Through 2035, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that the smallest water systems – those serving 3,300 and fewer – will require more than \$74.4 billion in drinking water infrastructure capital improvements to serve an estimated 23.4 million people. The estimated per customer cost to make these improvements is more than double the cost per resident served by larger systems. As communities assess regionalization opportunities, in most cases they find it can drive down overall costs and allow for larger infrastructure projects that attract both lower interest rates and more favorable loan and grant terms to facilitate construction, while providing opportunities for more lenders to be engaged given the larger scope of projects and costs.

New Small System Workforce Tools

U.S. EPA's Workforce Workgroup has developed two interactive tools designed to support water system operators in providing safe drinking water and protecting public health – the Knowledge Retention Tool and the Electronic Preventive Maintenance Logs. The Knowledge Retention Tool is a comprehensive spreadsheet to record system management information in a single location, helping to increase organization and coordination among operators. Designed to assist in personnel transition, the tool encompasses a wide variety of information that a new or contract operator would need to effectively manage and operate a small water system. The Electronic Preventive Maintenance Logs is an update to the Preventive Maintenance Card File for Small Public Water Systems Using Ground Water released in 2004. This tool provides a package of fillable pdfs with a variety of features to assist water system operators in planning and recording preventive operation and maintenance tasks for small drinking water systems.

These tools are available for download at the following link: <https://www.epa.gov/dwcapacity/resources-small-public-water-system-operators>.

For more information contact Leslie Temple at Temple.Leslie@epa.gov.



Access to drinking water and wastewater disposal is personal and hyper-local. Water systems partnering on their own is an exception; most need an objective third party to mediate and facilitate. Partnerships also take time. Depending on the complexity of the scenario – including the number of partners involved, level of partnership envisioned, and commitment intensity of town and system leadership – some partnerships take more than five years to reach conclusion. However, by getting started, most

partnerships start a trajectory of increased interconnectivity, involving frequent engagement and assistance. Because of the amount of time and effort facilitating partnerships requires and resource scarcity in small communities, a clear opportunity exists for for additional federal funding and private sector funding to help communities:

- identify potential partners,
- determine what type of partnership is right for them,

and

- access unbiased experts and facilitators who can help guide through the process and leverage resources.

RCAP is committed to exploring solutions for rural America, ultimately helping small communities secure a brighter future and provide safe drinking water and water treatment for decades to come.

Top 10 Ways to Be a Good Septic Owner

Septic Smart Week **September 17-21, 2018**

- ✓ Have your system inspected every three years by a qualified professional or according to your state/local health department's recommendations
- ✓ Have your septic tank pumped, when necessary, generally every three to five years
- ✓ Avoid pouring harsh products (e.g., oils, grease, chemicals, paint, medications) down the drain
- ✓ Discard non-degradable products in the trash (e.g., floss, disposable wipes, cat litter) instead of flushing them
- ✓ Keep cars and heavy vehicles parked away from the drainfield and tank
- ✓ Follow the system manufacturer's directions when using septic tank cleaners and additives
- ✓ Repair leaks and use water efficient fixtures to avoid overloading the system
- ✓ Maintain plants and vegetation near the system to ensure roots do not block drains
- ✓ Use soaps and detergents that are low-suds, biodegradable, and low- or phosphate-free
- ✓ Prevent system freezing during cold weather by inspecting and insulating vulnerable system parts (e.g., the inspection pipe and soil treatment area)





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RuralRISE:

Driving Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Development in Rural Communities across the USA

Written by: Joe Kapp

Last month, RCAP in collaboration with the National Center for Resource Development (“NCRD”), launched an inaugural event, called the RuralRISE Summit, comprised of a “crazy quilt” of people, organizations, foundations and public policy folks interested in helping increase entrepreneurship in rural communities across the country. As the President of NCRD, scarcely could I have imagined that in partnering with RCAP to launch the RuralRISE Summit that we would have over 175 attendees from over 25 states attend the event in a remote part of Appalachia. In addition, the Summit also led to national public policy and foundation recommendations

for funding rural entrepreneurship development. At first glance, RCAP, an organization that historically has focused on safe drinking water and wastewater, may not seem like a good fit to focus on entrepreneurship. After further review, however, it becomes abundantly clear that RCAP is one of the organizations best suited to lead rural entrepreneurship activities for a number of reasons.

The first reason is that almost all entrepreneurial and economic development activities start (and end) with safe drinking water. If there is no safe drinking water than there is no community. It is requisite for existence. To be sure, go to any small town across the United States and one will find scores of jobs and businesses in rural communities that are focused on supplying and maintaining safe drinking water and treating wastewater. Safe drinking water and wastewater are the foundations of rural communities. As a result, these communities have the potential to help drive innovation to help some of the most pressing waste problems.

