

Sewer projects get new funding **JODI DEAL / Staff Writer** **Coalfield Progress**

Special money earmarked by the Virginia General Assembly for sewer projects could go a long way toward cleaning up streams and rivers in Southwest Virginia.

According to Ron Flanary, executive director of the Lenowisco Planning District Commission, several major wastewater projects in Wise County and the surrounding areas are good candidates for substantial pieces of the \$17 million pie. That includes projects in Bold Camp, Josephine and Exeter, he said in a Tuesday telephone interview.

In fact, the Bold Camp sewer project is a “virtual slam dunk” for funding in the first round of the special Virginia Southern Rivers Watershed Enhancement Program, said Flanary, who usually hesitates to venture a guess on a project’s prospects for grant proposals.

Only the Southwest and Southside regions of the state will be eligible for funding through the Southern Rivers program, which is being managed by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. In 2006, the General Assembly set aside \$200 million for water quality improvements in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which covers most of eastern, northern and central Virginia.

The Lenowisco Planning District, which includes the city of Norton and Wise, Lee and Scott counties, has a lot of sewer projects virtually ready to go as soon as funding can be found for them. That’s mostly due to a 2005 regional sewer study that included the Lenowisco, Mount Rogers and Cumberland Plateau planning districts.

Of course, the \$17 million will “just scratch the surface of the needs” in Southwest Virginia, Flanary noted. But if the Southside and Southwest regions can show they mean business by churning out projects quickly with that funding, the General Assembly might be persuaded to appropriate more in the future.

The projects

Funding will be awarded in three rounds, Flanary explained — \$7 million, then another \$7 million, then the \$3 million that’s left. Applications for each round will be due July 10, Dec. 15 and in April 2008, respectively.

Priority will be given to projects with the biggest community impact, especially providing new sewer service and eliminating straight pipes or malfunctioning septic tanks.

Projects that will affect a stream or river that’s considered “impaired” because of wastewater will also get special consideration. In addition, projects will be ranked on how close they are to becoming a reality — meaning that projects that already have other funding and planning work out of the way will be ranked higher.

Local projects under consideration include:

- Bold Camp. The Bold Camp project has already received about \$1 million from the Department of Housing and Community Development. Only about \$489,500 is needed to complete the funding for the project, which will provide wastewater service to 356 homes with sewer pipes and 125 wastewater treatment systems.

Flanary noted that an application for the remaining needed funds will be submitted for this project in the first round of Southern Rivers funding next week.

- Lower Exeter. A decentralized sewer system that would serve 17 homes in the lower Exeter community would cost about \$240,000, according to engineer Bill Sutherland, who's helped plan the proposed project.

About \$150,000 would complete funding for the project, Flanary said. The town of Appalachia will likely apply either in December or April for funding.

The decentralized system would serve the community without having to build pipes to connect to a sewer treatment plant, using a textile filter treatment system, Sutherland noted. A similar project has already been completed in Imboden.

- Josephine. Although a lot more planning would have to take place before an application could be made for funding, a long-shelved proposal to provide funding to the Josephine community could qualify for Southern Rivers funding, Flanary noted.

Norton City Manager E.W. Ward explained Tuesday that in the late 1980s and early 90s, the city looked into providing public sewer service to more than 100 households in Josephine, many of which have failing septic systems or use straight pipes.

The city applied three years in a row for block grant funding from DHCD, but the \$1.4 million project was never funded, and the city stopped trying in 1994.

Many of the preliminary engineering studies and other planning documents created in the '90s would still be valid if their prices were updated, Ward noted.

However, the city is in the process of conducting a study on its municipal sewer system, and has a moratorium in place on new sewer taps until a plan is formulated for how to correct and improve sewer problems. That study is expected to be completed in late 2007, Ward noted, and city council will need the results in hand before they can try to make a decision about providing public sewer service to Josephine.

The project could be ready for a grant application by December or April, he noted.