

Lee breaks ground on \$6.7M water project in Ocoonita

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BEN HUR — A remote section of Lee County will soon have public drinking water for the first time thanks to a nearly \$7 million public works project that began construction Thursday.

U.S. Rep. Rick Boucher, D-Va., and other local, state and federal officials were on hand to help break ground on the long-awaited Ocoonita loop project, which will connect 200 homes and businesses in that community to water service.

The \$6.7 million project is being funded in part by a combination of federal grants and loans that Boucher helped secure through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Program.

Rural Development awarded the Lee County Public Service Authority a \$2.1 million grant and an additional \$1.3 million in low-interest loans.

The Virginia Department of Health added an additional \$3.16 million in funding.

Boucher said the loop project is needed to provide a source of safe and reliable drinking water to Ocoonita residents.

"The new water system will greatly improve the quality of life for the residents who will be receiving water services," Boucher said. "The construction that begins today represents another significant step in our ongoing work

to improve and expand access to public water throughout Southwest Virginia."

At this time, Ocoonita residents rely on private wells and springs that are often unreliable and provide inadequate water pressure and quality, Boucher said. Even worse, many of those wells have become contaminated by surface water intrusion, he said, which can introduce harmful bacteria and chemicals into the drinking water.

In addition to improving the quality of life for Ocoonita residents, Lee County Administrator Dane Poe said the introduction of public water would also help promote growth in the area.

"This is pushing into more remote areas that are desperately needing public water," Poe said. "With that many miles of line, it's putting a lot of availability out there to land that didn't previously have any access to public water. Even if there's not a residence there now, it opens the property up to further development."

The Lee County PSA has signed contracts with four separate construction companies that will be responsible for installing 27 miles of water lines and 25 fire hydrants along Route 621, Route 659, Route 657 and Route 656.

A 100-gallon storage tank and a 40-gallon-per-minute pump station will also be constructed as part of the project, which is expected to be finished by late 2010.



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scene of a two-car accident at the corner of Tranbarger and Parkway Plaza. A Honda minivan struck the Super 8 sign, seen below, and will be transported to Holston Valley Medical Center.

when minivan Hotel sign



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