

Demand for water dollars taps available funds

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CHEYENNE -- State officials have identified \$838 million in needed clean water and drinking water projects. But only \$38 million is available in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) economic stimulus dollars.

"There's a tremendous need," said Brian Mark of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality.

Mark and Robert Tompkins, program manager for the Office of State Lands and Investments, conducted a public hearing Tuesday morning. The topics were the federal stimulus money and a priority list of public water projects eligible for money through the core or traditional federal loan programs.

Only a couple of people spoke during the public comment period.

Mark Pepper of the Wyoming Association of Rural Water Systems predicted the applications for ARRA money will total nearly \$1 billion when all are tabulated.

The association, he said, will have a full-time "circuit rider" who will travel the state to help rural water providers with their projects.

Tompkins said the state will receive a \$19.2 million grant for clean water projects and \$19.5 million for drinking water projects.

The federal government requires that 20 percent of the grant money go to "green" projects to improve water and energy efficiency and environmentally innovative activities.

Another requirement is that half the grant money be spent on projects that can be started by June 16.

Tompkins said officials will be working hard to get the ARRA projects under contract by Feb. 16, 2010.

If they are not, the grant money for those projects will be "de-obligated," Tompkins said.

He said the agencies are looking to see how the \$38 million in ARRA dollars can be leveraged by tapping into other programs like rural development money.

By the end of this month, the agencies will cut the list of projects to be recommended to the state Loan and Investment Board on May 12.

The state board includes the governor and the other four elected state officials.

The board earlier adopted an emergency rules change to deal with the economic stimulus money for water projects.

Tompkin said after the meeting that it will be interesting to see how much of the \$838 million in identified needed projects will come in through applications for the "intended use" core loan programs.

Priority is given for projects ready to proceed to construction in 12 months.

Top priority for drinking water revolving fund money is a water treatment plant for Kemmerer and Diamondville, costing about \$2.5 million.

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