

State board awards nearly \$40M for water projects

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Tuesday, May 12, 2009 8:22 PM MDT

CHEYENNE -- The State Board of Loans and Investments awarded nearly \$40 million in federal economic stimulus dollars for water projects Tuesday.

The state received a total of \$38.7 million in stimulus money for clean and drinking water projects.

Of the total, \$19.2 million is for clean water projects and \$19.5 million for drinking water projects.

The board voted to allocate 23 percent, or \$8.7 million, of the total for "green" projects.

Gov. Dave Freudenthal, the board chairman, said he was encouraged by the diverse list of 43 Wyoming projects that will be funded by federal stimulus money.

The board action, in a special meeting Tuesday morning, left nearly \$2 million for additional green clean and drinking water projects.

The awards wiped out the money available for additional conventional clean and drinking water projects

Cheyenne received the largest amount of green clean water project dollars -- \$3.2 million for the Crow Creek Anoxic Basin Project.

The project qualified for financing from green project reserve money because it reuses irrigation water as a water conservation measure at a wastewater treatment plant.

Jackson will receive \$500,000 to install photovoltaic electric producing cells at a treatment works plant to promote energy efficiency.

Jackson also will receive \$95,000 for its Flat Creek Enhancement Project, to improve aquatic habitat.

All three projects will be zero-interest loans with principal forgiveness.

The federal government requires that 50 percent of the new money target communities that otherwise could not afford a regular loan.

The state board chose to meet that requirement by forgiving the principal.

Also approved were five green drinking water projects for Cheyenne, Jackson, Star Valley Ranch, Ten Sleep and Thayne.

The federal government has given a high priority to green projects.

The board also approved stimulus money for 18 conventional, non-green clean water projects.

But the higher allocation for green projects reduced the amount available for conventional drinking water projects.

As a result, the board turned down financing for 15 conventional drinking water projects.

It is possible other federal money can be found for the rejected projects, said Robert C. Tompkins of the Office of State Lands and Investments..

During the brief state board meeting, the governor emphasized to community representatives present the importance of keeping accurate records of how the stimulus money is being spent.

The federal government, he said, is providing more oversight than usual on these projects.

Lynne Boomgaarden, director of the Office of State Lands and Investments, said President Barack Obama popped into a meeting she was attending in Washington, D.C., recently to learn about the ARRA dollars.

"We need you to spend this correctly and if you don't, we will call you out," the president said, according to Boomgaarden.

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