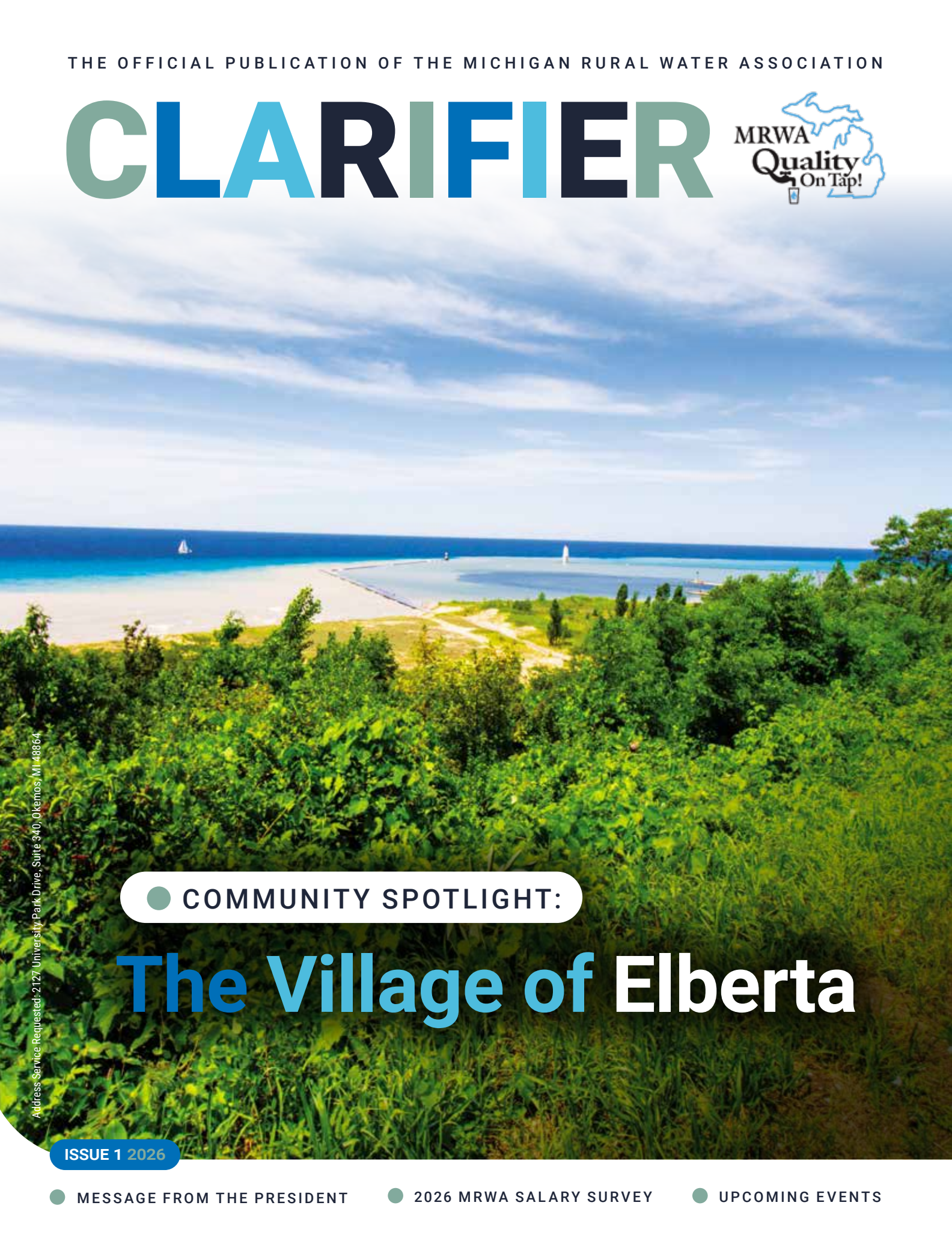


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● COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT:

The Village of Elberta

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ISSUE 1 2026

- MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT
- 2026 MRWA SALARY SURVEY
- UPCOMING EVENTS

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MRWA MISSION STATEMENT

To provide resources, education and networking to all members, future members and their customers in order to enhance quality of service.

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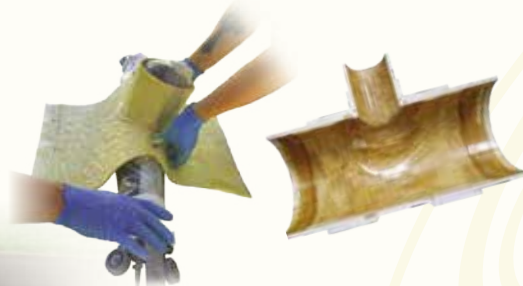
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Advocating for Rural Water in Washington, D.C.

During the first week of February, representatives from Michigan Rural Water Association traveled to Washington, D.C. to stand alongside the National Rural Water Association in support of the initiatives that protect and strengthen rural water and wastewater systems across the country.

This trip was an important opportunity to meet directly with federal lawmakers and agency representatives to share the real-world challenges faced by small and rural utilities. From aging infrastructure and regulatory compliance to workforce shortages and affordability concerns,

these conversations help ensure that rural systems remain part of the national discussion when policy and funding decisions are made.

Advocacy at the federal level is critical to the long-term sustainability of rural systems. Your membership, engagement, and support make it possible for MRWA to represent you – not just in Lansing, but in Washington as well. Together, we can continue to protect the future of rural water.

