



# FLORIDA RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

2970 Wellington Circle  
Tallahassee FL 32309  
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## APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST SAMPLE

### Organization Information

**Organization Name:** Florida Rural Water Association  
**Street Address:** 2970 Wellington Circle  
**City:** Tallahassee  
**State:** FL  
**Zip Code:** 32309  
**Phone Number:** 850.668.2746  
**Website:** www.frwa.net  
**Type of Entity:** Non-Profit  
**Co-sponsoring Organizations:** National Rural Water Association

### Contact Information

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### Request Details

**Title of request:** USDA Circuit Riders

**What this program request would do:**

Since 1980, the Circuit Rider program has been one of USDA's most successful public-private partnerships, efficiently and effectively using appropriated funds to provide technical expertise, training, and disaster assistance to rural communities through state based nonprofit organizations.

**Problem/Issue Statement:**

Small and rural communities often have difficulty complying with complicated federal mandates and providing safe/affordable drinking water and sanitation due to limited economies of scale and lack of technical expertise.

**Request description:**

The National Rural Water Association (NRWA) requests an appropriation of \$22,470.00 for the Circuit Rider Program for FY2025. The FY2024 enacted level was \$21,817,000, consistent with our requested level and the third-year federal contract cost. This is a five-year competitive contract that was awarded to NRWA on November 1, 2020. The fifth-year option begins on November 1, 2024, with

the exact contract cost presented by Rural Development of \$22,470,000, consistent with our FY2024 request. This level, or \$21,817,000, is a 3.0% or \$653,000 increase over the FY2023 contract cost and the funding level enacted by Congress.

**Request goals and expected outcomes:**

There are currently 132 full-time permanent Circuit Riders deployed in the field in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Regardless of the appropriations level, the terms and conditions of the contract require NRWA to continue to provide the same level of service, even if there is a reduction in force. As previously mentioned, this funding request is the exact cost contained within the federal government contract requirements necessary to continue to provide existing activities and levels of service.

In recent years, NRWA has received an increase from Congress that is consistent with the 5-year competitive federal contract cost. For FY2024 the increase was 3%, for FY2025, the increase is 3%.

As previously mentioned, regardless of the appropriations level, the terms and conditions of the contract require NRWA to continue to provide the same level of service, even if there is a reduction in force. There are currently 132 full-time permanent Circuit Riders in all 50 states and Puerto Rico that are deployed in the field.

Experience and Benefits: Personnel turnover within this program is very rare. Circuit Riders have a total of 2,823 years of experience in the water and wastewater industry for an average of 24.35 years of experience per Circuit Rider. This experience and dedication to the overall mission reaps rewards in additional cost savings provided to the communities served. With this seasoned experienced staff, salary and benefit costs are higher. States provided \$1,540,510 of non-federal matching funds to carry out this initiative from December 1, 2022, to November 30, 2023. The direct salary and benefit cost coupled with the increased cost of travel (travel constitutes approximately 18% of the total cost for each Circuit Rider) has put additional financial strain on State Associations' ability to continue to meet the needs and requests efficiently and effectively for all rural communities.

Circuit Riders Protect Federal Investments: Circuit Rider assistance has become even more critical with the loss of over 1,000 USDA Rural Development staff in the field. Circuit Riders' on-site, hands-on assistance for operations, management, disaster assistance, governance and finance are essential for the sustainability of water and wastewater utilities. This assistance enhances the water system's ability to repay their government debt, protects the low cost of this program, and ensures rural water systems continue to have access to affordable financing. In addition, the Circuit Riders perform Mission Critical Services for the U.S. Government during a lapse of appropriations, or what is also referred to as a federal government shutdown, with the justification stating their work is to "prevent imminent harm to life or property" and are considered excepted activities. It is also important to note that the federal government has designated our water and wastewater districts as critical infrastructure and our water and wastewater specialists, employed within every State Rural Water Association, as essential employees to provide continuity of essential services throughout public health emergencies.

