

RURALMATTERS

The background of the entire cover is a low-angle photograph of a tall, white metal water tower. The tower's lattice structure is prominent, and the large, rounded tank at the top is visible against a clear blue sky. The sun is shining from behind the tower, creating a bright glow and lens flare effect.

The magazine of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership

2018 Issue 1

Rural Opportunity

Behind the Scenes: Making an Instructional
Video for Tribal Communities

The Challenges of Complying with New Laws

National Training Conference

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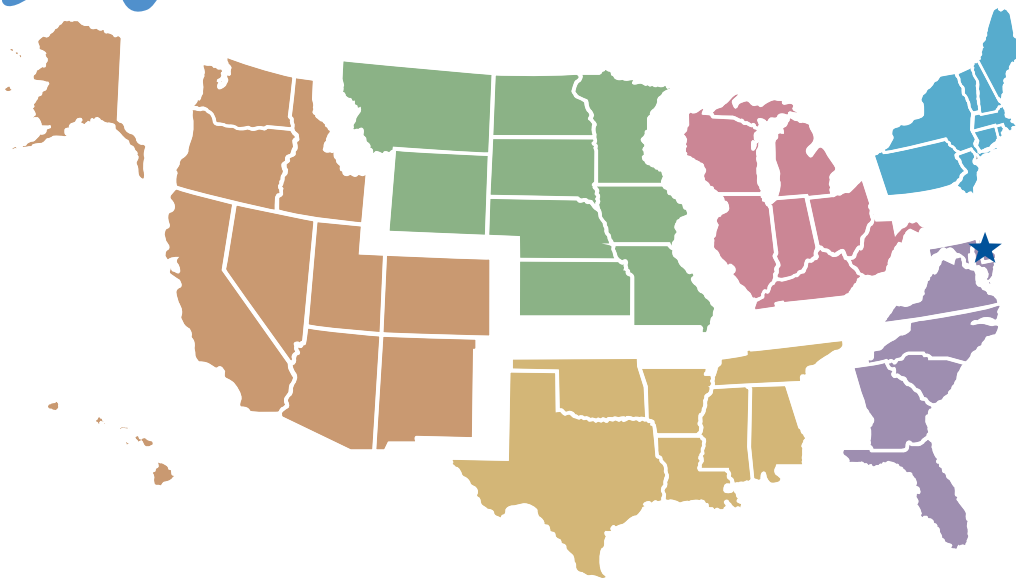
The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) is a national network of nonprofit organizations working to ensure that rural and small communities throughout the United States have access to safe drinking water, sanitary wastewater disposal and affordable solid waste and recycling programs.

The national office and six regional RCAP partners provide a variety of programs to accomplish this goal, including direct training and technical assistance, leveraging millions of dollars to assist communities develop and improve their water and wastewater systems.

If you are seeking assistance in your community, contact the office of the RCAP region that your state is in, according to the map below. Work in individual communities is coordinated by these regional offices.



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PHOTO CAPTION
French Creek Bridge
Photo by Jim Jone

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Looking Ahead in the New Year!

By Nathan Ohle, Executive Director



As we start a new year, it is important to appreciate all that was accomplished last year that will set us up for success moving forward! I joined the RCAP network as the Executive Director in May of 2017, and it was immediately clear that the commitment to the work that RCAP and all of our partners do across the country is second to none.

Having worked at the local, state and federal level throughout my career, I know how important it is to have local voices talking about the work that they are accomplishing, and that is why I am so excited about Rural Matters. This is an opportunity for us to tell local success stories, and for all of us to share both the struggles and the high points that you see on a daily basis.

As someone who grew up in rural Michigan, just 30 minutes away from Flint, I know firsthand the importance of having safe drinking water. Rural communities face unique challenges and opportunities, and having the opportunity to visit each of the six regions in my first six months on the job allowed me to see firsthand the incredible work we are doing across the country.

Visiting Texas in the wake of Hurricane Harvey was especially impactful. Because of the work that our regional partners are doing in response to natural disasters across the country, we have been able to raise the voice of rural communities and the unique challenges they face in response to disasters. Being able to tell specific stories is incredibly important to helping policy makers and funders understand the needs of rural communities, and why I am so excited about Rural Matters and other opportunities to tell the stories of the communities you serve.

As leaders in the water industry, it is important for us to help local, state and federal officials to understand the historic underinvestment in infrastructure and the long-term impact that has on local communities. Too often, small, distressed communities are overlooked in these conversations, and often suffer from a lack of adequate safe drinking water. The lack of investment in infrastructure for these communities needs to be a high priority for our public officials, especially in the uncertain budget times we face.