And as always please join us March 17 to the 20 for our Annual Conference at Soaring Eagle Resort in Mt. Pleasant Michigan. ●



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Securing Michigan's Water Future Through Apprenticeship

Clean water doesn't happen by accident. Behind every glass of safe drinking water and every properly treated gallon of wastewater is a skilled professional who understands complex systems, regulations, and the responsibility of protecting public health. But across Michigan – and the nation – that workforce is changing. Experienced operators are retiring, systems are becoming more technical, and rural communities are feeling the pressure to attract and retain qualified staff.

To meet this challenge head-on, the Michigan Rural Water Association (MRWA), in partnership with the National Rural Water Association (NRWA), has embraced Registered Apprenticeship as a long-term workforce solution.

While the program is just getting underway, MRWA has begun laying the groundwork – developing structure, building partnerships, and preparing to educate communities about this workforce opportunity. The goal is to have the program fully operational by August 2026.

A PRACTICAL PATHWAY INTO ESSENTIAL CAREERS

Registered Apprenticeship offers a structured, proven model for developing Water and Wastewater System Operations Specialists. Rather than relying solely on classroom instruction or informal on-the-job training, apprentices participate in a carefully designed program that blends hands-on experience with related technical instruction.

For many people, water careers are not something they discover in high school career fairs. Yet these roles offer stability, meaningful work, and long-term growth. Apprenticeship creates a direct, accessible pathway into the industry – allowing individuals to earn while they learn.

For small and rural systems in particular, apprenticeship offers a

sustainable strategy for succession planning. Instead of reacting to retirements, utilities can proactively grow their own workforce.

BUILDING AWARENESS ACROSS MICHIGAN

Because the program is in its early stages, much of MRWA's current focus is on outreach and education. Over the coming months, MRWA will be actively promoting the apprenticeship model to utilities, local officials, workforce agencies, veterans' organizations, and community groups across the state.

The effort is not simply about recruitment – it is about awareness. Many communities are unfamiliar with Registered Apprenticeship as a workforce development tool. MRWA aims to help employers understand how the model works, how wage progression and training requirements are structured, and how apprenticeship can strengthen long-term workforce planning.

At the same time, the program will introduce potential apprentices to a career field that offers both purpose and stability. Youth outreach initiatives and partnerships with workforce development boards will play a key role in building a strong future talent pipeline.

“ RATHER THAN RELYING SOLELY ON CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION OR INFORMAL ON-THE-JOB TRAINING, APPRENTICES PARTICIPATE IN A CAREFULLY DESIGNED PROGRAM THAT BLENDS HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE WITH RELATED TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION.

STRUCTURE, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND QUALITY

A successful apprenticeship program requires coordination and oversight. MRWA's Apprenticeship Training Coordinator will manage the day-to-day operations of the program, ensuring

alignment with NRWA standards, grant deliverables, and Department of Labor requirements.

Participating employers will provide structured on-the-job training, while apprentices complete required related technical instruction. Progress – including training hours, mentor evaluations, and wage advancement – will be tracked through the NRWA Apprenticeship Tracking System. This structured approach ensures accountability and consistency statewide.

INVESTING IN THE LONG TERM

The launch of MRWA's Registered Apprenticeship Program represents more than a new initiative – it signals a long-term investment in Michigan's water infrastructure and the communities it serves.

By targeting August 2026 for full implementation, MRWA is taking deliberate steps to build a strong foundation. Outreach today will lead to trained operators tomorrow. Employers will gain a reliable pathway for workforce development. Apprentices will gain meaningful careers. And communities will benefit from stable, well-trained professionals who safeguard public health every day.

Water may flow quietly beneath our streets, but the workforce behind it is essential. Through Registered Apprenticeship, MRWA is preparing for the future – ensuring that Michigan's water systems remain safe, resilient, and in capable hands for generations to come. ●



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OR Complete the survey and email it to Melisa at membersvcs@mrwa.net.

If you have any questions, please contact **Melisa Lincoln**, Membership Director at 517-657-2601
Thank you for your help with this project.

The Purpose

To give community members an accurate picture on wages and benefits are by system size, location, etc.

If you do any of the following things, it means your survey will be invalid without being recorded and will not help you or any other community.

1. Leave your name and employer blank.
2. Use one survey for multiple people (we have no way of separating these and need as many individual responses as possible to get results that will be useful to you).
3. Leave questions unanswered.

Any paper or emailed surveys received will be destroyed once the answers are entered into the database. Be assured that the data collected will be handled with the required level of confidentiality and all data will be aggregated before reporting. All information gathered as part of this study to be treated as confidential. No information provided will be attributed to an individual or organization. Your participation in this study is voluntary.

BRIDGING THE GAP

INNOVATIVE TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE
INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCING



By **Nick Roederer**, Managing Director,
Rural Water Financing Agency and Raymond James & Associates, Inc.

Financing infrastructure projects is essential to the economic and social vitality of communities across the United States, particularly in rural areas. Quality infrastructure – such as water and sewer systems, roads, bridges, schools, and fire stations – forms the backbone of local communities. In rural America, where populations are more dispersed and private investment is often limited, public financing tools like municipal bonds and innovative financing programs play a crucial role in bridging the funding gap. These investments not only improve day-to-day life for residents but also make rural regions more attractive for businesses, helping to retain local jobs and spur new economic opportunities.

