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USDA Rural Development Awards \$4.25M Water and Environmental Programs Grant to Southwest Harbor

Comments from partners

“Upgrading our wastewater plant to ensure we can properly treat our community’s waste stream and protect our marine resources now, and in the future, was a very difficult financial task for our small system of 680 customers from the onset. Then the bids came in 30% above the original estimates, and we were financially unable to proceed with the project. If it wasn’t for the hard work the USDA Rural Development staff did on behalf of our community in obtaining additional federal grants and loans, this project may never have come to fruition.”

-Steven Kenney, Southwest Harbor Water & Sewer District Manager

“Our small community has its origins as a tightly compact fishing village. Without the wastewater plant, our business district, municipal buildings, and our economic well-being in general would be greatly jeopardized as we could not meet the environmental parameters for safely treating our wastewater. The grant and low-interest loans we have received from USDA Rural Development have assured the viability of our downtown area while protecting our marine resources.”

-Marilyn Lowell, Southwest Harbor Town Manager

Maine DEP Reflects on Recent Lincolnville Project

Maine Healthy Beaches Program Monitors Water Quality

Maine is well-known for its miles of stunning saltwater beaches, and ensuring these waters are safe for recreation is a priority for many coastal communities. Elevated fecal bacteria levels threaten public health and contribute to increased beach advisories during popular summer months. The [Maine Healthy Beaches \(MHB\) program](#) is a statewide effort to monitor water quality and protect public health at Maine's participating coastal saltwater beaches. It is a partnership between the [Maine Department of Environmental Protection](#) (ME DEP) and approximately 30 local municipalities/state parks.

For nearly 20 years, the Town of Lincolnville has partnered with MHB and local volunteers to monitor water quality at Lincolnville Beach. Over that time, elevated fecal bacteria concentrations and associated beach advisories have occurred periodically. Fecal bacteria issues can be difficult to eliminate because they often result from a combination of human and non-human sources such as sewage treatment plant or collection system overflows, malfunctioning septic systems, untreated boat sewage, and domestic animal and wildlife waste. These sources can compound to create a larger water quality problem, particularly during periods of increased rainfall when stormwater runoff transports these fecal pollution sources to the coastal zone.

The USDA Rural Development (RD) Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant program provides investments for communities to tackle many of these challenging wastewater infrastructure issues. In Lincolnville, their investment supported the development of a new wastewater treatment facility and collection system to replace outdated infrastructure and implement necessary upgrades. Additionally, Maine DEP administers the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) which provides low-interest loans to municipalities for the construction of wastewater infrastructure projects. Currently, a CWSRF loan with 100% principal forgiveness is being used to provide much-needed upgrades to repair Lincolnville's collection system outfall.

Funding mechanisms like the USDA RD Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant program and the Maine DEP-administered CWSRF provide opportunities for communities to tackle expensive, and often complicated upgrades to wastewater infrastructure that otherwise may not be feasible. Reducing and/or eliminating any potential human pollution sources through wastewater infrastructure repairs and upgrades can support improvements to existing coastal water quality conditions, protect public health, and prevent future threats to water quality.

-Meagan Sims

Maine Healthy Beaches Coordinator, Bureau of Water Quality

[Maine Department of Environmental Protection](#)

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