

Why Washington, D.C. Needs a National Clean Water Trust Fund



The United States's wastewater infrastructure, aging and increasingly unable to handle the pressures of modern society, is in serious danger. When pipes break and sewers overflow, communities, the environment, and our economy all suffer.

Recognizing that states across the country were faced with clean water spending requirements well beyond their ability to support, the federal government created the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. The fund, established in the late 1980s, provides states with federal grant money that they then use to make low-interest loans to communities for clean water projects.

Unfortunately, funding for the program has atrophied since it became fully operational in 1991. Since that year, funding has been cut by half (nearly two-thirds when adjusted for inflation), leaving states scrambling to deal with growing backlogs of maintenance and improvement projects. Broken pipes and sewer overflows spill more than one trillion gallons of untreated sewage every year and contaminate our beaches, waterways, and estuaries.

Given the fickle year-to-year funding of the SRF and the urgency of our clean water troubles, we need a new solution. A federal clean water trust fund would provide a steady, reliable, and equitable source of funding for needed projects across the country. By sidestepping the contentious appropriations process, a trust fund would safeguard our clean water infrastructure, our environment, and our economy.

Funding Gap: The District of Columbia's wastewater infrastructure needs are wildly out of line with its ability to provide funding. On its most recent priority list, Washington, D.C. announced its intention to fund one project in fiscal 2007/2008, a biological sludge facility that will require \$37.2 million. Its list of projects in the planning portion, however, runs eight long at a cost of \$1.75 billion. D.C. expects to receive a \$4.2 million Clean Water SRF grant from the federal government in 2008, a sum less than 1/415th of its stated needs. The District does not anticipate being able to fund one project, a \$60.5 million effort to reduce the number of sewage overflows into Rock Creek (the namesake of Rock Creek Park, D.C.'s primary recreational area) until 2022.

Federal contributions to Washington, D.C.'s clean water funding efforts have decreased by 58.7 percent since the Clean Water SRF was fully implemented in fiscal 1991 and 73 percent when adjusted for inflation.

"Although the District has already spent a considerable amount of money to deal with the CSO issue, the CSO problem still remains...CSO pollution abatement for the District involves substantial capital and operation and maintenance costs."

Water Quality: According to a 2000 District assessment, D.C.'s water quality is significantly hampered by pollution. Ten percent of estuaries, 89 percent of lake waters, and no river miles fully support aquatic life, and none of those waters support safe fish consumption. Only four percent of D.C.'s river miles are safe for swimming; no lake or estuary waters support such activities. Additionally, 78 percent of river miles and 100 percent of lake waters are unsafe for even secondary contact recreational use.

Job Creation: One billion dollars in federal infrastructure investment leads to approximately 47,500 new jobs. Addressing Washington, D.C.'s currently listed wastewater infrastructure needs would spur 83,125 employment opportunities.

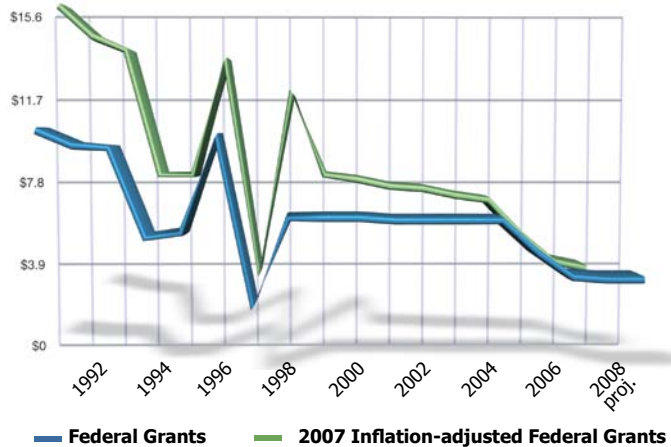
"The District of Columbia, along with several union territories, is exempt from Federal State Revolving Fund (SRF) requirements as it has only one level of government. The U.S. Congress passed a bill allowing the District of Columbia and other territories to use the SRF under Title II provisions. However, the District and the territories are not receiving the same benefits generally associated with SRF funds." - The District of Columbia 2000 Water Quality Assessment Executive Summary

For more information, download the full report, Clear Waters: Why America Needs a Clean Water Trust Fund, and analyses of all 50 states at: www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/clearwaters

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Federal Funds for Washington, D.C.'s Clean Water State Revolving Fund from Fiscal Year 1991 to 2007 (in Millions of Dollars)



Washington, D.C.'s Clean Water Needs vs. Federal Funding (in Millions of Dollars)