Bridging this gap necessitates strategic financial investments, and that's where the significance of financing tools like the Rural Water Financing Agency (RWFA) comes into play. RWFA is a public agency headquartered in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and its primary function is to mobilize financial resources for governmental projects. Raymond James serves as Bond Underwriter for the RWFA Interim Program and as Municipal Advisor for the RWFA Flex Term Program. My colleagues at Raymond James and I have worked with RWFA and its predecessor (Kentucky Rural Water Finance Corporation) since 1995 to finance more than 800 projects for over \$1.8 billion. The RWFA and Raymond James are committed to providing borrowers with quick access to affordable infrastructure financing in my home state of Kentucky and throughout the country.

The Rural Water Financing Agency plays a pivotal role in mobilizing financial resources from various channels, including the municipal bond market, to offer funds that can be strategically deployed for a variety of projects. The RWFA funding is available through its two financing programs to governmental borrowers throughout the country:

RWFA INTERIM PROGRAM

- Provides tax-exempt construction financing to borrowers with a USDA Takeout
- Streamlined and efficient application and documentation
- Fixed rate for the term of construction
- All costs included in the loan rate
- All interest is capitalized until the end of construction

RWFA FLEX TERM PROGRAM

- AA- rated program offers borrowers access to tax-exempt markets at low rates
- No debt service reserve requirement
- Fixed rate terms from 1-30 years for a variety of project types
- Funding can be provided in 60-120 days (depending on regulatory requirements)
- Projects not subject to federal regulations (BABA Act, American Iron and Steel, Davis Bacon)

The RWFA Flex Term Program has been particularly active recently as communities have determined that financing their projects quickly and without some of the federal regulations (BABA Act, American Iron and Steel, etc.) is most beneficial to them. Just in 2025, the RWFA Flex Term Program issued over \$150,000,000 to fund 36 projects in 11 states. The upcoming December 2025 issuance is expected to provide approximately \$70,000,000 in financing to nine projects in seven states. This increasing momentum has led to a variety of projects being financed by RWFA around the country such as water and sewer improvements, a new library, fire trucks and fire station renovations, a new parking facility, a new multi-purpose event center, healthcare facility improvements, a new correctional facility, school building improvements, land purchases, and refinancing.



These RWFA Flex Term loans have been secured by revenues, general obligation pledges, special obligation pledges or other tax revenues. This flexibility ensures that the unique challenges faced by different communities are addressed and fostered by a more effective, efficient and consistent financing approach.

Furthermore, the Rural Water Financing Agency plays a pivotal role in leveraging partnerships and collaboration. By facilitating alliances with governmental bodies and state rural water associations, RWFA amplifies its impact and creates a network of support for infrastructure projects. To date, RWFA has partnered with **19 state rural water associations** that are contributing to enhancing the financial resources available to borrowers in their states.

Strategic infrastructure investment is about resilience and the future. Well-financed projects strengthen a community's ability to withstand and recover from natural disasters, economic downturns, and demographic shifts. Financing tools such as the ones that RWFA provides allow local governments to plan beyond short election cycles and focus on projects that will serve residents for generations. In rural America, where every dollar must stretch further, thoughtful infrastructure financing is not just an economic necessity, it's an investment in future generations, connectivity, and the enduring strength of community life.

RWFA and Raymond James pride ourselves on being able to provide financing to borrowers quickly and efficiently and it all starts with a simple application. Please visit the website at www.ruralwaterfinance.com to learn more and to fill out your application for financing. ●

Raymond James & Associates, Inc.

serves as underwriter to the Interim Loan Program and municipal advisor to the Flex Term Program. This overview may not be representative of the experience of other clients and is not a guarantee of future performance or success. Past performance is not indicative of future results. The information contained herein is solely intended to facilitate discussion of potentially applicable financing applications and is not intended to be a specific buy/sell recommendation, nor is it an official confirmation of terms. The information contained herein has been obtained from sources considered to be reliable, but we do not guarantee the foregoing material is accurate or complete.

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PFAS Cost Recovery Program

Phase 2

In partnership with the National Rural Water Association and Napoli Shkolnik PLLC, we are sharing this call to action with you concerning the Phase 2 Settlement Deadline for the PFAS Cost Recovery Program.

Is this supported by our Association?

Yes, this program was initiated in 2018 when National Rural Water Association engaged the law firm of Napoli Law to file litigation on behalf of its members and all public water supplies. We encourage your system to register into the settlement to lessen the financial burden on your system and rate payers.

Act Now to Access Funding

Gain access to \$15.4 Billion Dollar Settlement for PFAS Detections and Contamination. Systems must register to receive this funding. There is zero cost to register into the program.

Who is Eligible?

Any public water system that has tested and found detections of ANY PFAS chemical, at any level, is eligible to receive an award from this settlement based on level of detection and maximum daily flows. This includes all 29 PFAS compounds included in the UCMR5 monitoring rule.

Deadlines and Urgency

3M/DuPont Settlements

- Phase 1 of the 3M/DuPont settlement has ended.
- Phase 2 of the settlement is now open for systems that tested after June 22, 2023. The deadline to register in the program to be eligible for the settlement is **July 12, 2026**.

Additional Settlements

- Twelve other companies are in the settlement process with no set deadlines yet. Napoli Law will ensure your system is included in all applicable settlements.



Contingent Cost

There is no cost to register into the cost recovery program. Your utility will have no costs unless Napoli Law recovers funds for your system.