**Programmatic Request**

**Program Name and Agency:** Circuit Rider Program/Rural Utilities Service (within Rural Development)

**Amount included in FY2023 if applicable:** \$21,180,000.

**Amount included in the President's FY2024 Budget:** \$21,817,000

**Amount requested to increase President's FY2024 Budget, & total amount requested for FY2024:** Increase of \$627,000 to \$21,817,000

**Appropriations bill best suits our request:**

Bill: Section: Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

**Other House members we are submitting our request to:**

- |                           |                                    |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Matt Gaetz (FL-1)         | Laurel Lee (FL-15)                 |
| Neal Dunn (FL-2)          | Vern Buchanan (FL-16)              |
| Kat Cammack (FL-3)        | Greg Steube (FL-17)                |
| Aaron Bean (FL-4)         | Scott Franklin (FL-18)             |
| John Rutherford (FL-5)    | Byron Donalds (FL-19)              |
| Michael Waltz (FL-6)      | Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (FL-20) |
| Cory Mills (FL-7)         | Brian Mast (FL-21)                 |
| Bill Posey (FL-8)         | Lois Frankel (FL-22)               |
| Darren Soto (FL-9)        | Jared Moskowitz (FL-23)            |
| Maxwell Frost (FL-10)     | Fredrica Wilson (FL-24)            |
| Daniel Webster (FL-11)    | Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (FL-25)   |
| Gus Bilirakis (FL-12)     | Mario Diaz-Balart (FL-26)          |
| Anna Paulina-Luna (FL-13) | Maria Salazar (FL-27)              |
| Kathy Castor (FL-14)      | Carlos Gimenez (FL-28)             |

**Senators we are submitting request to:**

Marco Rubio (FL)

Rick Scott (FL)

**Impacts on**

This assistance protects the sizable investment the federal government has made in rural water infrastructure. Circuit Riders are in the field everyday helping systems with compliance, operations, maintenance, management, disaster response and training. The Circuit Rider Program has long been one of USDA's most successful public-private partnerships, efficiently and effectively using appropriated funds to provide technical assistance and training to rural communities through state based nonprofit associations.

**Public Disclosure Section**

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## Grassroots Source Water Protection Program

This is the only statewide local community-based initiative ensuring environmentally progressive local land-use decisions without the controversy and bureaucracy of regulatory programs. It provides each state with at least one full-time person to organize and assist rural communities, farmers, and other land-use interests in the implementation of source water protection plans including non-point source (runoff) protection practices in agriculture regions. This initiative allows the people who benefit from environmental protection to take responsibility for achieving it—ensuring its success and eliminating local controversy.

Name of program: **Grassroots Source Water Protection Program**

Appropriations bill: Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Senate subcommittee chairman: Senator Martin Heinrich (NM)

Senate subcommittee ranking member: Senator John Hoeven (ND)

House subcommittee chairman: Representative Andy Harris (MD)

House subcommittee ranking member: Representative Sanford Bishop (GA)

Department: United States Department of Agriculture

Agency: Farm Service Agency

Appropriations account: Grassroots Source Water Protection Program

Authorization: 16 U.S.C. 3839bb-2

FY2025 President's budget request: TBD

### Funding History

FY2020	\$6,500,000
FY2021	\$6,500,000
FY2022	\$6,500,000
FY2023	\$7,500,000
FY2024 House Report	\$7,500,000
FY2024 Senate Report	\$7,500,000

### **FY2025 request: \$7,500,000**

The National Rural Water Association (NRWA) requests an appropriation of \$7,500,000, consistent with the FY2023 enacted level and the amounts pending in both the FY2024 House and Senate reported bills. NRWA requested, and Congress appropriated \$6.5 million to carry out this initiative from FY2016 to FY2022. For FY2023, Congress increased this account by \$1,000,000 to expand services and activities. Additional activities can include, but are not limited to, enhanced assistance to address nutrient run-off from highly erodible cropland; decline in water quantity and quality related to drought; chemical security mapping; and coordination implementing source water protection practices in high priority areas, as determined by the Natural Resources and Conservation Service.

