

FRESHWATER VOICES



2022: Issue 2

This Issue:

FUNDING - Getting it Where It's Needed Most
PAGE 2

Tips on Taking Action in Your Community
PAGE 3

Helping Detroit Communities Adapt to Increasing Rainfall
PAGE 5

Meet Our Environmental Fellows
PAGE 6

DRINKING WATER ACTION YOU CAN TAKE:

Does your community accept LIHWAP? Contact your City Manager or City Council Member and ask. If not, urge them to sign up!

NEW YORK DRINKING WATER WORK

"People are struggling, some for the first time ever, to pay their water bills and utilities as a result of financial burdens from the pandemic," stated Jill Ryan, Executive Director, Freshwater Future. The moratoria on water shutoffs put in place during the pandemic are starting to lift, leaving many susceptible to water bill debt and potential shutoffs. Fortunately, the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program, or LIHWAP, is a new federal program that provides funding and reconnects households' water and prevents shutoffs. This temporary program is slated to end September 30, 2023 or when money runs out.

Recognizing the need to quickly connect potential beneficiaries with the program to ensure continual access to clean water—a human right—we created a strategy to help New York residents enroll in the program. Crystal Gabriel, Community Program Assistant, visited 66 New York municipalities to increase enrollment in this program. With each visit, she inquired what each was doing to assist their residents with accessing these funds and identifying potential barriers to enrollment.

To help promote the program, Freshwater Future developed a flyer in English and Spanish that was distributed through Meals on Wheels and other programs, as well as at libraries, post offices, and popular public gathering places. Crystal also assisted people with the enrollment process, connecting them to resources such as scanners and one-on-one help.

As a result of this effort, water systems confirmed receiving payments on behalf of their customers, paying down arrears in water and sewerage bills of up to \$5,000 per family.



"After visiting so many communities, it feels great to know that Freshwater Future helped people keep water service by expanding enrollment in LIHWAP," shared Crystal Gabriel.

Now, we are looking at other states, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Ohio for opportunities to increase enrollment. Every state has created its own unique implementation plan for distributing the LIHWAP funding, including different application requirements, benefit limits, and promotional efforts in each state. Preliminary reports indicate that the program has been successful in ensuring people continue to have access to water service in most communities.





**The Time to
Act Is NOW!**

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WATER SYSTEM UPGRADES

Getting it Where It's Needed Most

Demand and support for infrastructure investment in the U.S. has resulted in an historic amount of federal funding available for infrastructure, including water systems, over the next five years. Available to local communities, these funds can cover stormwater, wastewater, and drinking water projects that reduce pollution from sewage and runoff and ensure safe drinking water. Projects like new water mains, lead pipe replacement, and wellhead protections can address local problems such as flooding and contaminated water. Funds will be distributed primarily through the State Revolving Fund (SRF), and modifications to the program significantly expands the use of grants, principal forgiveness, and flexible repayment terms. Additionally, 49% of all grants and forgivable loans are dedicated to disadvantaged communities.

Freshwater Future has been working with communities, especially those overburdened and disinvested, to help them navigate the complexities of the SRF program. We see this as a “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity to keep local water safe, clean, and affordable as well as use innovative technology to develop the best possible outcomes.

In the past, this funding program was underutilized and limited technical and hardship assistance kept small rural and disadvantaged communities from participating. Now, it is important that communities of all sizes seek out SRF funds within the next five years. Since these additional funds are time limited, **The Time to Act Is Now!**

What is the State Revolving Fund (SRF)?

The Federal government was the primary funder of American water infrastructure from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s. Everything changed, however, when Congress shifted the burden (1988) to local governments by creating the State Revolving Fund (SRF) to distribute low-interest loans to water utilities to fund local water system improvements. This application-based process varies from state to state, but always prioritizes funding for those with the most urgent needs through scoring and ranking of applications.

By creating the SRF, the federal government reduced its financial support of water infrastructure in favor of low-interest loans that would “revolve” earned interest back into the fund and grow the pot of money. Access to the fund has often been inequitable, leaving many small or disadvantaged communities without affordable solutions to address aging infrastructure. The 2021 infrastructure bill passed by Congress significantly increased funding for the next five years and aims to improve equitable access to disadvantaged communities.



2022 SUMMER VIRTUAL CONVENING

If you missed the summer virtual convening, the recording and slides can be accessed any time on our website:

freshwaterfuture.org/all-about-water



2022 Steering Committee Members

MaryAlice Adams - Project NEED Foundation
Michael Harris - Flint Community Lab
Tommie Johnson - City of Flint
Monica Lewis-Patrick - We the People of Detroit
Victoria Loong - We the People of Detroit
Candice Mushatt - Flint Community Lab
Tanya Myers-Phillips - Sugar Law Center
San Juana Olivares - Genesee Cty Hispanic Latino Collab
Rev. Edward Pinkney - Benton Harbor Comm Water Council
Junction Coalition
Royce Stephens - DREAMS
Cheryl Watson - Chicago Conservation Corp
Jeffrey Whitelow - Chicago Water Alliance
Gwendolyn Winston - Wisdom Institute



TAKE ACTION ON WATER ISSUES



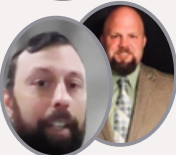
Virtual Summer Convening Federal, State, Community, and Contractor Focus

In June, the All About Water Steering Committee hosted an intensive virtual convening about essential aspects of accessing funds with the influx of investment coming.