How much will my utility receive?

The amount will depend on the level of detection, the compound detected, and maximum daily flows.



Unrestricted Funds

There are no strings attached to the funding your system receives; the decision to utilize funds is at the discretion of the utility. There are no approvals or reporting requirements.

PFAS Contamination



Many systems have tested positive for PFAS across the nation. Time is of the essence, act now and protect your utility and ratepayers from the costs of PFAS remediation and treatment. To date, Napoli Law has recovered:

\$179M

\$179,184,509.11 in settlements

314

Rural Water Members

Estimated Awards

	3M	Dupont	Tyco	Additional Settlements
High	\$28,771,300	\$3,409,409	\$2,167,854	Ongoing
Low	\$3,824	\$453	\$286	Ongoing
Average	\$1,607,481	\$169,368	\$129,076	Ongoing

Additional Information

Register your system into the settlement at www.napolilaw.com/nrwa-pfas. There is no obligation. Hank Naughton or Sam Wade with Napoli Law will contact you to provide additional details and answer any questions you may have.

Is someone available to meet with our board/council?

Napoli Law welcomes the opportunity to connect with your board/council, staff or legal representative just give them a call or email.

Contact

- **Sam Wade, Water Consultant**
swade@napolilaw.com
580-917-1425
- **Hank Naughton, Managing Partner**
hnaughton@napolilaw.com
978-852-3643

Documentation

In order to participate in these settlements, public water systems need to submit four different forms to the Claims Administrator:

01

A completed IRS Form W-9.

02

Evidence of any remedial action taken for PFAS.

03

Documents showing the maximum flow rate per source.

04

Documents showing the maximum permitted flow rate per source.

Looking to Learn More?

You can visit NRWA's website by scanning the QR Code below to learn more about the PFAS Cost Recovery Program and PFAS in general.



PFAS COST RECOVERY PROGRAM

NO
SIGN UP
COST!

Phase 2 is now open! Register by July 12, 2026, to be eligible for settlements to help your utility with costs associated with PFAS.



REGISTER NOW



<https://nrwa.org/issues/pfas/>



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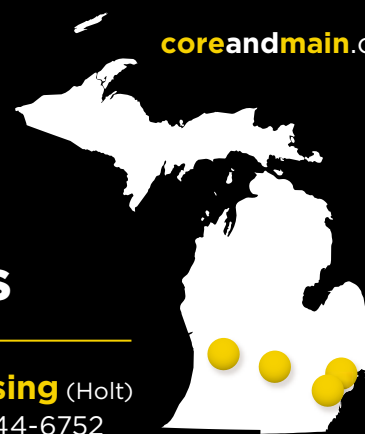
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OLD TECHNOLOGY, NEW APPLICATION



By **Amanda White**, Wastewater Technician,
Michigan Rural Water Association

At some point in each wastewater operators' career they will have lost sleep or agonized over the aeration, temperature, smell, mixing, pH, decanting, having enough



Image 1: 4-acre sludge holding pond September 4, 2025. Prior to ProO2 install. (Simpson, R. 2025)



Image 2: Close up of pond and aerators September 2, 2025. Prior to ProO2 install. (Simpson, R. 2025)

“ FOR A SEASONED OPERATOR WHO HAS SEEN VAST INDUSTRY CHANGES IN REGULATION, ADVANCEMENT IN TECHNOLOGY AND “SNAKE OIL” PRODUCTS TOUTING OUTCOMES THEY’LL NEVER ACHIEVE COME AND GO, EVEN THE MOST CURIOUS CAN BECOME JADED TO NEW TECHNOLOGY AND HARD TO CONVINCE WHEN A NEW IDEA WALKS THROUGH THE DOOR.

space, cost, overall transport and fate of this ONE thing. It doesn’t matter how the waste is treated; whether it goes into a tank, a pond, lagoon or any type of mechanical treatment plant, **BIOSolids** are an ever present operational and managerial challenge that all Publicly Owned Treatment Work (POTW) operators deal with.

Over the years we have been introduced to products promising to reduce sludge volume, enhance digestion and increase

bug population. Presented with a myriad of exciting new designs touting greater efficiency, providing more air using less electricity or producing electricity without the need for air. For a seasoned operator who has seen vast industry changes in regulation, advancement in technology and “snake oil” products touting outcomes they’ll never achieve come and go, even the most curious can become jaded to new technology and hard to convince when a new idea walks through the door.

CURRENT HANDLING METHODS & REGULATION

Currently the most common options for disposal of biosolids include landfilling, incineration, Class A EQ distribution, Class B agriculture and reclamation. All of these come with a hefty price tag that continues to increase, while some are becoming less available due to constraints of contents or simply because there is no land available.

As the reality begins to hit the farmers using biosolids for fertilizer, rightfully so, many are becoming hesitant and questioning the application of the product, growing fearful that the land that keeps their family fed could be deemed unusable. This trickles down, all the way to the operator wasting and returning sludge each day.

In 2022, as a response to protecting farmland and water supplies from these “forever chemicals” the State of Maine, completely banned the land application of Biosolids. In 2024, Connecticut passed law banning land application of biosolids containing detectable levels of PFAS; while Michigan, New Hampshire, Vermont and Minnesota issued strict monitoring requirements and/or regulations on testing and reporting.

