The Power of an Association
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2012 – the Most Active Year Ever for NRWA’s Policy Agenda

Each year, NRWA and state rural water associations mobilize volunteer representatives from across the country, to petition the federal government and Congress support federal funding and policy that is most beneficial for small and rural community water priorities. This is our strength. By having thousands of small community representatives organize together with a common message, and petitioning the national government and legislature, we can be heard. Our success is directly related to our local volunteers’ ability to be active and persuasive.

The federal government and Congress are responsible for many important rural water issues including: circuit rider and technical assistance funding, water infrastructure funding (USDA, EPA State Revolving Funds, Reclamation, etc.), federal laws like the Safe Drinking Water Action (SDWA), the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Farm Bill, all drinking water and wastewater regulations, etc.

NRWA’s Board of Directors convenes each year to determine priorities and our positions on all relevant policy issues. Funding for circuit riders, technical assistance and water infrastructure remains our highest priority each year. However, in addition to advocating for funding, NRWA is the leading voice for regulatory and policy positions that are in the best interest for small and rural communities. NRWA Board Member and Regulatory Committee Chairman John Sasur (Three Rivers Fire District, Massachusetts), recently identified many of the polices we have been pressing in the last year saying, “Here is a list of NRWA accomplishments pursued for the benefit of small water and wastewater systems across America over the past year. We are most likely familiar with a number of individual policies, but this consolidated list is impressive, and this is just for the past year. It should be a vital part of our public education campaign. Each one of the thousands of members and potential members of Rural Water should be reminded of the financial benefit every water system receives from the hard work performed by NRWA at the national regulatory level. The benefit from regulatory relief in my water system alone is substantial.”

2012 Policy Initiatives

- H.R. 1427 & S. 2166 – SDWA technical assistance authorization legislation introduced in the House and Senate with bipartisan support. If enacted it would allow EPA technical assistance to be similar in award to the circuit rider funding and would allow EPA to fund technical assistance under continuing resolutions.

- USDA Section 1926(b) Protection – retain fair and limited federal protection of certain service areas – and assist members, state associations and municipal associations in resolution of policy conflicts. Assist in explanation of federal protection, and how protection works fairly for both the cities and the rural water supplies. Following current court cases expanding the coverage of the protection.
• State Revolving Loans Funds – supported increased funding for SRFs in collaboration with all other national water associations – resulting in approximately $2.4 billion in SRF funding.

• Cybersecurity – identify NRWA’s position on national cybersecurity legislation and collaborated with all other national water associations to prevent additional regulation of membership. Participated with Department of Homeland Security in adopting an approach to protection of water cyberinfrastructure.

• EPA Technical Assistance Funding – supported Congressional funding of $15 million in small community technical assistance funding. Promoted additional Congressional directives to ensure funding is most helpful to small and rural communities.

• H.R. 1340 & S. 1578 – supported House and Senate bipartisan legislation to allow for web publishing for Consumer Confidence Report (CCRs).

• CCR Mailing Reform – testified before the EPA CCR retrospective in favor of reinterpretation the SDWA to allow for web publishing of CCRs in lieu of mailing requirement. Possible change could be announced in January 2013.

• Total Coliform Rule (TCR) Reform – briefed the White House on the urgency of TCR implementation to repeal the identification of total coliform as an MCL and the subsequent public notification requirements. The administration is expected to release the final rule in January 2013.

• Release of Local Risk Plans on Internet – successfully petitioned EPA to reconsider policy to release local risk plans to the public.

• Lead Free Act – participated on federal advisory panel in support of interpreting law to not cover operations, maintenance, repair or calibration of components.

• Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) Rewrite – participating on several federal advisory panels in support of monitoring and public notice reform under rewrite of LCR rule expected summer 2013. Also opposing expansion of current limits of authority over private property under EPA mandates.

• Perchlorate Rule Development – participating on federal advisory panel on rule development. Supporting reasonable analysis of the science and strict compliance with SDWA authorities in standard development. Also supporting maximum reliance on SDWA flexibilities in final rule.

• Super Storm Sandy Assessment – participating with all water associations on post-storm assessment of emergency polices.

• Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring (UMCR) Relief – petitioning the EPA for reform and relief of small communities and consecutive communities in implementation of UMCR3.

• Hydraulic Fracturing Legislation – supporting legislation to retain state regulatory authority where appropriate for energy production.
• Gaseous Chlorine – supporting retention of use of gaseous chlorine where necessary to protect public health under Clean Air Act implementation and security legislation.

• Arsenic Rule Review – participated on federal advisory panel and filed comments on EPA’s congressionally directed review of current arsenic rule and its feasibility for small community compliance.

• EPA Climate Ready Water Utility Guidance – participated on federal advisory panel to determine guidance and ensure that EPA’s policy is non-regulatory.

• EPA Sustainability Guidance – participated on federal advisory panel on development of EPA guidance.

• Hexavalent Chromium Rule – petitioned the EPA to include all health effects studies in their analysis to regulate Hexavalent Chromium along with AWWA.

• Inherently Safer Technology – opposed federal authority to expand regulatory review of disinfection choices under the Clean Air Act and other legislation.

• Product Liability Protection for Water Contamination – opposed legislation to allow for special liability waivers of companies that contaminate ground water/drinking water sources (with all other national water associations).

• NPDES E-reporting Rule – appointed to advisory panel for EPA in implementing new reporting rule for POTWs.

• Numeric Nutrient Criteria (NNC) – supported Florida Rural Water Association and a coalition to allow for adoption of the state preferred NNC program. Supported legislation to allow of state primacy in determining NNC plans.

• CWA Citizens’ Suits Legislation – supported House legislation, H.R. 3544, to limit the authorities under the CWA for filing citizens’ suits against communities.

• SDWA Reform – supported Senator Inhofe’s legislation, S. 3038, the main legislative vehicle to reform the SDWA.

• USDA Tax Exemption of Guaranteed Loans – testified before the Congress in favor of legislation to establish this new funding instrument.

• Total Organic Content (TOC) Rule – petition U.S. Senators to reform the TOC standard and eliminate the current public notification requirements.

• Water Infrastructure Legislation – testified in Congress, supporting NRWA priorities in new legislation. NRWA supported legislation (H.R. 5320, The AQUA Act) has been the most advanced water infrastructure legislation in this last Congress.

• Waters of the United States – commented in opposition to EPA’s use of guidance in defining CWA scope with all other national water association. Agency has not finalized the guidance.
Details of all these policy positions are available at www.ruralwater.org/policies.htm