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Clean Water Solutions (CWS)

If rural communities in Delaware are plagued by wastewater system failures that due to economic distress languish in disrepair, and those failures can create disease outbreaks, and contribute to ecosystem damage and algae blooms, then it is critical to provide innovative solutions. By insuring the sustainability of these wastewater utilities Clean Water Solutions, ("CWS") will assist low to moderate income, ("LMI") rural communities with critical upgrades; repairs or replacement to existing systems through the creation of a non-profit utility.

The challenge: Several broken, or near failing wastewater systems that are privately owned by rural, (LMI) communities are posing a community health and environmental risk. These cluster communities who struggle with the manpower, technical and financial capacity, to maintain and operate their systems, because the upgrade costs per customer connection make an unwise investment. Several systems are out of compliance and at risk of failure, *putting the homes within these communities at risk for DNREC condemnation*. The expense and technical complexity of bringing these systems up to date has been out of reach for a long time. For profit utility companies cannot simply step in and take over the systems, because the cost per connection is not economically feasible for the utility or the rate payers. Neither these system owners, nor the for-profit utilities can qualify for free or grant assistance from federal or private foundations. Relying solely on loans adds further costs to be recovered from rates.

The Solution: A working group of stakeholders, including elected representatives, federal and state agencies, private utilities and nonprofits convened during the spring of 2015, and by fall 2016, through innovative sponsorship from Discover Bank's CRA Officers, the committee fostered a collaboration called Clean Water Solutions, between three non-profit entities: EDEN Delmarva ("EDEN"), Diamond State Sustainability Corporation ("DSSC"), and Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project ("SERCAP"). Together they are creating a non-profit utility to service these struggling communities of failing wastewater systems.

The Pilot: CWS has identified 6 LMI cluster communities owned systems, which cannot afford to operate safely, in compliance with State law, and in such a way that user rates will still be affordable, ("pilot"). The pilot requires each one of these communities to negotiate an Assignment of Assets Agreement. Thereafter, the rate and billing method for water and wastewater will be negotiated and filed with the Delaware Public Service Commission, ("PSC"). The CWS submission of wastewater and water rates to the PSC ensures a fair, affordable rate, enforcement of bill paying, and allows the communities to be relieved of their struggle to technically maintain their broken or failing systems. The financing for the pilot project requires 70% grant and 30% loan in the structure, and through this work, CWS is leveraging monies from USDA Rural Development, DNREC's Office of Financial Assistance Branch, ("FAB") along with grants from the Delaware Community Foundation and Discover Bank. CWS seeks to involve other foundations and grant makers who recognize the public health and environmental threats of these failing systems, and are innovatively willing to join in this team's work creating Solutions.

The Vision: In Delaware, surrounding the Inland Bays Region, Delaware Estuary, and Chesapeake Watershed, there are over 80,000 septic systems. Of the approximately 165 community wastewater systems, about 80 are cluster septic systems. Approximately 18,000 of these individual septic systems and at least 8 community systems are broken or working improperly—causing a public health hazard and environmental problems because of the nutrient overload flowing into the surface waters and aquifers. More systems are expected to fail at an increasing rate over the next decade. The end result is a growing environmental and economic problem that imperils the environment, and cannot be fixed overnight. The solution, funding the assessment, repair, and replacement for onsite community systems and wastewater systems for LMI cluster communities ***cannot happen overnight.***

Through the collaborative work of CWS, its growing team of advisors and sponsors, these communities can be assisted. CWS can provide critical upgrades to prevent system failures, financial management expertise, and technical capacity support services to create solutions for the regional crisis of these failing systems.





https://www.delaware1059.com/news/audio-sen-carper-announces-major-wastewater-reform-for-rural-communities/article_0022569e-88ef-11e7-b97e-23a640a22ebb.html

AUDIO | Sen. Carper announces major wastewater reform for rural communities in Delaware

Rob Petree Aug 24, 2017



Sen. Tom Carper with officials who helped make this possible, along with residents of the Country Glen II community in Bridgeville.

Photo: Delaware 105.9's Rob Petree

If someone traveled from one end of Delaware to the other they'd encounter dozens of small, rural communities, and almost all of them own and operate their own on-site wastewater treatment systems.

These communities are often times under-resourced because of their geographical location and cannot access a central sewer system from their county or municipality. Small, rural communities throughout Delaware often encounter a host of issues with their septic systems due to a lack of technical expertises, volunteers, and shortages of funding.

Delaware's Senior U.S. Senator Tom Carper, on Thursday, at the Country Glen II Subdivision in Bridgeville, announced the start of a collaborative partnership forming the new statewide Clean Water Solutions (CWS) project, which will support those communities through direct technical assistance and capacity development.

In an interview with Delaware 105.9's Rob Petree, Sen. Carper explained...

"The communities are older, the wastewater infrastructure is older and in some cases decaying and falling apart. The cost of fixing it is more than some of these rural communities can bear on their own, and they're willing to contribute and they want to contribute and do their part," said Sen. Carper.

"What we've come up with is a really unique partnership where we use some federal dollars in order to leverage greater participation from the non-profit community and the for-profit community, and for the people who live here. I think this can be a model not just for this community, not just for Sussex County, not just for Delmarva, this could be a model for the Country because there are thousands of communities like this across America."

