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Apply now: more than \$4 billion in loans available for rural water infrastructure projects

By Arthur Garcia

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Not long ago, the United States was a world leader in infrastructure investments. Federal and private funding helped even the most remote communities obtain electricity, running water and access to the rest of the world through telecommunications.

However, recent years have not followed the same trend, and too many rural communities have been left behind. The need for improvement is great, especially for rural water and wastewater systems.

To put this in perspective, the American Water Works Association estimates that more than \$600 billion is needed over the next 20 years to upgrade our nation's water and wastewater systems. Unfortunately, many small and rural water systems lack access to affordable financing.

But there is hope for the future. This year, USDA Rural Development has more than \$4 billion in direct loans available now to help rural communities build or upgrade water infrastructure.

This is a substantial increase from last year. In 2017, USDA helped more than 2.5 million rural residents get access to upgraded water and wastewater systems. I am excited to see how many more people we can help with this unprecedented funding opportunity.

I encourage rural community leaders and water district operators to apply now for this assistance. USDA state and field offices are great resources to use during the application process, and we have technical assistance providers with water and waste expertise that can help complete rural communities' applications.

USDA's support for rural water infrastructure has made a big impact in New Mexico. Over the years we've financed both large and small water and wastewater projects.

For example, we funded an \$8-million wastewater system serving Mesquite and Brazito in southern Doña Ana County. We also provided \$288,000 for a water project in Vallecitos in Rio Arriba County.

Water districts and rural communities can apply for USDA loans electronically using the interactive RDAApply tool on the USDA Rural Development website

Also, USDA state and field offices are great resources to use during the application process. Their locations and contact information can also be found on the rural development website.

USDA is eager to partner with you in this effort to modernize water infrastructure in our state's rural communities.

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