BIOSOLIDS REGULATION HISTORY

- **1990s: Federal Foundation** – The EPA established 4CFR Part 503 in 1993, setting national standards for land application, pollutant limits and pathogen reduction.
- **1997: Michigan Rules** – The DEQ (now EGLE) promulgated Part 24 rules to manage land application of sewage sludge, incorporating state-specific requirements.
- **2018: PFAS Regulation** – In response to identifying PFAS contamination, EGLE launched initiatives to monitor & reduce industrial chemical loads in biosolids.
- **2020: EGLE** requires electronic reporting for biosolids annually, for all POTWs in the State.
- **2021: EGLE** implemented the *Land Application of Biosolids Containing PFAS Interim Strategy*, with subsequent modifications in 2022 & 2024. This strategy put in place thresholds for how biosolids may be land applied.
- **2022: EGLE** includes land application criteria and
- **2024: EGLE** requires all biosolids be tested for PFOS and PFOA compounds prior to land application approval.

A CASE STUDY

For City of Hart BIOPure Water Reclamation Superintendent Paul Cutter, all the above have been increasingly weighing on his mind. The City of Hart sewer utility serves just over 2,000 residents and two very large

fruit and vegetable processing and packing facilities. Influent flow to the plant fluctuates from 0.250MGD in the winter, to upwards of 2.0MGD throughout harvesting season. Nutrient loading also increases throughout the summer as the products being processed naturally contain higher BOD.

What this means for Mr. Cutter and staff of the BIOPure facility, is a great deal of preparation and foreshadowing must be accomplished each Spring prior to production beginning, to ready the facility for increased loading. Bug population in mixed liquor is increased slowly throughout the summer to account for the increase in loading. An ammonia source must be added and carefully monitored to prevent the BioMass from upset due to nutrient imbalance in the raw water.

As summer comes to an end and the last carrot is processed, Mr. Cutter is left with an 8-acre activated sludge lagoon with a much higher MLSS than necessary and a lot of undigested fruit and vegetable (organic) solids. So, they waste. A LOT! To account for this the City's annual budget for biosolids handling alone, is twice that of similar sized community's entire annual operating budget.

As vegetable production waned in late summer of 2025, staff began preparing for



Image 3: Photo of pond on October 7, 2025 following decant of approx. 1MG of supernatant. Post ProO2 operation. (Simpson, R. 2025)

DATE	VSS (MG/L)	SLUDGE DEPTH (FT)
Initial 9/2/25	23,500	7.0
Final 10/7/25	6,350	1.5

Table 1: Data compiled and provided by Paul Cutter, City of Hart WWTP.

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winter operations. They wasted millions of gallons of sludge into the facilities 4-acre sludge holding pond, drawing and filling as much as possible to concentrate the solids, until the pond was full. An approximate 4 million gallons of decanted and thickened sludge filled the pond to an average depth of 7 feet. Mr. Cutter could barely row the boat across when he measured sludge depth, it was so thick.

TECHNOLOGY THAT WORKS

That's when a random visit from Ross Simpson of Eden Lakes LLC, began to change everything. Mr. Simpson, in not so many words, made that promise we operators know all too well, "I can reduce your sludge by half. You don't have to take anything out of service and while we're at it, let's also reduce electrical consumption in your aerated basin." Mr. Cutter was cautious, and as any tenured Class A Operator would respond, "PROVE IT."

On September 2, Mr. Simpson and staff installed Eden Lakes "PrO2 System" into the sludge holding pond. Mr. Simpson agreed to install as a one-month trial for the city, and he hasn't left as of February 2026.

From September 2 to October 7, 2025 the following reductions were achieved, and 2 million gallons of crystal-clear liquid was decanted back to the head of the plant.

Proprietary PrO2 technology offers a novel approach to wastewater treatment by fundamentally altering water chemistry. Through its process, specially treated "PrO2 water" is generated and introduced into the facility enhancing the conditions for microbial activity. Unlike traditional aeration systems, PrO2 increases the surface area available to both existing and supplemented microbiology, which accelerates the reduction of organic material and leads to significant advantages in many wastewater treatment processes. (Simpson, 2026)

The entire unit comes in an 8-foot covered trailer and draws no more than 50 amps of electricity at full capacity, during Michigan's coldest winter in years. Two "legs" can be run off one unit. Each "leg" is about the size of a garden hose and culminates with a patented delivery device

Simpson designed specifically for pond, lake and wastewater sedimentation. During the initial experiment one leg was in the sludge pond and the other was in the aeration basin, each running at five gallons per minute, the highest setting. While volatiles were being consumed in the sludge pond, Mr. Cutter noticed that his blowers to the aeration basin had all ramped down to the lowest setting on their VFDS, only remaining on for mixing purposes.

SAVINGS TO SYSTEM

Further research is being conducted, at the writing of this article. However, early predictions and cost savings estimates expressed by Mr. Cutter are staggering. He strongly believes that he will not have to haul biosolids offsite for the first time in decades. There are still many findings he believes that will come from this that have not yet been seen. Initial tests of the supernatant from the sludge pond indicate that he may be able to utilize that water as an ammonia source (NH₃), in lieu of spending thousands of dollars on chemical.

