



Pennsylvania
**Department of
Environmental Protection**

Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Programs:

**Federal Fiscal Year 2025 Updated Draft Ranking Frameworks for
Drinking Water, Wastewater, Nonpoint Source and Stormwater Projects
Applying for State Revolving Funds**

Comment and Response Document

INTRODUCTION

On August 2, 2025, the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PENNVEST) and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) published notice in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin* [55 Pa.B. 5223] of the availability for public comment on the Updated Draft Ranking Frameworks for Drinking Water, Wastewater, Nonpoint Source and Stormwater Projects Applying for State Revolving Funds for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2025. A 30-day comment period was provided on the FFY 2025 Updated Draft Ranking Frameworks for DWSRF and CWSRF Projects Applying for State Revolving Funds, and interested parties were directed to submit comments to DEP's eComment system or by e-mail to ecomment@pa.gov. The comment period ended on September 2, 2025.

DEP and PENNVEST received comments and questions from one organization during the comment period. The purpose of this document is to present DEP's and PENNVEST's responses to these comments and to explain how the comments were considered in finalizing the Updated Draft Ranking Frameworks for CWSRF and DWSRF Projects Applying for State Revolving Funds.

The names and, where available, addresses of individuals who submitted comments are identified in Attachment A, in no particular order. This document presents each comment received and identifies the commenter(s) by number in parentheses, corresponding to the list in Attachment A. Copies of all comments received during the public comment period are posted on the Department's eComment website at <https://www.ahs.dep.pa.gov/eComment/>.

COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

Comments received on CWSRF Stormwater Projects Applying for SRF Funds

- 1. Comment:** Stormwater runoff from urban and suburban areas is a major source of pollution affecting over 5,900 miles of the state's streams, including those that drain to the Chesapeake Bay. The stormwater runoff carries a variety of pollutants, including nutrients, sediment, toxic organic and inorganic compounds, and litter. These substances impact the physical, chemical, and biological conditions of rivers and streams and contributes to the degradation of the Chesapeake Bay. There is evidence and concern that thermal pollution from stormwater runoff contributes to the degradation of stream health. From 2009 and 2023, pollution from regulated stormwater grew by 392,716 pounds, and phosphorus loads increased by 8,564 pounds. During this same period, however, sediment loads were reduced by 40,769,362 pounds. The commenter further explains that stormwater runoff can impact public health, because it collects pet waste, pesticides, fertilizer, oil and other contaminants along the way as it runs off streets, lawns, and other surfaces. The polluted water runoff can be a concern for residents in urban areas who come into contact with it when system failures cause flooding or when it is deposited into streams and waterways. In natural areas, such as fields and forests, 10 to 20 percent of rainfall is absorbed and filtered by soil and plants before it reaches aquifers and waterways, but in urban areas, close to 100 percent of rainfall on concrete and other hard surfaces produces runoff. The commenter recommends "adding increased ranking points within the Community Health Factor for Green Infrastructure...Restoration practices like green infrastructure have the potential to alleviate the damage caused by lackadaisical environmental management in vulnerable and marginalized communities. Examples of green infrastructure include planting rain gardens; attaching downspouts to rain barrels to collect rainwater; replacing old pavement with pervious pavement; replacing grass with native plants; planting trees; and planting gardens on rooftops...to reduce polluted stormwater runoff and ultimately benefit public health across the Commonwealth." (1)

Response: As the commentor acknowledges the intent of updates to the ranking frameworks is to maintain consistency with federal guidelines and allow for continued United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) allocations. PENNVEST and DEP focused on this issue to ensure timely grant submissions that meet EPA's award timeframe.

The Stormwater Projects Ranking Framework continues to provide points for green infrastructure under the Community Health Category for a project employing any green infrastructure designed to infiltrate, evapotranspire, or capture and reuse stormwater runoff. Also, there are points for green infrastructure projects under the Aquatic Health Category. Adding points or shifting points to or from any particular category was not part of the scope of this update. We will consider your comment during any future ranking revision. Rankings only become critical when demand for project funding exceeds available funding. It should be noted that PENNVEST has funded every project that is technically and administratively ready to go since 2015.

