

Wisconsin Clean Water News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Contact: Jennifer Feyerherm, Sierra Club, (608) 257-4994

Monday, September 20, 2004

Lynn Broaddus, FMR, (414) 287-0207

Unions, Groups say Clean Water Spending Cuts Threaten Jobs, Health- Diverse Coalition Calls on Senate to Restore Clean Water Funds

Madison, WI – A broad coalition of state and local governments, labor, construction, and environmental and public health groups including the Milwaukee Area Labor Council, the Sierra Club, and Friends of Milwaukee Rivers urged Senators Kohl and Feingold to keep up the fight against President Bush and Congress slashing federal clean water spending by \$500 million today. This one-third cut could lead to more sewage overflows, polluted water, disease outbreaks, and a loss of nearly 50,000 jobs, 755 in Wisconsin. This warning comes as the Senate Appropriations Committee considers the vote.

“The May sewage dumping leaves no doubt that the greater Milwaukee region needs to improve its sewerage system. It is a cruel joke that the Bush administration is cutting funds when we need it the most,” says Lynn Broaddus, Executive Director of Friends of Milwaukee’s Rivers. “This funding is a vital investment that protects our health, our drinking water, and creates jobs.”

While water quality and public health are key concerns, the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) is also a jobs program. At historic spending levels, federal clean water spending has directly lead to the creation of an estimated 400,000 highly skilled jobs for engineers, contractors, manufacturers, administrators, and construction workers in communities throughout the nation.

“The condition of our nation’s clean water infrastructure will continue to diminish rapidly unless the federal share of investment is substantially increased for a number of years,” says John Goldstein, President of the Milwaukee County Labor Council. “If this funding is lost, we will lose 755 good paying jobs and clean water here in Wisconsin.”

Despite the program’s popularity and success, the House Appropriations Committee failed to restore Clean Water SRF funding when it passed the VA-HUD spending bill in July. With the Senate expected to take up the VA-HUD bill soon, the coalition is urging the Appropriations Subcommittee to reject the deep cuts in clean water spending and fully restore a half-billion dollars in federal funding to the program.

MORE

Clean Water Funding Needed, Page Two

"Cutting \$500 million from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund that protects our waters, while spending \$200 billion on a futile war dramatically points out how upside down our

priorities are. Not only must congress restore these federal funds, but it ought to increase the funding to help our nation's utilities simply keep up with the daunting task of cleaning our waters,” said Dale Olen of Germantown, Sierra Club Clean Water expert.

If the Senate does not restore money to the Clean Water SRF, Wisconsin will lose \$13.3 million in funding. With the State 20% matching funds, the total loss will be \$16 million. Currently, the state has 194 of Clean Water SRF projects on its priority list awaiting money. With less funding, fewer of these projects will be completed. This cut would lead to a loss of \$16 million in Wisconsin, while there is a need for \$542 million for new projects needing funding.

Millions of Americans get sick every year from swimming in or drinking water contaminated with raw or inadequately treated sewage. 137 people died in Milwaukee during the 1993 cryptosporidium outbreak caused when sewage got in the drinking water supply.

“The fact that you can drink the water and not worry is because of this funding,” says Brett Hulse, Sierra Club Midwest Representative and author of “Danger on Tap.” “But the Bush administration and Congress are poised to cut this funding. That means more sewer overflows, and higher taxes for Wisconsin. We thank Senators Kohl and Feingold for their efforts to protect this funding for clean lakes and safe drinking water.”

The report is available on-line at www.nrdc.org/media/docs/040915.pdf and votes are expected in the U.S. Senate starting on Tuesday.

###