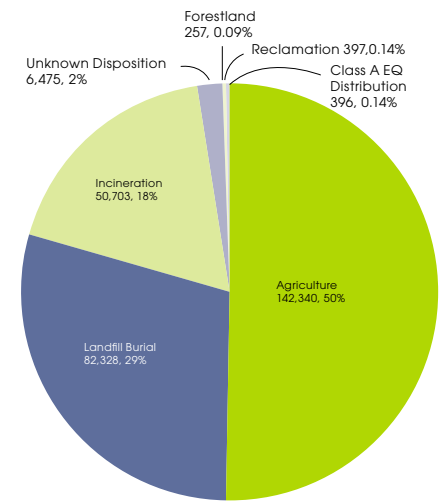
Mr. Cutter is now gladly compensating Eden Lakes for their equipment and time. He has freed up a portion of his treatment plant to allow Eden Lakes staff to conduct further research in a real-world setting, benefiting both parties for a host of reasons. Mr. Cutter is still counting the ways this cold call visit from Mr. Simpson has saved the City. Currently, he believes the City will be able to save over half their budgeted Biosolids monies this year, perhaps even more once energy costs and other costs are factored in. Sometimes taking that chance on new Tech, just might be worth it.

QUICK FACTS:

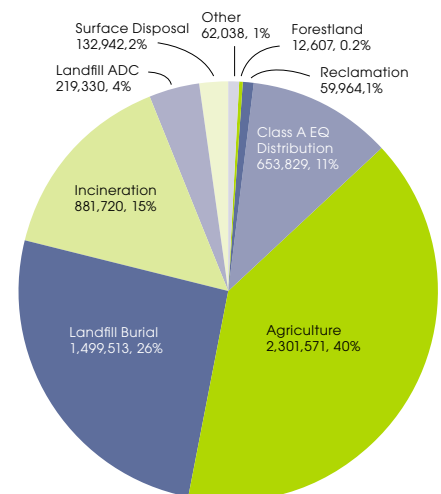
- Biosolids land applied in Michigan contain 50% or more VSS. (EGLE, 2025)
- Michigan produces around 300,000 dry US tons of sludge annually. (EGLE, 2025)
- Around 50% of Michigan Biosolids are land applied. (EGLE, 2025)
- Less than half of a percent of the total acres of harvested cropland in Michigan, is used for biosolids application. (EGLE, 2025)
- Nationally, around 40% of Biosolids are land applied. (Beecher et al., 2022) ●

“ MR. SIMPSON, IN NOT SO MANY WORDS, MADE THAT PROMISE WE OPERATORS KNOW ALL TOO WELL, 'I CAN REDUCE YOUR SLUDGE BY HALF. YOU DON'T HAVE TO TAKE ANYTHING OUT OF SERVICE AND WHILE WE'RE AT IT, LET'S ALSO REDUCE ELECTRICAL CONSUMPTION IN YOUR AERATED BASIN.' ”

Michigan Biosolids Use & Disposal 2018
(dry US tons, %) - Total: 282,900



United States Biosolids Use & Disposal 2018
(dry metric tons, %) - Total: 5,823,000



Beecher, Ned.; Juliana Beecher; Janine Burke-Wells; Maile Lono-Batura; Nora Goldstein; Greg Kester; and Bill Toffey. 2022. National Biosolids Data Project: Biosolids managements in the U.S. <https://www.biosolidsdata.org>, accessed [(01.21.2026)]

Figure 1 & 2: 2018 breakdown of biosolids disposal. (Beecher et al., 2022)

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RURAL AMERICA RELIES ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT



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Small and rural communities rely on access to affordable loan and grant opportunities through USDA Rural Development to make repairs, upgrades, and to build new critical infrastructure for their communities.

While affordable financing is a vital component for these communities, it is not the complete solution. After these projects are completed, the need for training for water and wastewater operators does not go away. Technical assistance ensures the government's and public's investment is secured. For small and rural communities to remain sustainable, they need ongoing training and technical assistance.

Last year, Circuit Riders directly helped to protect the health and safety of 30,721,691 people - 42% of rural America.

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Americans Live in a Rural Community

Technical assistance for small and rural communities includes providing training, energy audits, certification, financial management, environmental compliance, governance, and on-site technical assistance necessary to ensure that water and wastewater facilities operate at the highest possible level. Through the grants provided through USDA WEP, these services are provided at no cost through technical assistance providers like NRWA and its State Affiliates. The loss of funding for this essential technical assistance will jeopardize the sustainability of rural water systems and their communities. System managers will be forced to choose between not addressing ongoing operational and management issues or contracting for these services at steep costs.

WEP is instrumental in helping rural America maintain affordable water access for all rural people, and it is imperative that Rural Water's voice and priorities are heard within the Halls of Congress and within our nation's leadership. Through our combined thousands of rural leaders from every state, we can ensure Congress and the Trump Administration know that WEP is the trusted partner for rural America and must be maintained.

USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT WATER & ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS (WEP)

State Rural Water Associations in partnership with USDA RD WEP provide the following technical assistance to rural communities:

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Disaster Recovery Circuit Rider Program

Wastewater Technical Assistance and Training Program

NRWA Apprenticeship Program

Manufactured Housing Program

Energy Efficiency Program

Decentralized Wastewater Technical Assistance and Training Program

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RURAL AMERICA DESERVES RURAL DEVELOPMENT

“From a cultural and spiritual standpoint water is very sacred to the Ute Mountain Ute people and the funding provided by USDA RD has allowed upgrades and extensions of water and wastewater lines. USDA project funding for the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and the support of technical assistance from other supporting agencies drives our growing community.”

