



west virginia department of environmental protection

Several West Virginia communities are already hard at work upgrading their wastewater treatment facilities to meet new Chesapeake Bay water quality standards.

Eight West Virginia Eastern Panhandle counties -- Pendleton, Grant, Mineral, Hardy, Hampshire, Morgan, Berkeley and Jefferson -- are part of the 64,000-square mile Chesapeake Bay Watershed. The Potomac River, which flows through the state's Eastern Panhandle, drains into the Bay.

The new regulations address reductions in nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment, following President Obama's 2009 Executive Order declaring the Chesapeake Bay a national treasure and calling for the natural sustainability of its watershed. The reductions are necessary to achieve water quality standards for dissolved oxygen, water clarity and chlorophyll, which is a measure of algae.

"From a funding side of things, we have already closed on loans with Charles Town, Shepherdstown and the Frankfort Public Service District, three communities in our Eastern Panhandle that do have Bay limits," said Kathy Emery, program manager for the state Department of Environmental Protection's Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan program, which offers low-interest loans for water quality improvement projects. "They are upgrading their plants as we speak."

Meeting the new Bay standards comes at a cost, and that's where the state has stepped in to help. Senate Bill 245 authorizes the state to sell bonds -- up to \$180 million -- to raise money to help offset the costs of the upgraded facilities in the Bay watershed. The bill also provides help for wastewater treatment plants in the Greenbrier River Watershed to make similar improvements.

"These facilities have until no later than June 30 of next year to submit a plan to the Infrastructure and Jobs Development Council outlining the costs of these upgrades," Emery said.

Emery said projects, like the ones in Charles Town, Shepherdstown and the Frankfort Public Service District, which have already closed on loans and started construction, will be reimbursed retroactively to help them pay a portion of the bonds they've already taken out.

The Council will review the applications and then the Water Development Authority will report the cost of the project to the Joint Committee on Government and Finance by December 2012.

"This is a wonderful thing that has been done to help these communities," Emery said, "but we aren't going to know until the end of 2012 at the earliest how much each of these are going to receive."

The upgraded treatment facilities are required to meet a total nitrogen level of 5 mg per liter and a total phosphorus level of 0.5 mg per liter. West Virginia is one of six states that make up the Chesapeake Bay watershed.