I am incredibly inspired by the work that the RCAP network is doing, and by the commitment that partners across the country are showing to create opportunity for every community to thrive. This is an exciting time to be a part of this organization, and I look forward to all the year ahead has in store. Thank you for your passion, excitement and hard work, and for the role you play in moving the entire RCAP network forward.

Nathan Ohle
Executive Director

BEHIND THE SCENES: MAKING AN INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO FOR TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Kotlik, Alaska

By Dustin Love

Graphic Designer

Rural Community Assistance Corporation (Western RCAP)

I first saw the village of Kotlik from the window of a small bush plane after an hour's flight from the "hub town" of Bethel, over the tundra of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in southwest Alaska. My air travel began with an hour long 737 jet ride from Anchorage to Bethel. Kotlik is a small, Yupik community adjacent to the Kotlik River which flows from the Yukon River. Kotlik faces many severe economic and infrastructure challenges. Like most villages, Kotlik is isolated due to the lack of road systems in rural Alaska.

I traveled to Kotlik with my colleague Jacqueline Shirley, Rural Community Assistance Corporation Rural Development Specialist, a solid waste expert, who grew up in a similar nearby Yupik village, and Dr. Edda Mutter of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council. For the next three days, I would be filming an instructional video as Jacqueline and Edda taught the tribe proper landfill assessment water sampling techniques.

After landing on the short, gravel runway, we were escorted across Kotlik's wooden boardwalk on an ATV (the mode of travel in rural villages) to the tribal office where we met Victor, a kind, soft-spoken man who was our guide for the project. He carefully explained the landfill situation



Only seat left in full small bush plane enroute to Kotlik, Alaska

Selfie by Jacqueline Shirley



Water intake pump for the entire community (notice the bank erosion)

Photo by Dustin Love

to us.

The landfill is located a short distance upstream from the community, at the junction of the Yukon and Kotlik rivers. Community members have been self-hauling their trash, via boat, to the landfill for many years, which has caused the waste to spread out past the landfill boundaries.



Kolik's water treatment plant, storage tank and piping
 "The pipes for water and wastewater are above ground, due to permafrost below. However, the permafrost is melting, causing challenges to the integrity of the pipes, and the connections of the pipes to the houses."

Photo by Dustin Love

This, combined with rapid erosion and recent flooding events is washing trash into the river. Aside from obvious environmental impacts, this has caused public health concerns within the community because the drinking water intake pump is located a short distance downstream from the landfill and no one knows if it is impacting the drinking water source.

The community doesn't have the funds to move the intake pump or the landfill. Our job was to conduct water sampling at the landfill and the drinking water intake pump to test for contaminants. Since Kotlik's situation is somewhat common among villages in this region, we planned to create an instructional video so that other



Victor Tunuchuk, Kotlik's Environmental Coordinator
 seating in his boat aside the landfill.

Photo by Dustin Love

tribes can begin their own landfill assessment and monitoring programs.

After our meeting, Victor took us to the landfill in his boat. During the ride, we passed many similar boats. I began to realize how important the river is to the community as their home and source of water, food, and transportation. As we were leaving the village, I noticed a couple houses that were falling into the river. Victor explained that a recent flood had caused severe erosion and damage to their infrastructure. Flooding and erosion has increased dramatically in the past few years.

When we arrived at the landfill, I was shocked to see how close the trash was to the riverbank and realized the severity of the problem. Unlike communities in the continental U.S. with road systems, trash is not "out of sight, out of mind". There are no trash collection services or transfer stations and each household manages their refuge from purchase to disposal. This is not the best solid waste management practice, so the tribal government is trying to step in with their limited resources and capacity



Jacqueline Shirley records data during landfill assessment

Photo by Dustin Love

to improve the solid waste management conditions and circumstances for their community.

Our group walked around the landfill, looking for potential locations where we would perform testing the next day. I filmed Edda and Jacqueline as they surveyed the area for suitable sampling sites and was bombarded by the

famously huge and countless Alaskan mosquitoes. After our assessment, we boated back to town to prepare for sampling the next day.

After checking in at the school, (Kotlik doesn't have a hotel so I slept in the third grade classroom) I went to the community grocery store for some food. I was surprised by the high prices for simple things like bottled water and produce. Jacqueline explained to me that everything is expensive in rural Alaskan villages because they have to



Evening sunset "downtown" Kotlik AK. (No roads in village, only boardwalks) Water and wastewater system is above ground, due to permafrost below ground.