Second, few organizations have the broad, national rural footprint that RCAP has, with deep reach into rural



Organizations represented At RuralRISE:

AARP Foundation	Hardy Convention and Visitors Bureau	Small Business Majority
ACEnet	Hocking College	SOCAP
AIR	Interise	SERCAP
Institute of Berea College	International Business Innovation Association	Southern Research
America's Small Business Dev Council	JARI	Southern WV Community & Tech College
Appalachian Regional Commission	Kauffman Foundation	Southside Virginia Community College
Ashland Community and Technical College	Kentucky Heritage Council	Staunton Innovation Hub
Ben Franklin Technology Partners	LIGHTS Ohio University	TechConnect West Virginia
Brookings Institution	Maysville Community & Technical College	The Highland Center
Center on Rural Innovation	Michigan Small Business Development Center	The Progress Fund
Central Louisiana Econ Dev Alliance (CLEDA)	Mississippi Development Authority (MDA)	TN Dept of Economic & Community De
Co.Starters	Mountain BizWorks	Tucker County Development Authority
College of Southern Maryland	National Center for Resource Development	U.S. Small Business Administration
Communities Unlimited	Natural Capital Investment Fund	University of North Alabama
Cortland Downtown Partnership,	NC Department of Commerce	University of Virginia's College at Wise
Cortland Business Innovation Center	NetWork Kansas	USDA Rural Development
VA Dept of Housing and Community Dev	Pathway Lending	Value Chain Cluster Initiative
Eastern WV Community and Technical College	Patrick Henry Community College	Virginia Organizing
US Dept of Commerce -EDA	Potomac Highlands AmeriCorps	West Virginia Community Development Hub
EntreEd	Proximity Space	West Virginia Farmers Market Association
Entrepreneurial Communities AmeriCorps-	RAIN Source Capital	West Virginia University
Rural Action	RCAC	WSOS Community Action/ Great Lakes RCAP
Entrepreneurial Learning Initiative (ELI)	RCAP	WV Community Development Hub
Etsy	RCAP Solutions	WV Council for Community and Technical College Education
EveryLibrary	Robert C Byrd Institute	WV Dept. of Agriculture
Federal Reserve Board	Rural Action	WV Dept. of Education
Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky	Seed Spot	WV Hive Network
GA Department of Community Affairs	Shaping Our Appalachian Region, Inc. (SOAR)	WV Small Business Development
	Small Business Administration	

across the country. RCAP's network already works in rural communities. Sure there are other organizations that have been doing great work in rural communities, however few of these national organizations have the ability to collaborate closely with small, rural communities while also reaching across the country. RCAP has the ability to both be very local but also scale best practices across the United States.

The third reason is that many of RCAP's regions are already performing entrepreneurial and economic development activities. From Communities Unlimited to MidWest RCAP, RCAP's family is already conducting important entrepreneurial ecosystem development activities that are working. From Wealth Works to lending institutions like Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), RCAPs team has been engaging in entrepreneurial ecosystem development activities that are helping move towns and communities from poverty to prosperity.

So, perhaps RCAP is not your typical organization to be launching a new event. But then again RuralRISE was not your typical event. With ringing of a cowbell to mark the start of the Summit RuralRISE started and ended with local

entrepreneurs and was a high energy, fast-paced interactive experience where speakers gave 5-minute "quick-fire" presentations of various projects and programs. Attendees then broke out into individual table grouping and provided real-time input to develop a set of unique issues that rural entrepreneurs face. After rolling up their sleeves and doing some hard work, attendees were treated to a local food dinner with music from a local bluegrass band and a tasting of Appalachia's finest moonshine.

As Andy Stoll from the Kauffman Foundation, put it, the RuralRISE Summit was an "astounding win for entrepreneurs, rural communities and the field of ecosystem building." The RuralRISE Summit is an opportunity to help all communities to enjoy the benefits and opportunities of local entrepreneurship regardless of geographic location. RCAP stands at the forefront of the leadership to ensuring that this happens.



Septic on The Hill

Written by: Laura Landes

Bipartisan Legislation Introduced in Congress Aimed at Helping Rural and Low to Moderate Income Homeowners with Updating Septic Systems

Recently, bipartisan legislation has been introduced in both houses of Congress that would provide much needed assistance to low- and moderate-income households for the improvement of onsite wastewater systems (known better as septic systems).

Many households in rural America are not connected to, or do not have access to, a municipal wastewater treatment facility. As a result, many homes rely on onsite treatment, such as septic systems. Under the best circumstances, these systems protect public health, the environment, and water quality by treating household waste - these systems can cost thousands of dollars and require upkeep and periodic replacement. Too frequently, rural households either have no treatment system, resorting to options such as straight-piping (which means waste is transported out of the house through pipes into the outdoor environment without being



treated), or they are dealing with a failing septic system due to cost of installation and upkeep and/or environmental factors that impact the septic system. When these events occur, the health of residents, water quality, and the community are put at risk. Wastewater that is untreated can contaminate drinking water and has the potential to cause serious illnesses in anyone who comes into contact with it. Failing septic systems can also cause waste to back up into a home, which is very dangerous to the health of the household and overall environmental quality.

RCAP has been working with Congress on bipartisan solutions to this growing problem. Legislation has been introduced that would establish a loan-grant combo program to assist rural customers and households on installation and maintenance of individual septic systems. The legislation includes an option, if a public wastewater utility is available, to establish a connection to the utility instead of installing or improving the onsite system, which can be costly. The funds would be awarded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to experienced and qualified private nonprofit organizations with the necessary expertise

to determine the need and options of customers facing septic system needs. This program and funding would be utilized throughout the United States.

Rural communities are more likely to lack access to a municipal wastewater treatment system and are often responsible for providing their own solution to household sewage, such as an onsite septic system. Sometimes these systems work well for many years, but sometimes they do not for a variety of environmental and economic reasons. In other cases, rural households lack access to septic systems because they are simply not affordable. This is a national issue given that reports of inadequate wastewater treatment have been identified and studied in multiple states such as Alabama, Minnesota, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and North Carolina. Research by the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that almost 200,000 households across the country have no sewage treatment system in place. If efforts to pass this legislation are successful, more resources will become available for rural Americans to improve their wastewater treatment and consequently their health.



"Improving the quality of life in rural communities"

1701 K Street NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20006

National Photo Contest
Winner- Facilities
Photo By: Deb Patton