NRWA currently maintains 55 full-time Grassroots Source Water Protection Program Specialists in the field. Every state has one full-time Source Water Specialist with two Specialists currently provided in Colorado, California, Kansas, Minnesota, and Montana. Source Water Protection Specialists help communities develop locally-driven plans to protect the ground and surface waters that are the source of water for that community.

**FSA Source Water Justification: Maintain the FY2023 enacted level that is also consistent with the pending FY2024 House and Senate reported levels of \$7,500,000 to maintain current field staff, services, and activities.**

**Grassroots Source Water Protection Initiative:** Protecting public health is the top priority in every water and wastewater system in America. Since 1990, the National Rural Water Association (NRWA) and State Rural Water Associations have assisted water utilities and rural communities in identifying, controlling, and eliminating pollutants from the nation’s water resources. The NRWA Source Water Protection Program is built around small water utilities, local businesses, agriculture, government, and other groups working together to develop and implement strategies to protect their drinking water sources. It is a voluntary, grassroots planning effort that builds local responsibility and creates more sustainable communities.

**Source Water Protection:** The FY2025 source water protection program appropriation of \$7,500,000 will allow NRWA to maintain 55 full-time field employees to continue to provide this essential service with enhanced activities.

**Prevention vs. Remediation:**

This is the only statewide local community-based initiative ensuring environmentally progressive local land-use decisions without the controversy and bureaucracy of regulatory programs. Currently there are 55 full-time specialists employed to organize and assist rural communities, farmers, and other land-use interests in the implementation of source water protection plans including nonpoint source (runoff) protection practices in agriculture regions. State Associations provided \$532,887 of non-federal matching funds to carry out this initiative from December 1, 2022 to November 30, 2023. This initiative allows the people who benefit from environmental protection to take responsibility for achieving it—ensuring its success and eliminating local controversy. Through comprehensive planning efforts that identify potential threats to the water supply, communities proactively maintain local sources of safe and clean water. Additionally, by developing and implementing a source water protection plan, communities can help minimize the future need for expensive upgrades to treatment facilities.

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## **EPA Safe Drinking Water Act Technical Assistance and Training**

Since 1977, small and rural communities have relied on local/on-site technical assistance and training for compliance with the myriad of federal EPA regulations, avoiding EPA fines, and operating drinking water and wastewater supplies. According to small and rural communities,

EPA-funded local initiatives are the most effective environmental protection efforts for drinking water & wastewater, ground water, source water, and compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act. Small communities want to ensure quality water and stay in compliance—rural water provides them the shared technical resources to do it.

Name of program: **EPA Safe Drinking Water Act Technical Assistance**

Appropriations bill: Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Senate subcommittee chairman: Senator Jeff Merkley (OR)

Senate subcommittee ranking member: Senator Lisa Murkowski (AK)

House subcommittee chairman: Representative Mike Simpson (ID)

House subcommittee ranking member: Representative Chellie Pingree (ME)

Agency: Environmental Protection Agency

Appropriations account: Environmental Programs and Management

Authorization: Safe Drinking Water Act (42 USC 300j-1(e))

FY2024 President’s budget request: TBD

Funding History

FY2020	\$17,700,000
FY2021	\$21,700,000
FY2022	\$25,700,000
FY2023	\$30,700,000
FY2024 House Report	\$39,000,000
FY2024 Senate Report	\$32,700,000

**FY2025 request: \$39,000,000**

The National Rural Water Association requests report language (see below) appropriating \$39,000,000 under this account to provide \$30,000,000 dedicated to the technical assistance activities as prescribed under the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Act. Of the total amount remaining available, \$4,300,000 is designated to provide technical assistance support to small and rural systems and communities that have been recipients of Community Project Funding, \$3,450,000 is directed for technical assistance to private wells and \$1,250,000 for wastewater. This is consistent with the House’s FY2024 reported levels. Small and rural communities rely on local/on-site technical assistance and training for compliance with federal EPA regulations, avoiding EPA fines, and operating drinking and wastewater supplies.