Photo by Dustin Love

ship everything in on small passenger planes like the one we arrived in. Community members rely on subsistence fishing, hunting and berry foraging for much of their diet.

I spent my evening wandering around the community boardwalk and chatting with the residents. I was inspired by how friendly and welcoming everyone was towards me. Outside visitors are rare in Kotlik and I'm sure I stood out like a sore thumb, but the people I met treated me like family. Almost everyone said hello to me and many stopped me to have a conversation about what I was doing there and where I came from. They were excited to know that someone was trying to help them with the landfill/ drinking water situation and to meet someone from out



Victor Tunuchuk grabbing water sample from pre-determined site

Photo by Dustin Love

of town. The genuine, welcoming nature was refreshing to me as someone who spends most of his time in urban areas where people don't even look at you as you pass on the street. I have never felt so welcome among strangers.

We woke up early the next day and headed back to the landfill for the sampling. The town was quiet and the river was foggy and still. I set up my camera and filmed as Edda showed Victor and the other landfill staff how to collect samples and test for PH, dissolved oxygen and turbidity. They were very attentive and eager to learn the proper techniques. They made sure to do everything right. This wasn't just a job to them, they were learning how to keep their community safe and healthy. Once the landfill sampling was complete, we took the boat out to the drinking water intake pump. It is attached to a triangular buoy just outside the community and really isn't very far from the landfill. Edda explained how to sample the water in the river and emphasized the importance of consistency on subsequent samplings. The staff listened and watched closely as she went through the procedure.

Once we had finished the sampling and were back at the office, Victor explained that a village elder had recently passed away and encouraged us to attend the ceremonial dance that evening. Eager to learn more about the culture, we went to the community center to observe the ceremony. A line of men sat in the back and sang repetitive chants while playing large shallow drums and a few women came to

the front and started performing rhythmic dances in unison. As the evening progressed, more and more dancers would come forward (including Jacqueline, who is a traditional dancer herself) and the male dancers would kneel in front and perform similar movements with feathered objects in their hands. Dancers would come and go between songs. The whole experience was very fun and informal. The dancers and crowd would occasionally bark and tease each other when the energy was high. Compared to the somber funeral services I am used to, this was a very joyful and lighthearted community gathering.

The next day, we tied up a few loose ends and packed up the samples for our flight back to Anchorage. Our final task was to hold a community meeting to discuss the landfill

situation. A couple dozen people showed up for the meeting and my colleagues explained the importance of proper disposal practices at the landfill. Jacqueline told them to stop waiting for the government to help them and to work hard toward helping themselves by volunteering and looking for opportunities for change. As a fellow Yupik, she gave them a bit of tough love and stern encouragement that was very genuine and caring.

After saying our goodbyes and taking off in another small plane, I looked down at this small community on the river with a new perspective. Like many rural Alaskan villages, they face complex challenges. The people who live there, however, are resilient and some of the most kind, welcoming and genuine people I have ever met. Despite the challenges

Congress Passes Tax Reform; Infrastructure and Farm Bill left for 2018

By RCAP Director of Government Relations, Ted Stiger

As we enter the last year of the 115th Congress, there will be no shortage of legislative agenda items that need to be addressed. After passing the recent tax reform bill, Congress continues to grapple with government funding and overall spending levels to finish out the current fiscal year. Recently, Congress has punted on spending and politically charged issues by passing short-term funding measures known as a Continuing Resolutions (CR). Additionally, federal spending on domestic programs including water infrastructure and rural and economic development has remained stagnant.

One big ticket item for 2018 will include consideration of President Trump's Infrastructure Package, which is likely to include \$200 billion in new federal funding over ten years for rebuilding our nation's infrastructure. It is widely known that our water and wastewater infrastructure alone will require more than \$650 billion in investment over the next 20 years just to maintain current levels of operation, with some estimating the need at more than \$1 trillion. More surprising is that federal spending on water infrastructure decreased from \$76 per person in 1977 to just \$11 per person in 2014, adjusted for inflation, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

The Administration is currently working on a draft proposal to send to Congress in January, which is likely to provide new funding for transportation and water infrastructure projects, and indications are that it will include a provision for rural specific projects. The goal of the Administration's proposal is spur public-private partnerships that will leverage both public and private dollars in new projects. The legislative timeline and process on Capitol Hill for this package remains to be seen, but RCAP looks forward to working with the Administration and Congress on this proposal to ensure the needs of rural communities are met.

