



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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DEQ awards over \$1.3 Million in stimulus funding to Benton and Delcambre

BATON ROUGE – Today, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality awarded \$418,000 to Benton and \$900,000 to Delcambre to go toward wastewater improvement projects. The award represents the next in a series of 55 total awards that the department will be issuing to cities and municipalities across the state.

DEQ received approximately \$43 million from the U.S. EPA as part of the federal stimulus package for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, also known as CWSRF, to support wastewater improvement and “green infrastructure” projects.

“We’re using this money to address wastewater treatment concerns across the entire state,” said DEQ Secretary Harold Leggett. “We know by the number of applications we received that the wastewater infrastructure throughout the state, and the nation for that matter, is in dire need of repair. Since that issue is a top priority, we made a concerted effort to get funding to those municipalities that met the criteria set by the department.”

Benton, located in Bossier Parish, is receiving funding for improvements to its existing wastewater treatment facility. As part of the plan, Benton is addressing the algae growth problem that has plagued its treatment lagoon. A system cover will be installed over half of the last cell in the lagoon. The cover will allow for a more consistent ambient temperature, facilitate settling of particles and eliminate algae growth prior to discharge. Additional improvements include rehabilitation of the lagoon levees to prevent erosion, and the addition of a filter system gate valve to allow the operator to clean and maintain filters more efficiently.

Delcambre, located in Vermilion Parish, is receiving funding for improvements to the Rock Reed Wastewater Treatment Facility. As part of the plan, the existing rocks from the filter cells will be removed, clay bottoms will be reshaped, a liner will be constructed, short sheet piles around the perimeter of the pond will be installed, and rocks will be cleaned and reinstalled. This will allow the town to recover treatment capabilities that were lost during the tidal surge that occurred during Hurricane Rita when the facility became overloaded with silt and water.

To ensure the benefits from the stimulus package were felt statewide, the department looked at compliance issues and regional diversity to ensure there would be widespread sewer system improvements across the state. The department also looked at projects where there was a possibility to eliminate any imminent threats to human health or the environment. Financial constraints were also taken under consideration. Communities that did not have the ability to repay loans were targeted. The average median household income for the 55 selected municipalities is \$22,785; well below the state’s median household income. Additionally, DEQ considered criteria such as project costs, population served, requested amount, a community’s ability to assume additional debt, and projects that would provide economic recovery.

The federal stimulus package allows states to keep up to four percent of their award. The DEQ opted to keep none of the allowable administrative set-aside dollars; choosing instead to direct the stimulus funds to support wastewater improvement projects across the state.

The 55 selected municipalities across 42 parishes do not have to repay their “loan awards” because the DEQ is allowing the 55 recipient municipalities to receive a zero percent interest loan with 100 percent principal forgiveness. However, each of the 55 recipients must go through the standard loan process, since the CWSRF program is not set up to offer grants.