**FY2025 Additional Report Language Request:** The Agency is directed to comply with the Congressional intent of the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act to ensure awards are limited to the most qualified and experienced non-profit organizations necessary to provide quality uninterrupted training and technical assistance that are the most beneficial and effective to small public water systems. Additionally, awards shall be issued on an annual basis.

**EPA Technical Assistance Justification: Enact the House’s FY2024 reported level of \$39,000,000 and follow the Congressional intent of Public Law 114-98 for FY2025.**

**EPA Technical Assistance Authorization:** The President signed the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act into law (Public Law 114-98) on December 11, 2015. The House of Representatives unanimously passed the bill on November 30, 2015 and the Senate on June 9, 2015 (also unanimously). The authorization was modified in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (H.R.3684, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) to ensure the funding is used in the most beneficial manner for rural and small communities.

The purpose of the Act is to require the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) follow Congressional intent in administering directed appropriations to assist small and rural communities to comply with federal environmental mandates. The Act authorizes the EPA to provide technical assistance to small and rural communities to assist them with: (1) compliance with the myriad of federal regulations under the Safe Drinking Water Act; (2) operation and maintenance of their water utilities; and (3) public health protection through the supply of safe public drinking water.

**Technical Assistance Demand:** Small and rural communities often have a difficult time, due to their limited customer base and technical capacities, providing safe water and complying with federal standards. This is compounded by the fact that small and rural communities often have lower median household incomes and higher water rates compared to larger communities. As a result, the cost of compliance is often dramatically higher per household.

The vast majority of U.S. drinking water supplies are small; 91% of community water systems serve a population of fewer than 10,000 people. Some communities are so small they rely on volunteers to operate their drinking water supply. Small communities in violation of the federal rules are subject to \$25,000 per-day civil penalties. We are urging Congress to fully fund the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act portion at \$30,000,000.

**Experience:** Since 1977, NRWA has assisted small and rural communities in providing safe drinking water and ensured access to the expertise of an experienced, trustworthy technician. This technical assistance provides for efficient system operation and maintenance and affordable compliance with Safe Drinking Water Act mandates. Small and rural communities are struggling under new federal regulations, complex funding program applications, and continuing mandatory operator training requirements. Recent EPA allocations for this initiative do not adequately address the needs of small and rural communities that need help as soon as possible.

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## **EPA Clean Water Act Compliance Technical Assistance**

Small and rural communities have more difficulty affording public wastewater service due to lack of population density and lack of economies of scale. This challenge is compounded by the fact that rural communities have lower average median household incomes and often have higher rates of poverty. PL 155-270, enacted in October 2018, authorizes a new technical assistance program for small and rural communities to improve water quality, operate and

maintain public wastewater treatment utilities and comply with federal Clean Water Act standards.

Name of program: **EPA Clean Water Act Compliance Technical Assistance**

Appropriations bill: Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Senate subcommittee chairman: Senator Jeff Merkley (OR)

Senate subcommittee ranking member: Senator Lisa Murkowski (AK)

House subcommittee chairman: Representative Mike Simpson (ID)

House subcommittee ranking member: Representative Chellie Pingree (ME)

Agency: Environmental Protection Agency

Appropriations account: State and Tribal Assistance Grants Account

Authorization: America’s Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (section 4103), “Technical Assistance for Treatment Works”

FY2025 President’s budget request: TBD

Funding History

FY2020	\$12,000,000
FY2021	\$18,000,000
FY2022	\$20,000,000
FY2023	\$27,000,000
FY2024 House Report	\$27,000,000
FY2024 Senate Report	\$28,000,000

**FY2025 request: \$28,000,000**

The National Rural Water Association (NRWA) requests \$28,000,000, consistent with the FY2024 Senate reported bill to fund section 4103 America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018. This competitive grant program provides small and rural communities with the technical assistance necessary to improve water quality, operate and maintain public wastewater treatment utilities, assist with permitting, comply with federal Clean Water Act regulations and apply for federal funding under the Clean Water State Revolving Funds. Small and rural communities strive to ensure quality wastewater stays in compliance—this initiative provides them with the technical resources to do so.