Another important agenda item for Congress this year will be writing a new five-year Farm Bill since current programs under the last bill expire in September of 2018. RCAP has been busy laying out our priorities for the next bill, which reauthorizes important programs under the USDA-Rural Development portfolio.

We are back at it in the New Year, fighting for the necessary investments for rural communities and our country's infrastructure needs. RCAP continues to advocate for additional emergency relief funding for rural communities and small water systems damaged by the recent natural disasters of 2017. Keep on the lookout on how to get involved in 2018 as we continue to work with Congress and the Administration on issues important to rural America.

To contact RCAP's Government Relations team, email Ted Stiger. If you have a success story about how RCAP has helped your community or letters of support for RCAP's programs that you would like to share, please mail them to the RCAP National Office attention Ted Stiger (address is on page 1) or e-mail them to tstiger@rcap.org.

THE CHALLENGES OF COMPLYING WITH NEW LAWS: A GENERATIONS-OWNED FAMILY ORCHARD BECOMES A PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM

Honey Pot Hill Orchards, Stow, Massachusetts

By Mia McDonald

Technical Assistance Provider for Connecticut,
Massachusetts, and Rhode Island

RCAP Solutions, Inc. (Northeast RCAP)

Honey Pot Hill Orchards is a family run business located in Stow, Massachusetts, about 30 miles west of Boston. Stow is a small, quiet town of approximately 6,600 residents. When Clifford Martin purchased the 180-acre farm in 1926, he sold apples, pears and peaches both wholesale and retail. His son, Richard, was one of the first in the country to offer pick-your-own apples; and that experience continues with Richard's son and granddaughter. Andrew and Chelcie Martin are currently the third and fourth generation owners. They run a fully retail operation with pick-your-own apples, peaches and blueberries, as well as a retail and bake shop, a maze and other

family-friendly fun and entertainment. These resourceful business owners now operate their thriving family legacy, which recently placed 3rd in USDA Today's Best Apple Orchards of 2017.

For the entire history of the business, the farm has utilized one drilled well with no treatment for the labor residence, public bathrooms and operation of the cider press and snack bar. In late 2015, the farm contacted the town health department to inspect a new donut machine in the snack shop. The inspector had recently retired and the town was now utilizing an association of boards who were not familiar with the farm. During the on-site inspection, the farmers were informed that they should be a public water system and that they had already been reported to the

"We've been here 93 years.
Why is this suddenly a problem?"
asked Andrew Martin.

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MA DEP).

MA DEP had recently discovered many farms and small businesses operating under similar circumstances and all were subject to the same regulations: all were considered small public water systems and were required to take the steps necessary to comply with the Safe Drinking Water Act. MA DEP recognized Honey Pot's well as a transient non-community public drinking water system because it serves more than 25 people for more than 60 days per year. Very understandably, the owners were confused at the new designation as they had operated the business without the additional requirements and regulations of being a public water system for generations. They had also heard horror stories from fellow farms who had become



public water systems, undergone testing and were now burdened with tens of thousands of dollars in contractor, testing and equipment fees.

As involved and successful farmers in New England, the Martins were already dutifully complying with local, state and federal regulations governing their crops, business and employment practices. They contacted their local Farm Bureau for assistance in resolving this issue without the need to become a public water system. The Martins were hopeful that by reducing connections or usage, they could avoid the designation of a public water system and the additional requirements, fees and costs. They were willing to stop public use of the bathrooms, post signs that stated the water was not potable and only use the water after it had been thoroughly heated. But MA DEP was not open to the proposed changes because of the exposure of the public to the water system.

At this point, the Martins contacted their State Representative, Kate Hogan, for assistance in communicating with MA DEP. They were then referred to Massachusetts State Senator Jamie Eldridge. The legislative offices were not able to help as the MA DEP falls under the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. The Martins met with MA DEP in Boston, then in the Central Regional Office in Worcester on multiple occasions. These attempts at discussion and compromise proved unsuccessful. During this time, the deadlines for compliance passed and the farm received an administrative consent order with possible fines. The situation had reached a stalemate.

