New water funding authorized under massive House bill

The House of Representatives unanimously approved a significant water policy bill that includes a number of industry priorities on drinking water and other provisions impacting water infrastructure funding. America’s Water Infrastructure Act, bill S. 3021, combines two versions of Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) legislation developed earlier this year by the House and Senate, respectively, with a Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) reform bill approved last summer by the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

S. 3021 is a bipartisan compromise that includes components of all three bills.

Some priorities of the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies included in the bill are summarized below. Additional details about specific provisions in the bill can be found in ANWA’s Congressional Report and in a summary of the bill developed by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

RELATED: New private activity bond legislation introduced in Senate

Drinking water infrastructure programs

America’s Water Infrastructure Act includes a three-year, $4.424 billion reauthorization of the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF). The bill also makes a number of programmatic changes to the program, such as stretching loan repayment periods from 20 to 30 years (or 40 years in the case of disadvantaged communities), and extending through 2023 EPA’s existing “Buy-American” rules that apply to DWSRF-funded projects.

Also included is a two-year, $108 million reauthorization of EPA’s Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program, while eliminating its status as a “pilot” program.

Finally, the bill also includes a two-year, $8 million authorization for a new EPA Drinking Water System Infrastructure Resilience and Sustainability program that will offer grants to help small or disadvantaged communities.
communities prepare their drinking water infrastructure for threats like floods, hurricanes and hydrologic changes.

Additionally, S. 3021 authorizes two new EPA grant programs to reduce lead in schools and a third to promote water sector workforce development. More information can be found here.

CCRs to be upgraded with a guaranteed electronic delivery option

EPA is directed to issue revisions to its consumer confidence report (CCR) regulations within 24 months with the goal of increasing the "readability, clarity, and understandability" of the reports. As part of this process, EPA must allow the option for electronic CCR delivery consistent with current guidelines.

The revised rule must mandate "biannual" CCR delivery to customers of water systems serving more than 10,000 people, though EPA will determine the scope of this requirement, with stakeholder input, during the rulemaking process. Find more information here.

Risk and resiliency assessments to replace vulnerability assessments

- Current rules regarding the completion of facility vulnerability assessments (VA) are eliminated. In their place, beginning in 2020 community water systems must certify to EPA that they have completed an expanded "risk and resiliency assessment" that will consider risks posed by a range of threats, from natural disasters to terrorist attacks.
- Unlike VAs, the new assessments will not be forwarded to EPA for storage or review. Every five years, utilities will be required to certify to EPA that they have reviewed their assessment and made any necessary updates. Based on the results of the assessment, water systems will complete (and certify completion of) emergency response plans that outline how the system would respond to defined threats.
- In place of completing new assessments and response plans, water systems will have the option of certifying their adherence to similar all-hazards technical standards developed by the water sector, such as the American Water Works Association's J100 standard.
- Find more information here.

Bill includes only limited SRF WIN provisions

- The bill largely excludes a controversial plan known as the SRF WIN Act that AMWA and other water sector organizations warned would underfund the WIFIA program.
- As originally proposed, SRF WIN would have created a separate, $1 billion branch of WIFIA exclusively for use by states - some of which would be entitled to rock-bottom interest rates as low as half the Treasury rate. This and other loan preferences would have been offered to states but withheld from WIFIA applicants from individual communities.
- The final bill includes only a barebones version of some modest SRF WIN language, such as clarifying that no additional environmental reviews are required of state projects, providing an expedited 180-day application review timeframe for states and allowing a WIFIA loan to cover the entire cost of all projects compiled into a state's application.
- The bill would authorize an additional $5 million per year for state-complied projects, only if Congress first funds WIFIA and the SRF programs at or above a prescribed level in a given year.

For more information, visit https://www.amwa.net/article/congress-scales-back-srf-win.

According to AMWA, the bill will now move on to the Senate, where it is expected to pass without amendment in the coming weeks.

Sources: AMWA

Tags: America's Water Infrastructure Act

SHARE THIS POST

MORE IN PUBLIC UTILITY FINANCE