**Bill Language:** \$28,000,000 shall be for grants under section 104(b)(8) of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1254(b)(8)).

**Report Language:** The Agency is directed to issue awards on an annual basis to the most qualified and experienced non-profit organizations necessary to provide quality uninterrupted training and technical assistance. The Agency is directed to allocate funds to grantees within 180 days of enactment of this Act.

**EPA Clean Water Act Compliance Technical Assistance Justification: Enact the FY2024 Senate reported level of \$28,000,000 for section 4103 of America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 in FY2025.**

**EPA Clean Water Act Compliance Technical Assistance:** A recent technical assistance authorization, section 4103, “Technical Assistance for Treatment Works,” was included in



America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018, and signed into law by the President on October 23, 2018.

Small and rural communities have more difficulty affording public wastewater service due to lack of population density and lack of economies of scale. This challenge is compounded by the fact that rural communities have lower average median household incomes and often have higher rates of poverty. Likewise, rural communities have a much more challenging time complying with federal Clean Water Act permits and operating complex wastewater treatment systems due to the lack of technical resources and expertise in small communities. While most rural communities have fewer resources, they are regulated in the exact same manner as a large community - and often operating similarly complex treatment systems that are smaller in scale but no less sophisticated to operate and troubleshoot. Many small communities may only have one (or one part-time) operator with multiple duties, not just wastewater treatment - while a large community may have a team of technical experts including engineers, chemists, and highly trained operators - all as part of their full-time staff.

Many small and rural communities are currently struggling to comply with the EPA sewer permits (i.e. federal National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permits), experiencing issues with inflow and infiltration of their collection systems, meeting Clean Water Act ammonia standards, biochemical oxygen demand standards, new nutrient standards, stormwater regulations and changing permits due to implementation of Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) regulations.

This recent law provides direct on-site assistance to communities to support the efficient operation of their wastewater utilities and ensure compliance with all the federal regulations under the Clean Water Act. Funding and implementation of this new law will allow communities to comply with the federal Clean Water Act requirements, potentially save thousands of dollars, prevent the hiring of consultants to comply with the Clean Water Act and limit exposure to civil penalties. Instead of a "must" mandate from the federal government, this provision will provide small and rural communities with "how-to" guidance for cost-effective compliance with the federal government's Clean Water Act.

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## **National Rural Water Apprenticeship Program**

Since 2016, NRWA has collaborated with State Rural Water Associations, USDA, DOL, EPA, and local rural water utilities to build the first nationally recognized DOL Registered Apprenticeship Program for water and wastewater system operators. Employment data indicates up to 50% of the rural water workforce will leave the water industry over the next 10 years. Rural water and wastewater utilities need a pipeline of skilled workers to help ensure clean and safe water for the public and to maintain the water infrastructure necessary to keep rural service areas economically viable. To date, thirty-seven State Rural Water Associations have federally approved Registered Apprenticeship Programs and are currently offering a job creation program

specifically designed by industry leaders to attract, train and retain the next generation rural water workforce with over 775 apprentices enrolled or graduated so far.