An RCAP Solutions Technical Assistance Provider for Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island was working with Tougas Family Farm, a fruit farm in nearby Northborough, Massachusetts, on brainstorming innovative ideas for water supply during their busy apple-picking season. At a Massachusetts Fruit Growers Association meeting, the Martins were discussing their situation with other farmers. The Tougas family suggested meeting with RCAP to see if they could help. The Martins were reluctant as they feared RCAP worked for MA DEP and had little belief that the situation could be resolved, but they agreed to meet and discuss the situation, regardless.

As with many of the rural locations in which RCAP technical assistance providers (TAPs) get the opportunity to work, it was a beautiful site to visit. Even in early March, the gracefully gnarled apple trees rose and fell with the hills that covered the farm. Father and daughter, Andrew and Chelcie Martin, met with RCAP on a chilly spring morning to talk about what had been happening to this farm in the



cozy apartment in which the seasonal laborers were soon to reside again. The Martins were trying to finish pruning the apple trees and were anxiously awaiting the arrival of their seasonal help to assist. They were tired and frustrated. They explained the arduous process of complying with the many labor and health laws under which a family-owned farm is subject. Chelcie Martin recounted the year that the health inspection of the labor housing had found that the silverware needed polishing. The laborers were due any day and she spent hours late into the night shining each piece of silverware in order to not delay their much-awaited arrival. They were responsible and caring business owners; but they had enough on their long lists and did not wish to take on the responsibility of a public water system.

After a thorough review of the thick file the Martins were keeping of their correspondence with MA DEP, RCAP had good and bad news. The Martins' farm, Honey Pot Hill Orchard, Inc., had already been assigned a public water system identification number and the lengthy application process was most likely not necessary. The Martins were surprised. "We are already a public water system?" Chelcie Martin asked.

The next step was to review the administrative consent order that had been issued to the water system and make a list of the requirements. Although this designation was unwanted, it did save the already very busy business owners from the application process and allowed them to continue down the list of requirements in the consent order. RCAP provided an emergency response plan and cross connections survey as required by the order. RCAP also drafted personnel plans, a sampling plan and other forms required by the order and

assisted in the submission of all documents to MA DEP. All of this was completed at no cost to the system under grant funding from the Environmental Protection Agency. The corrective action plan was drafted at this first meeting.

Chelcie Martin volunteered to become the certified operator for the system. RCAP assisted in the completion of an emergency certification application for licensure to cover her until she met the requirements to apply for full licensure. She attended the RCAP/AWWA full day training on the Safe Drinking Water Act to gain the knowledge needed to pass the operator exam. Chelcie Martin also took the time from her own busy schedule to study materials provided by RCAP and, due to her diligence, passed the exam on the first try.

The final step was to establish communication with primacy to make sure everyone was on the same page. RCAP attended meetings between the system and primacy just to provide support for any additional requirements. MA DEP was pleased to see the progress on the consent order action items. MA DEP's comments were received and incorporated into the items to be submitted.

MA DEP had seemed pleased with the progress and all action items had been completed so RCAP closed the project, but a few months later, it was time for the Martins to submit their first annual report for the water system. The state's electronic filing system would not recognize Chelcie Martin's operator designation. After a little probing, it was discovered that her application had never been processed

past the emergency designation. It is unclear how this detail had been missed, but whatever the cause, the reports were rejected. The Martins reached out to RCAP again for assistance. With permission from MA DEP, one of RCAP's certified operators worked with Ms. Martin to review the reports and submitted them under his license. After the reports were successfully submitted, Chelcie Martin was able to apply for and receive full operator status for very small systems.

Utilizing their experience with water systems and their existing relationship with MA DEP, RCAP was able to work with the business owners to bring their water system into full compliance. Through the entire process both the business owners and the primacy agency were looking for more information, but messages were not getting through and communication was failing. RCAP was able to act as a liaison between the water system and primacy to achieve the goals of both sides: continued provision of clean, safe water. The order was fully resolved and the Martins were ready for their busy season to begin in early August.

"It was a very stressful time," remarked Chelcie Martin. Even after achieving full compliance, she remains vigilant about the new requirements and responsibilities of being a public water system which include maintaining her licensure, water testing and reporting. They are fortunate that their well produces high quality water that meets all standards. The Martins were appreciative of the knowledge and time that RCAP was able to provide to help them understand the



SAVE THE DATE

RCAP National Conference

APRIL 23-26, 2018

Rural Community Assistance Partnership's next training conference will be hosted in New Orleans, Louisiana at the Renaissance Pere Marquette



The RCAP National Training Conference is an annual conference for technical assistance providers in the water/wastewater field. Leaders in the field from across the country gather to present on best practices, innovative solutions, and effective collaborations happening in and around the water industry. This conference is the premiere rural focused educational forum for participants to learn about new training opportunities and the latest innovative tools around water and wastewater.