The initiative was made possible through federal funding through two grants, \$25,000 from Rural Business Development and \$30,000 from the Special Evaluation Assistance for Rural Communities and Households. These two grants will cover consulting fees, legal services, engineering services, and an overall concept plan for regional conveyance for several rural communities in Delaware.

CWS is comprised of three non-profit organizations, Delmarva Community Wellnet Foundation, Diamond State Sustainability Corporation, and the Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project.





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Delaware Debuts First Non-Profit Wastewater Treatment Plant

Posted by Katie Breeden (<http://blog.envirosight.com/author/katie-breeden>) on Jan 22, 2018

The United States as a whole is urbanizing, so what happens to rural regions as they lose population? Due to their physical remoteness and sparse population, these areas pay a premium for water and sewer utilities—a problem that gets exacerbated as populations decline. Tens of millions of households, mostly in the eastern half of the nation, rely on septic tank systems when they lack a centralized sewer system, but these also lead to a slew of environmental and health issues that small neighborhoods must then address. A rural community in Delaware is attempting to remedy its wastewater challenges in a way the state hasn't seen before.



Bridgeville, Delaware in rural Sussex County is starting its first non-profit wastewater treatment plant. The state government helped identify this opportunity by creating a task force within its USDA Rural Development office. Over the course of two years, the task force has tackled the complicated matter of maintaining older rural community wastewater systems. Sussex County alone has approximately 80 small communities, so finding a solution that's possible to replicate would benefit the entire state, and potentially beyond.

With the support of federal funding, non-profit organizations Delmarva Community Wellnet Foundation, Diamond State Sustainability Corporation and Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project have come together to help create the Clean Water Solutions (CWS) program. CWS has gained federal funding through two grants totaling \$55,000. Water Online reports that "the first will go towards setting up the non-profit utility company and the second will go towards organizing an engineering and environmental report for the proposed local Country Glen wastewater system." With stakeholders in the local, state and federal level, there are many who are working towards the endeavor's success.

Previously, Bridgeville Homeowner Association president, Mike Mills, was the go-to person when it came to the town's septic problems. Tending to these issues consumed a significant portion of his time— even when there were other matters that required his attention. He was not alone in his frustration. The National Association of Home Builders found that in the Northeast more than half of new homes are built with septic systems, despite the health risks they pose. There are severe consequences when septic systems contaminate surface and ground waters with disease-causing pathogens and nitrates. Bridgeville will find relief with its new wastewater treatment plant.

The non-profit trio behind the CWS program hopes to make an impact on rural areas across the country. Federal funding has made the non-profit program possible and is available to other non-profits looking to solve wastewater problems within their communities as well. One of the critical steps CWS will be taking is creating a wastewater treatment plant, thereby addressing the heavy reliance on septic systems. This action will not only have a positive impact on the community's health, but also on the environment as well. If you're interested in learning more about septic systems, get introduced with the EPA's overview here:

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<http://www.circleofblue.org/2015/world/infographic-americas-septic-systems/> (<http://www.circleofblue.org/2015/world/infographic-americas-septic-systems/>)

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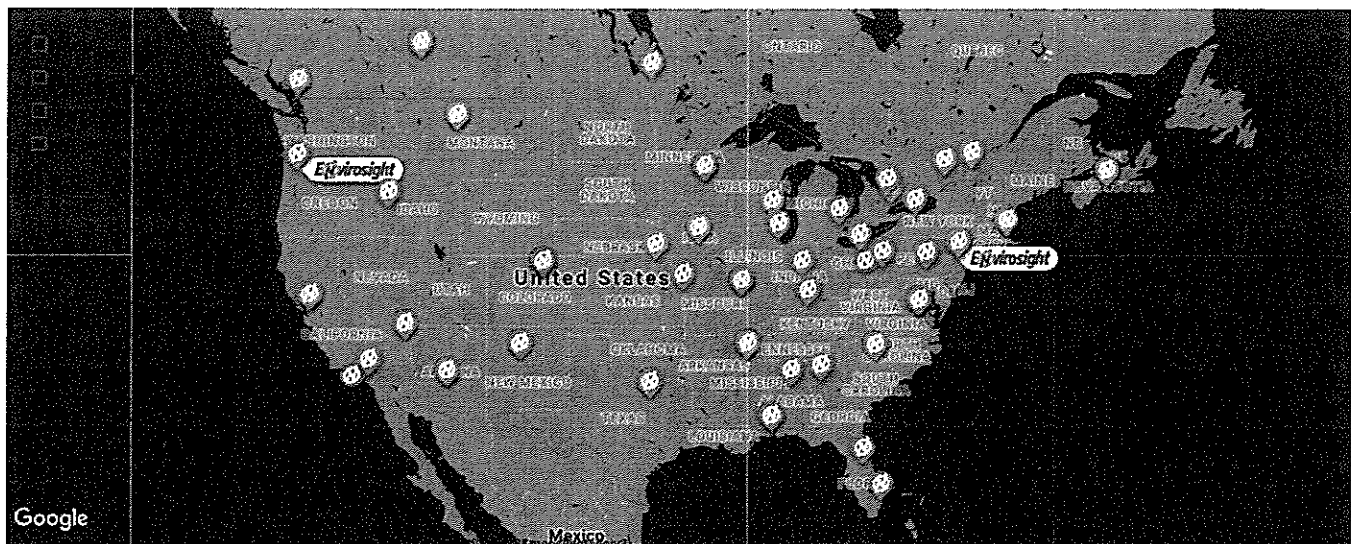
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