Name of program: **National Water and Wastewater Operator Apprenticeship Program**

Appropriations bill: Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, & Related Agencies

Senate subcommittee chairwoman: Senator Tammy Baldwin (WI)

Senate subcommittee ranking member: Senator Shelley Moore Capito (WV)

House subcommittee chairman: Representative Robert Aderholt (AL)

House subcommittee ranking member: Representative Rosa DeLauro (CT)

Department: United States Department of Labor

Agency: Employment and Training Administration

Appropriations Account: Training and Employment Services

FY2025 President’s budget request: TBD

**Apprenticeship Grant Program Funding  
History**

FY2020	\$175,000,000
FY2021	\$185,000,000
FY2022	\$235,000,000
FY2023	\$285,000,000
FY2024 House Report	\$285,000,000
FY2024 Senate Report	\$290,000,000

**FY2025 request: \$20,000,000 set-aside within the Apprenticeship Grant Program**

The National Rural Water Association (NRWA) requests \$20,000,000 for a national water and wastewater operator registered apprenticeship program to be funded by the available resources within the Apprenticeship Grant Program account.

**Bill Language:** \$20,000,000 shall be for national water and wastewater operator industry workforce training through apprenticeship programs registered with the Office of Apprenticeship of the Employment and Training Administration of the Department of Labor or a State apprenticeship agency recognized by the Office of Apprenticeship pursuant to the Act of August 16, 1937 (commonly known as the “National Apprenticeship Act”; 50 Stat. 664, chapter 663; 29 U.S.C. 50 et seq.).

**Report Language:** The Committee directs the Secretary to make \$20,000,000 in grant funding available to establish, implement, expand, and administer registered apprenticeship programs consistent with the National Guideline Standards of Apprenticeship for Water and Wastewater System Operations Specialists to address nationwide shortages of qualified drinking water and wastewater operators, especially in rural America.

**DOL Rural Water Workforce Initiative Justification: Provide the FY2024 House reported level of \$20,000,000 for the national water and wastewater operator registered apprenticeship program.**

NRWA, State Rural Water Associations, USDA, DOL, EPA, and local rural water utilities are collaborating successfully to establish the first nationally recognized Registered Apprenticeship Program for water and wastewater system operators, while creating jobs in rural America. As of January 2024, thirty-seven State Rural Water Associations have completed the rigorous process of obtaining federally approved Registered Apprenticeship Programs and are now attracting, training, and retaining the next generation water workforce with over 775 apprentices enrolled or graduated so far.

To bolster these efforts, Congress included a new National Program for Water and Wastewater Operators in the 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act explanatory statement explicitly supporting our workforce initiative. In the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023, Congress “urges” the Secretary of Labor to make funding available for the NRWA Registered Apprenticeship Program and the FY2024 DOL House Appropriations report includes a set-aside directing the Secretary of Labor to invest \$20 million in this effort:

The Committee directs the Secretary to make \$20,000,000 in grant funding available to establish, implement, expand, and administer registered apprenticeship programs consistent with the National Guideline Standards of Apprenticeship for Water and

Wastewater System Operations Specialists to address nationwide shortages of qualified drinking water and wastewater operators, especially in rural America. (page 9)

To continue the growing, successful NRWA Apprenticeship Program, we also request a \$290 million funding level for the Apprenticeship Grant Program account, the same as the Senate’s FY2024 reported level, and \$20,000,000 for a national water and wastewater operator apprenticeship program to be funded by the available resources within that account.

Safe and effective water utility management is vital to rural America and the nation. There are currently 50,067 community water supplies in the country, 91% serve less than 10,000 population and 55% serve populations of 500 or less. Employment data indicates up to 50% of this workforce will leave the water industry within the next 10 years. Rural water and wastewater utility owners and operators need a pipeline of skilled workers to help ensure clean and safe water for the public and to maintain the water infrastructure necessary to keep rural service areas economically viable. These operators serve as public health officials and are often the only person responsible for complying with all the applicable federal Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act regulations and for supplying the small community with safe drinking water and sanitation every second of every day. A vast majority of rural and small community water systems have been unable to attract, train and retain the next generation workforce due to the lack of an identifiable career path coupled with low salary levels and population density. Water and wastewater systems will be empowered to leverage workforce development activities

including an identifiable career path and a modern, systematic apprenticeship model with this funding for the first time.