

“WHAT IS A RURAL WATER SYSTEM AND HOW DOES IT WORK”?

In several areas of rural Nebraska, very successful public projects have been constructed for the purpose of providing high quality water to homes and businesses for a monthly fee.

Q. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTING RURAL WATER

A. In compliance with State law, Nebraska’s 23 Natural Resource Districts are liable for high quality water supplies out of city limits. The Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District has successfully completed two projects. Logan East Rural Water System in the Oakland/Scribner area and the Wau-Col Regional Water System in the Wausa/Coleridge area.

Q. WHAT ARE STEPS NECESSARY TO PLAN, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCT

A. If sufficient “potential customer interest” is shown, the LENRD Board of Directors may authorize a preliminary engineering study to analyze major components.

Q. MANY CRITICAL ENGINEERING DETAILS ARE ADDRESSED IN THE STUDY

A. For example, boundary surveys, voluntary easement descriptions, floodplain and environmental permits, geotech investigations and many related issues are included.

Q. WHO PAYS FOR THE PRELIMINARY ENGINEERING STUDY

A. The project is for the benefit of those within a specific geographic area. Landowners within the specific geographic area are asked to complete a survey questionnaire to gather information to determine the feasibility of the project. Those landowners are also asked to include a survey fee with the questionnaire. Those fees, along with potential grants pay for the preliminary engineering study.

Q. IF THE PRELIMINARY STUDY IS POSITIVE, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

A. The preliminary study will be completed in seven months. USDA-Rural Development hopefully will also complete their basic analysis – to fund the project – or not, in this time frame. If the analysis is positive, LENRD Board of Directors will then request final engineering bids and the project will go forward.

Q. WHAT DETERMINES IF A PROJECT IS CONSTRUCTED – OR NOT

A. A reasonable amount of interest must be shown from rural communities and rural populations who will be customers.

Q. WHAT ARE THOSE COMPONENTS

A. Reliable, long term source of groundwater is critical as well as enough customers to generate revenue for USDA loan pay back, if needed. LENRD legally defines scope of the service area (called IPA-Improvement Project Area) which will include water tank site and general layout for the buried pipeline distribution system.

Q. *WHY IS THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FUNDING TO PLAN AND CONSTRUCT*

A. USDA-Rural Development determines if low interest loans or grants qualify based on economic analysis of household incomes.

Q. *WHO PROVIDES FUNDING FOR SUCH LARGE PUBLIC PROJECTS*

A. Most common source of funding is the US Department of Agriculture – Rural Development. Funds are provided to a qualified project in the form of grants and loans. The loans are paid back over a 40 year period with proceeds of the monthly water billings.

Q. *WHAT IS THE COMMON METHOD OF WATER DELIVERY TO CUSTOMERS*

A. All water is delivered by buried pipeline (plastic pipe size ranges from 2”-12” in diameter)

Q. *HOW LONG WILL THE PROJECT TAKE TO COMPLETE*

A. From start to finish most likely 4-5 years.

Q. *IS RURAL WATER CONSIDERED A “GRASSROOTS EFFORT”*

A. Yes, these systems are totally driven by local citizens who want high quality drinking water. It is NOT a project that any government will force upon people. Partnerships are critical – agencies such as NRD and USDA are available to offer advice and support.

Q. *WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE “CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE”*

A. This group is created with oversight of the LENRD Board of Directors and consists of “water users – customers” who organize to manage day to day operations of the system. Once organized the Advisory Committee meets once a month and reports directly to the full LENRD Board.

Q. *HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO “HOOK ON” TO RURAL WATER*

A. A monthly fee is charged to each user. There is a fixed minimum and billing is based upon gallons consumed by each user. There is also a ONE TIME hook up fee (to be determined by the Advisory Board – this helps pay for engineering studies and construction costs) and each user is eventually financially responsible for hook ups to homes or business from the supply lines.

Q. *DO I NEED TO “HOOK ON” TO THE RURAL WATER SYSTEM*

A. Domestic water supply may be provided to homes, businesses and livestock operations on a voluntary basis. Current wells or water supplies do not need to be abandoned. However, it is advantageous to hook on to the system at the beginning of construction. After the project is completed hook on fees will increase due to additional planning and construction costs.

Q. *HOW DO I SUPPORT RURAL WATER*

A. Attend meetings promoting and organizing rural water systems conducted by the LENRD, USDA-Rural Development, and encourage neighbors to become customers. Ask questions, learn as much as you can and just pass it on. Rural Water is a GOOD DEAL!