Comments received on CWSRF Wastewater Projects Applying for SRF Funds

2. **Comment:** Pennsylvania has nearly 200 significant sewage and industrial waste dischargers and 3,000 non-significant, small-flow treatment facilities permitted under NPDES. In 2021, these facilities discharged 2,861,499 pounds of Total Nitrogen and 398,794 pounds of Total Phosphorus pollution. Progress toward reducing pollution from sewage plants is lower in more suburban and rural areas where on-lot (aka onsite septic systems) are used to treat human waste. The commentor further states, "areas with a high number of septic systems coincide with low income and historically disenfranchised communities... [that lack] access to centralized public sewer systems. [This leads to] human health and community impacts... [including] disease, and sanitation risks due to contaminated drinking water, toxic exposure, chemical contamination, beach closures, and fishing advisories, [which] can be exacerbated in these areas. The commentor recommends increasing the point ranking for Proactive Management to include considerations for community outreach and public participation to ensure the Department's intention not to reward recalcitrant conduct is properly implemented and understood by the public." (1)

Response: On-lot systems are used in rural areas across Pennsylvania in low-, moderate-, and higher-income areas. On-lot systems are considered non-point sources of nutrient to waters of the Commonwealth. On-lot systems discharge pretreated sewage effluent to soil absorption areas. Pennsylvania has rules and regulations that apply to siting, design, construction, and operation and maintenance of on-lot systems. On-lot septic systems properly sited, designed, installed and maintained are cost-effective and protective of human health. The fate and transport of nutrients from on-lot system through the soil to groundwater and ultimately surface water is complex, so Pennsylvania focuses on ensuring operation and maintenance of systems to ensure properly operating system in lieu of connecting homes with an on-lot system to centralized collection, conveyance and treatment or requiring nitrogen removal for all on-lot systems across the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Centralized collection and disposal to rural areas is cost prohibitive and is not sustainable infrastructure in all cases. A public health issue arises when these systems malfunction, so the Wastewater Projects Ranking Framework assigns points under the public health category for Confirmed On-Lot Malfunctions, which include wildcat sewer systems. Points are also assigned, under Domestic Water Supply (a subcategory under the Public Health Category), for confirmed domestic private well contamination. In addition, points are assigned for projects that eliminate a wildcat sewer system discharge with a service area failure rate >50% under Aquatic Health category. Act 537 Sewage Planning is required for all municipalities identifying public and private sewage disposal in its jurisdiction. A maximum of 19 points under the Infrastructure Health Category for Proactive Management is conditional on projects adhering to Act 537 Planning requirements

for community outreach and participation, applying to centralized, community and individual sewage system projects.

Comments received on CWSRF Nonpoint Source Projects Applying for SRF Funds

- 3. Comment:** Nonpoint source reductions in the agricultural sector are most effectively achieved through different conservation practices and funding those practices is essential as to not put additional financial burdens on the individual farmers or landowners. The primary purpose of Municipal Separate Stormwater Sewer Systems (MS4s) is to collect and transport stormwater from urbanized areas directly to local streams, rivers, and lakes without treatment, thereby reducing the risk of flooding and protecting water quality. As these systems manage stormwater, the public health and community impacts described above for the Stormwater Sector also apply here. The commenter recommends “bolstering the Nonpoint Source Sector ranking system by adding a section on cumulative impacts. Prioritizing projects sited in communities facing multiple environmental hazards would help alleviate public health concerns in addition to improving water quality. The Cumulative Impact factor should also require public engagement, and data-driven analysis to mitigate or prevent pollution increases and other environmental stressors in already overburdened areas. For example, in rural communities, this could be achieved through stream restoration projects areas with large-scale agricultural and livestock operations. Green infrastructure projects cited for areas subject to high flood risk and legacy pollution could have a similarly beneficial effect in urban communities. Adding these considerations to the Nonpoint Source Sector would help address ongoing environmental and public health disparities while advancing safety, well-being, and prosperity across communities.” (1)

Response: The current ranking frameworks do consider communities facing multiple environmental hazards and provide more points in both stormwater as well as non-point source projects rating systems, so they will receive prioritization. The benefits for construction projects, such as stream restoration, are estimated through modeling. For example, a model would factor in that there are large agricultural operations nearby indicating a higher likelihood of stream impairment. For this circumstance alone the project will get 30 points in the NPS ranking criteria. The NPS benefit-to-cost criterion is flexible enough that consideration is given to anything the applicant might think is relevant information in regard to the water quality benefit. Adding points or subcategories was not part of the scope of this update. We will consider your comment regarding cumulative impacts during any future ranking revision.

ATTACHMENT A
LIST OF COMMENTERS

- (1) Trisha L.R. Salvia, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Benjamin Olewine III Nature Center, 100 Wildwood Way, Harrisburg, PA 17110