

Why Kansas 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.

“Traditionally, there’s been an, ‘If it breaks, fix it,’ attitude towards wastewater systems...So we’re constantly in emergency mode. Thirty years ago, nobody would think about fixing their sewers until they overflowed and you had a basement full of sewage. That was a problem.”

Funding Gap: Kansas, through its heavy use of leveraging, has been able to keep pace with most of its clean water infrastructure needs. However, the state’s most recent Intended Use Plan still lists \$109 million in required work, less than 1/11th of which was provided by the federal government in 2007.

Federal contributions to Kansas’ clean water funding efforts have decreased by 47.9 percent since the Clean Water SRF was fully implemented in fiscal 1991 and 65.9 percent when adjusted for inflation.

“Now, the concept is ‘Let’s figure out what condition it’s in and let’s fix it before it breaks. What condition is our sewer in? How soon do we fear it’s going to fall down and cause these problems? Let’s fix it before that happens.’”

Water Quality: According to EPA, 81 percent of Kansas’ river miles and 85 percent of its lakes suffer from impaired water quality. Additionally, 74 percent of wetlands do not fully support aquatic life.

Job Creation: One billion dollars in federal infrastructure investment leads to approximately 47,500 new jobs. Addressing Kansas’ currently listed wastewater infrastructure needs would spur 5,177 employment opportunities.

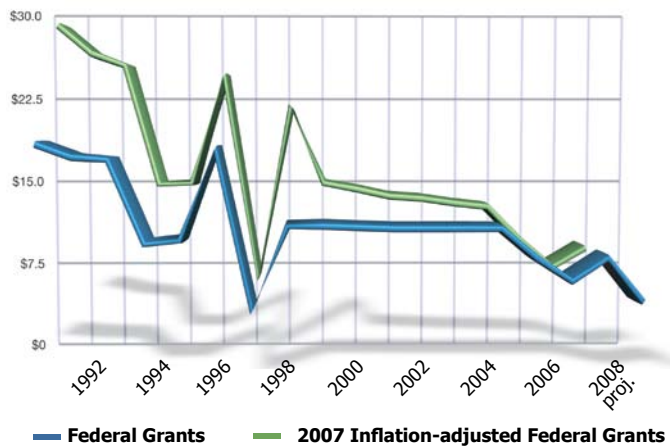
“If we spend x hours per year keeping it clean, we can avoid spending the money to replace it. It’s a good attitude, because it costs a lot less money to keep something from breaking down than it does to fix it once it breaks.” – Rod Geisler, Kansas Department of Environmental Quality

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 Kansas’ Clean Water State Revolving Fund from Fiscal Year 1991 to 2007 (in Millions of Dollars)



Kansas’ Clean Water Needs vs. Federal Funding (in Millions of Dollars)