An expert lineup of speakers from local, state, and federal levels shared their knowledge and insight on environmental justice, application processes, minority workforce development, and advocacy strategies for residents. Over 100 guests registered for the live event. **Stay tuned for more details on the Fall 2022 convening!**



Jonathan Nelson, U.S. EPA
"Federal Perspective: Updates on EPA's implementation of SRF and Tools for Monitoring State SRF Programs"



Eric Pocan and Paul McDonald, EGLE
"State Perspective: What is changing in Michigan's Program and how will new communities be addressed"



Jason Cole, Michigan Minority Contractors Association
"Contractor Focus: How to Break Into Government Contracts and Involving Young People in Work Force Development"



Nicholas Leonard, GLELC
"Community Involvement Focus: Advocating on SRF in Michigan (including DAC definition and beyond)"


Tips to Connect and Communicate with Local Officials **LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!!**

Do you want your community to replace lead water piping or address sewage backups during heavy rains? Whatever your local water concern, Freshwater Future has some tips to help you connect and communicate to get actions taken that benefit your community.

Clarify the water problem and solution that you want your local officials to implement. For example, if you're concerned about lead piping in the water system and delays in replacing it with safer materials, suggest your community apply for federal funds through SRF to replace pipes more quickly.

Identify the decision maker who is responsible for addressing this problem: **Mayor, City Manager, Water Utility Director, City Council Representative**, etc. Find out who has the authority to make the decision and implement the solution.

Consider what will motivate the decision makers to implement your desired action. Share the short and long term benefits for local economies and public health as a result of the recommended actions.

- 
- Communicate your concerns with a good old fashioned phone call.
 - Attend office hours or make an appointment to meet with officials in person at government offices.
 - Send an email stating your case and request a follow-up call or appointment.
 - Get your community involved, develop an online or paper petition to get others in your community that share and support the concerns and solutions for the water issue.
 - Present your questions and case at a public meeting, virtual or in person
 - Follow-up with the decision maker to either thank them for taking your recommended action or ongoing concerns about the decision.

Visit our website for a step-by-step plan template to ask your community to apply for federal funds for water system improvements - www.freshwaterfuture.org

WATER WORK

Moving Forward with New Websites and Databases



Alexis Smith
COMMUNITY DATABASE AND
TECH COORDINATOR

Twelve community groups expanded their ability to engage people on critical water issues thanks to the development of new websites and databases. The technology tools were developed through Freshwater Future's Voice Builder program funded by the Water Funders Initiative and the Park Foundation.

Alexis Smith, Technology Coordinator for the program, shared "while each group is at a different place organizationally, they are all growing to meet their own needs. The foundational technology tools are building the capacity of groups to be able to communicate both with their members and to other priority audiences such as elected officials."

VOICE BUILDER GRANTEES

Benton Harbor Community Water Council
Chicago Water Alliance
Flint Community Lab
Junction Coalition
Kettle Lakes Association
Michigan's Citizens for Water Conservation
Michigan PFAS Alliance
Project NEED Foundation
Water Is Life Festival
Water Walkers
We the People of Detroit
Wisdom Institute

WEBSITE SPOTLIGHTS!

Visit these groups online to learn more about what they are doing to protect our water resources!

Water Is Life Festival
waterislife festival.org



Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation
savemewater.org

Flint Community Lab
flintcommunitylab.org



ADAPTING AND FINDING SOLUTIONS

Flood Focus App: Helping Detroit Communities Adapt to Increasing Rainfall



Last July, six inches of rain inundated Detroit, leaving many neighborhoods with flooded streets and basements. This summer, groups in the Detroit area like West Grand Boulevard Collaborative, Friends of Chandler Park, and others are working with Freshwater Future to collect data on flooding after rains using the Flood Focus App to help the community find solutions to adapt, change, and minimize the harmful effects.

Reducing flood risks requires understanding where flooding occurs most frequently so that the most helpful solutions can be created in the best locations to solve the problems. Using the Flood Focus App, partner groups are documenting where rainfall impacts their neighborhood and residences. Then, using maps provided by Freshwater Future, that displays the data collected, community members can identify where green infrastructure, such as rain gardens, permeable paving, or runoff basins can be placed to reduce flooding.

Cassandra Floyd with West Grand Boulevard Collaborative experienced the flooding last summer, and shared “this app is much needed, particularly for the West Grand Boulevard and surrounding neighborhoods (Virginia Park, LaSalle Gardens and Northwestern Goldberg neighborhoods). These communities are made up of historic homes and businesses with antiquated infrastructure that’s never been addressed to combat flooding. With the Flood Focus App (which I was able to use before the COVID pandemic) I was able to report floods while on the move. The App pinpointed the location, and all I had to do was take a photo and upload it with a description of the severity of the flood (how wide, how deep etc). Awesome app to be the eyes and ears for community to address flooding problems.”

