

EPA: Wyoming could get \$39M stimulus for water work

By The Associated Press

CHEYENNE - The Environmental Protection Agency says Wyoming could get up to \$39 million in stimulus funds for water and sewer projects.

The federal package includes \$19.4 million for Wyoming's Clean Water State Revolving Fund and \$19.5 million for its Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, according to a release from the agency.

The state revolving funds are meant to help local communities meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Rob Tompkins, manager of the Grants and Loans Section of Wyoming's Office of State Lands and Investments, said the stimulus funding "makes a huge difference." The state is rushing to develop rules that meet federal demands for using the funds, because eligible projects have to get started by this time next year, he said.

"We have well over 100 projects on both the clean water and the drinking water lists as it stands right now," Tompkins said. "Some have been on there for some time, and this is really a golden opportunity for people to try to get funded."

Both funds are administered by the State Loan and Investment Board. The board typically makes loans to local governments or districts at 2.5 percent interest rates for 20-year terms. The stimulus funds are in addition to the roughly \$20 million in each revolving fund, Tompkins said.

But when it comes to the stimulus funds, the federal government has specified that at least 50 percent be used for "additional subsidization." Tompkins said that could include offering grants, loan forgiveness or negative-interest loans, or some combination of those.

"There's a potential with this new money that it could be partially grant or fully grant," Tompkins said.

"Right now, we're still working that through. I'm kind of leaning toward grants because it's easier than trying to calculate negative-interest loans. It's kind of like why make this hard when we've got to try to get the money out fast?"

The State Loan and Investment Board will hold a special meeting March 9 to adopt emergency rules for how to handle the stimulus money in the revolving funds, Tompkins said. Two days later, on March 11, Tompkins' office will hold a video conference to get the word out to entities around the state.

"I'm hearing from a lot of cities and towns already, and a few special districts," Tompkins said.

The state has been encouraging local governments to get their projects on the revolving funds' intended use list for this fiscal year by a Feb. 27 deadline. Tompkins said the list will be updated again later for fiscal year 2010.

Tompkins' office, along with representatives from the state environmental quality department and Water Development Office will review applications for stimulus funding and make recommendations to the State Loan and Investment Board.

"We have to have projects either under contract or under construction not later than" Feb. 16 2010, Tompkins said. "That's why there's a push."