Visit www.rcap.org/conference for more information on registration and corporate sponsorship.



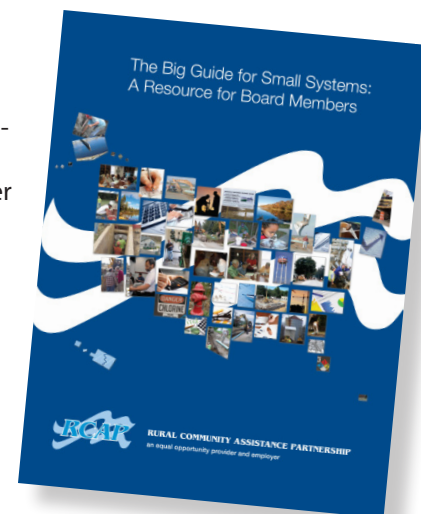
Updated RCAP Guides for Small-Community Systems

Many of guidebooks have been revised to address the changing landscape of the water and wastewater sector. Download a free copy at rcap.org/format/printed-guide

The Big Guide for Small Systems

A Resource for Board Members

A comprehensive desk reference that is ideal as an orientation and background for new members on the governing body of a small water/wastewater system or as a guide of standards that all elected members can use. The main section of the guide covers: water and wastewater treatment basics; regulatory responsibilities of a board; ways for boards to better conduct their affairs; and a board's financial duties and responsibilities. The guide also includes an extensive glossary of operational, technical and financial terms and appendices that include sample standard operating procedures, sample policy statements, guidance on hiring and terminating employees and sample job descriptions, guidance on emergency-response planning, and much more.



The Basics of Financial Management for Small Community Utilities

A how-to guide that provides an overview of financial management for small community water utilities, from developing and balancing an expense budget to estimating and collecting revenue. A primer that is ideal for a board member of a drinking water or wastewater utility who needs to understand the financial aspects of a utility's operations. Explains in very simple, easy-to-understand terms how to read and interpret the common financial statements so more informed decisions can be made with the information that can be gained from them.

The Non-operator's Guide to Drinking Water Systems

Explains in simple, everyday language the technical aspects of drinking water utilities from source to tap. Describes the various components and operations involved in small drinking water systems, including source, treatment and system of distribution to the customer's home. Also reviews maintaining compliance with requirements and the basic drinking water regulatory framework.



All of the guides listed here are available on the RCAP website:
rcap.org/format/printed-guide

On that page, visitors can view, download and print the PDF versions of the guides and any associated files (such as Excel files).



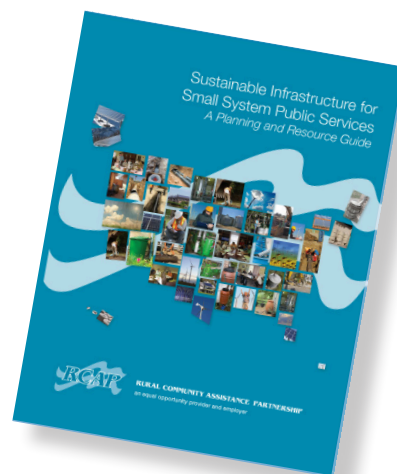
The Non-operator's Guide to Wastewater Systems

Explains in simple, everyday language the various components and operations of a small wastewater system from when wastewater is created in a home or building through collection, treatment, and its return to the source. Reviews discharge permits and other regulatory requirements and discusses alternative and decentralized systems.

Sustainable Infrastructure for Small System Public Services

A Planning and Resource Guide

Rather than presenting theories, this guidebook provides practical information, worksheets, examples, case studies and resources on water conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy resources for small utilities. Includes a step-by-step process for utility decision makers, staff and community members wanting to operate increasingly efficient utilities. It offers a flexible approach to evaluating sustainable alternatives for utility operations.



Getting Your Project to Flow Smoothly

A Guide to Developing Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

A comprehensive guide on all the steps a project owner (governing body of a utility) should go through in planning, designing and constructing infrastructure. A very detailed how-to on all phases of the process. Includes many pitfalls to avoid. Discusses roles and responsibilities of the parties in a project – owner, engineer, inspector, contractor, etc. Discusses securing funding, how to stay organized, and how to maintain control of a project.



"Improving the quality of life in rural communities"

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