Extreme rain events are becoming more frequent. These rain events carry a hefty price tag in property damage, and potentially higher taxes and water bills. Using the information collected with the Flood Focus App, Freshwater Future is proud to help Detroit communities speed up progress on flooding issues.

If your organization or community group is interested in using this innovative app to track flooding events, contact us at info@freshwaterfuture.org or call 231-348-8200.

2023-2025 Strategic Planning

Freshwater Future is working on a new Strategic Plan to guide our work for the coming 3 years. These plans ensure we align our short and long term goals strategically based on the needs of our members and partners. Please take a few minutes to provide your feedback to the process by answer some quick questions at <https://freshwaterfuture.org/2023-2025-strategic-planning/>

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FRESHWATER FUTURE HOSTS TWO ENVIRONMENTAL FELLOWS

Freshwater Future is proud to host two graduate students, Anna Bunting and Carla López Lloreda, from the Environmental Fellows Program this summer. The Environmental Fellows Program operates out of the Yale School of the Environment, and provides opportunities for historically underrepresented students in the environmental workforce to gain work experience in environmental philanthropies, the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, and government agencies.



Anna Bunting

This summer Anna worked on rolling out Freshwater Future's Flood Focus app in Detroit communities and supporting local partner organizations to track and address flooding. She also contributed to Freshwater Future's water affordability work to increase access to the new Low Income Household Water Assistance Program with public water supplies.

Carla worked on supporting efforts to analyze lead data from drinking water in Michigan communities as well as helped identify priority disadvantaged communities for support. She supported outreach and education efforts to marginalized Hispanic and Latino communities. Both Anna and Carla created communications materials for outreach around lead in water systems as well as other Freshwater Future advocacy efforts.



Carla López Lloreda

SHOW-OFF YOUR CORNER OF THE GREAT LAKES: Apply to Host a Freshwater Future Planning Meeting

Freshwater Future staff members have worked remotely from around the Great Lakes region since 2007. We gather in person a few times a year to develop work strategies, plans, and action priorities. Visiting different locations helps us to learn and experience the water issues throughout the region. If you are interested in sharing your local knowledge for future Freshwater Future meetings, you are eligible to receive a stipend. To find out more about how to apply to become a host city or group, contact info@freshwaterfuture.org to learn more.



Freshwater Future staff gathered in Toledo, Ohio in June for focused work planning, providing an opportunity to see the Maumee River and Maumee Bay.

THANK YOU to All of Our Donors from March 16, 2022 through July 31, 2022

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Brant Waterways Foundation
Butte des Morts Conservation Club
Citizens for a Safe & Clean Lake Superior
Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River Inc.
Environment North
Friends Of Kingston Inner Harbour
Grosse Ile Nature & Land Conservancy
Kent Environmental Council
Kettle Lakes Association
League Of Women Voters Lake Michigan
Region
Nearby Nature Milwaukee
Presque Isle Audubon Society
Rescue Lake Simcoe Charitable Foundation
Sturgeon For Tomorrow Black Lake
Chapter
Walloon Lake Association and Conservancy
WaterLegacy
West Grand Boulevard Collaborative

Flint Community Lab

Anastasia Melnik

Water Is Life Festival

April Burke
Great Lakes PFAS Action Network
Kenlea Pebbles and Martin Waymire
Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition
National Wildlife Federation Great Lakes
Resource Center
Nutcuse Vegan Meats
Straits of Mackinac Alliance

VOLUNTEERS

Nancy Staley

REMEMBERING OUR STRONG GREAT LAKES SUPPORTERS



Edward "Ted" Frey, Jr.

Freshwater Future lost a friend of the Great Lakes and strong supporter with the passing of Ted Frey, Jr. in April. Ted had a huge impact on philanthropy and building the nonprofit sector in Michigan. He was a mentor to us, providing advice on how to build a solid foundation for the organization and always encouraging innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to make a difference. We will miss Ted's guidance and forward thinking.



Ruth "Tucker" Harris

We are saddened to learn of the passing of Ruth "Tucker" Harris this past winter. Tucker along with her husband Jack were long-time supporters of Freshwater Future and many Northern Michigan environmental groups protecting water resources. She was an inspiring advocate for water, wildlife, and nature as well as a champion of social causes, youth, and the arts. Jill Ryan, Executive Director, reflects "I will miss paddling the Indian River spreads and Burt Lake with Tucker and learning from her wisdom about our changing environment over the years."



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Fall Cycle Project Grants Deadline September 30, 2022

Great News! We have an additional \$50,000 available in grant funds for our fall cycle. Application deadline is September 30, 2022. If you have questions or would like to learn more about our grants programs, email laurie@freshwaterfuture.org or go to freshwaterfuture.org/grants.



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Freshwater Future's 2021 Annual Report Available in September

Our 2021 annual report highlights our work and impact in the Great Lakes Region to protect water resources and ensure drinking water is clean, safe, and affordable. Go to freshwaterfuture.org/about and click on reports and plans to view or email leslie@freshwaterfuture.org to request a print copy.