-Bernadette Cuthair, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Director of Planning & Development



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IMPACT IN ACTION

The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe has lived on the Ute Mountain Ute Reservation located in Montezuma, County in

Colorado for more than 140 years. The community has a median household income (MHI) of \$43,466, compared to the state's overall MHI of \$89,302.

The Ute Mountain Public Works Department is responsible for not only the water and distribution systems, wastewater collection and oversight of their ten lagoons, but are also responsible for repairs to water services i.e., water heaters and faucet replacement within the tribal homes as well as sewer issues associated with septic tanks and leach fields. They perform most all water testing, utility location and construction oversight.

Since 2016, USDA Rural Development has provided over \$15 million in WEP funding to the Tribe in both Colorado and Utah, helping fund much needed improvements.

The Tribe currently has in place a 9-phase project, only one of which is completed, to replace 20 total miles of water main line. The project started in 2019 when Ute Tribal Elders met with USDA Rural Development staff to discuss the federal funding necessary to help their disadvantaged community make upgrades to their community's utilities.

USDA Rural Development has committed to funding the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe a minimum of \$2 million per year for 10 years.

CALL TO ACTION

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Rural Development will continue to play a vital role in modernizing, preserving, and protecting rural America's infrastructure and public health. You can help secure its future today by signing the pledge and writing to your Congressional representatives today.

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The Village of Elberta

A Village Built by Rail, Shaped by Water, and Sustained by Community



Situated along the Lake Michigan shoreline at the southern end of Grand Traverse Bay, the Village of Elberta is a small community with a history far larger than its footprint. Though quiet today, Elberta once stood at the center of a vital transportation and maritime network that helped move people, goods, and industry across the Great Lakes.

Founded in the late 1800s, Elberta grew rapidly with the arrival of the **Ann Arbor Railroad**, which established the village as a rail-to-ferry terminal connecting Michigan to Wisconsin. Rail cars and passengers arrived by train and were loaded directly onto ferries for the crossing of Lake Michigan – an engineering and logistical feat that made Elberta one of Michigan’s busiest rail-to-ferry ports.

At its peak, Elberta supported a workforce and level of activity that far exceeded what its

population might suggest today. The docks, rail yards, ferry slips, and shoreline were alive with movement, noise, and purpose – shaping the daily lives of generations of residents.

A WORKING TOWN FORGED BY RESPONSIBILITY

For decades, life in Elberta revolved around work tied directly to Lake Michigan and the railroad. Families depended on physically demanding jobs that required reliability, skill, and teamwork. In a village this size, coworkers were also neighbors, and success depended on people showing up and doing their part.

This same sense of responsibility extended beyond industry and commerce to safety on the water itself.

One of the most important – and often overlooked – parts of Elberta’s

history is the **Elberta Life Saving Station**. Established as part of the U.S. Life-Saving Service, a predecessor to the modern Coast Guard, the station played a critical role during an era when travel on the Great Lakes was dangerous and shipwrecks were common.

Crews stationed there patrolled the shoreline and responded to maritime emergencies, often launching small boats into violent storms or freezing conditions to rescue sailors and passengers in distress. These rescues demanded courage, physical endurance, and an unwavering commitment to protecting life – values deeply ingrained in the Elberta community.

Much like the railroad workers, the life-saving crews embodied the village’s working-class ethic: dependable, resilient, and ready to act when needed.



DID YOU KNOW?

Elberta was once one of Michigan's most important **rail-to-ferry ports**. Entire railroad cars were loaded onto ferries bound for Wisconsin. The Elberta Life Saving Station was part of the **U.S. Life-Saving Service**. Crews performed rescues during severe storms and winter conditions. The station now serves as a **community and cultural gathering space**.

CHANGE, RESILIENCE, AND REINVENTION

As transportation patterns shifted and rail ferry operations declined, Elberta – like many rural Michigan communities – faced a turning point. The industry that built the town slowly faded, but the people who called it home remained.

Rather than disappearing, Elberta adapted.

The railroad yards quieted, and the shoreline that once bustled with industrial activity gradually took on new meaning. Historic structures remained, including the Life Saving Station, which no longer launches rescue missions but continues to serve the community in a different way.

Today, the Life Saving Station stands preserved and repurposed as a community and cultural space – a place for gatherings, events, and reflection. Its continued presence along the water serves as a powerful symbol of Elberta's ability to honor its past while embracing new roles.

A VILLAGE DEFINED BY PLACE

Elberta's setting is one of its greatest assets. Framed by Lake Michigan, forests, and nearby trails, the village offers a quiet lifestyle rooted in natural beauty and a strong sense of place.

Residents and visitors alike value:

- Lake Michigan sunsets and waterfront access
- A walkable village layout shaped by history
- Access to outdoor recreation and nearby communities
- A slower pace built on connection and continuity

Seasonal tourism brings renewed energy during warmer months, while year-round residents provide the stability and stewardship that carry the village through every season.

THE STRENGTH OF A SMALL COMMUNITY

What truly defines Elberta is its people. In small villages, community involvement is essential, not optional. Residents support local events, preserve historic spaces, and take pride in maintaining the character of the place they call home.



TODAY, THE LIFE SAVING STATION STANDS PRESERVED AND REPURPOSED AS A COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL SPACE – A PLACE FOR GATHERINGS, EVENTS, AND REFLECTION. ITS CONTINUED PRESENCE ALONG THE WATER SERVES AS A POWERFUL SYMBOL OF ELBERTA'S ABILITY TO HONOR ITS PAST WHILE EMBRACING NEW ROLES.

● COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

There is a shared understanding that:

- History matters and should be preserved
- Change should be thoughtful and deliberate
- Small communities thrive when people work together

These values – formed during Elberta’s railroad and maritime eras – continue to guide the village today.

LOOKING AHEAD WITHOUT FORGETTING WHERE IT STARTED

Like many rural communities, Elberta continues to balance preservation with progress. By honoring its railroad heritage, maintaining landmarks like the Life Saving Station, and embracing its natural setting, the village remains an important part of Michigan’s cultural landscape.

Elberta’s story is one of service, resilience, and adaptation. Built by rail, shaped by Lake Michigan, and sustained by its people, the village stands as a reminder that small communities are not defined by their size, but by their history, pride, and commitment to one another. ●



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March 17	Women in Water & Wastewater Lunch	Mt. Pleasant

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March 9	Valve Maintenance & Fire Hydrant	Northville
March 10	Safe Drinking Water/Cross Connection/Water Meters	Northville
March 11	Bacti Sampling/Chemical Feed Pumps	Northville
March 12	Wells to Pumps/Water Main Repair and Tapping	Northville
March 13	Hazard Prevention	Northville
March 30	Valve Maintenance & Fire Hydrant	Mt. Pleasant
March 30 – April 3	Water Operators School	Mt. Pleasant
March 31	Safe Drinking Water/Cross Connection/Water Meters	Mt. Pleasant
April 1	Bacti Sampling/Chemical Feed Pumps	Mt. Pleasant
April 2	Wells to Pumps/Water Main Repair and Tapping	Mt. Pleasant
April 3	Hazard Prevention	Mt. Pleasant

WATER AND WASTEWATER MATH REVIEWS

March 24–25	2 Day Math	Warren
March 24–25	2 Day Math	ZOOM
April 1–2	2 Day Wastewater Math	West Branch
April 1–2	2 Day Wastewater Math	ZOOM
April 30 – May 1	2 Day Math	Okemos
May 4	One Day Math	Okemos
May 4	One Day Math	ZOOM

WASTEWATER REVIEWS

March 25–26	Advanced Wastewater Plant Operations	ZOOM
March 25–26	Advanced Wastewater Plant Operations	Okemos
April 29–30	Activated Sludge Process & Control	ZOOM
April 29–30	Activated Sludge Process & Control	Mt. Pleasant

WATER REVIEWS

April 7–9	3 Day S3 & S4 Review, Frankenmuth	
April 7–9	3 Day Limited Treatment	Battle Creek
April 14–15	2 Day Limited Treatment	Clare
April 14–15	2 Day Limited Treatment	ZOOM
April 14–15	2 Day S3 & S4 Review	Taylor
April 15–16	Distribution & Limited Treatment	Ishpeming
April 21–23	3 Day S1 & S2 Review	Bloomfield Hills
April 21–23	3 Day S3 & S4 Review	Bloomfield Hills
April 22–23	Lagoon Operations	Okemos
April 22–23	Lagoon Operations	ZOOM
April 28–29	2 Day S1 & S2 Review	Grand Rapids
April 28–29	2 Day S3 & S4 Review	Grand Rapids
April 28–29	2 Day S1 & S2 Review	ZOOM
April 28–29	2 Day S3 & S4 Review	ZOOM

OTHER CLASSES

March 11	Water Supply Cross Connection Report Workshop	Battle Creek
March 12	Water Supply Cross Connection Report Workshop	Mt. Pleasant
March 26	Submersible Pump	Flint
September 25	Submersible Pump	Flint
December 9–10	Hazard Control Conference, OPERATOR REG	Frankenmuth

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Blue Water Solutions	30-31	800-433-4332	www.blue-watersolutions.com
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Core & Main	20	586-323-8800	www.coreandmain.com
Dixon Engineering, Inc.	36	616-374-3221	www.dixonengineering.net
DLZ	21	248-681-7800	www.dlz.com
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EJ	3	800-626-4653	www.ejco.com
Fishbeck	36	800-456-3824	www.fishbeck.com
Fleis & Vandenbrink	35	616-977-1000	www.fveng.com
Giant Maintenance & Restoration	21	847-566-9188	https://giant2u.com
Harmsco Filtration Products	21	800-327-3248	www.harmsco.com
Hawkins Water Treatment	9	877-355-7876	www.hawkinsinc.com/groups/water-treatment
Headwater Companies	35		www.milansupply.com
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JGM Valve	38	248-926-6200	www.jgmvalve.com
JWC Environmental	4	877-873-4392	www.jwce.com
Kennedy Industries	22-23	248-684-1200	www.kennedyind.com
Kerr Pump & Supply	12	800-482-8259	www.kerrpump.com
L.D. Docsa	17	269-349-7675	www.lddocsa.com
Michigan Pipe & Valve	6	989-817-4331	www.michiganpipe.com
MissDig 811	21	906-789-3083	www.missdig811.org
Neptune Technology	3	281-794-3133	www.neptunetg.com
Peerless Midwest	43	616-527-0050	www.peerlessmidwest.com
Plummers Environmental, Inc.	8	616-877-3930	www.plummersenv.com
Raymer Co. Inc.	35	800-441-4943	www.raymerwaterwell.com
ROWE Professional Services Company	36	800-837-9131	www.rowepsc.com
SAK	2	651-263-0498	www.sakcompanies.com
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