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Subject 2024 Watershed to Well Newsletter

Greetings!

Welcome to the 2024 edition of Watershed to Well!

Since 1986, RCAP Solutions has been proud to bring this newsletter to our constituents, providing educational resources on important rural, environmental and community issues. As always, we appreciate your feedback on this publication and welcome your input on anything regarding RCAP Solutions and our services.

[For our contact information click here.](#)

[For our list of services and contacts by state click here.](#)

Photo Credit: "Split Rock Falls"
taken by Becky Sims, NY State
Manager is located in
Elizabethtown, NY and was a photo
contest winner at the 2023 national
RCAP Conference.

State of Massachusetts Invests in MassDEP Study

to Ensure Safe Drinking Water from Private Wells!

For more information about this legislation, our private well programming, and the Coalition for Safe Drinking Water, please visit: www.whatsinyourwellwater.org

FY2025 State Budget Includes \$100,000 for MassDEP, an Important Step Towards a Statewide Private Wells Program

With the FY2025 state budget, which was signed by Gov. Maura Healey on July 29, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) will finally have dedicated funding to explore how best to ensure safe drinking water from private wells. The agency will receive \$100,000 to conduct a study and make recommendations for a statewide program to ensure that drinking water from private wells is safe to consume. This study represents an important step forward in developing a statewide drinking water program for private wells to ensure that all Massachusetts residents have access to safe water.

Currently, many Massachusetts residents who rely on private wells are consuming water that may be unsafe. Over 500,000 people throughout the Commonwealth rely on these wells, yet there are no statewide regulations to ensure private well water is safe from harmful contaminants such as PFAS, arsenic, radon, uranium, and more. In contrast, public water systems are subject to state and federal regulations and are routinely monitored. As written in the budget, MassDEP will submit a report detailing its findings to the Joint Committee on Environment and

Natural Resources as well as the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means by Jan. 1, 2025.

[Full Press Release can be found here.](#)

Lead Service Line Inventory (LSLI) Requirements: What Water Systems Need to Know

Knowing where lead pipes are located is critical to replacing them efficiently. Every public or private water system which serves water to over 15 service connections across the country will be required to provide an initial inventory of their water service lines to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency by October 16, 2024, through their state regulatory agency. State regulatory agencies are very proactive in helping communities meet these requirements.

[More Information & State-Specific Resources here.](#)

Lead pipes in public water systems and drinking fixtures have been banned in new home construction since 1986, when Congress amended the Safe Drinking Water Act. However, in some older homes, services lines which are connected to the water mains may be made of lead. In addition, some faucets and plumbing fixtures in homes built before 1986 may also be made of lead.

This initiative is an important first step in ensuring every family across the country has access to clean drinking water – as the EPA's goal is to replace 100% of the nation's lead pipes and service lines within 10 years.

[Check out our video with more details here.](#)

RCAP Solutions Selected in Inaugural Economic Recovery Corps to Drive Sustainable Economic Growth in Rural Communities

For more information on how your community might benefit from RCAP

Solutions’ “Community Engagement to Guide Ecosystem Development” project, visit:
www.rcapsolutions.org/economic-development/

[More information about the Economic Recovery Corps program, here.](#)

The Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) Fellowship program aims to build capacity in economically distressed areas across the U.S. while cultivating the next generation of economic development leaders. The program connects 65 host sites nationwide with diverse practitioners and leaders with the passion, skills, and vision to create new ways of performing economic development. The ERC Fellowship was launched in 2023 through a \$30 million cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration (EDA). It is led by the International Economic Development Council and supported by six other national economic development organizations.

Each project across the United States receives a dedicated fellow, who is fully funded for 2.5 years from the ERC program, serving as a field catalyst to enhance, strengthen, and coordinate relationships and local efforts alongside the host communities. RCAP Solutions was matched with Elyse Oliver, who brings a wealth of education, experience, and passion to help the organization and local stakeholders on the “Community Engagement to Guide Ecosystem Development” project.

[See Full Press Release here.](#)

Puerto Rico Hosts National Manager's Meeting

In January, RCAP Solutions is in sunny Puerto Rico, hosting the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) network for a program managers meeting. Joined by partners from across the country, including representatives

from USDA Rural Development and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, we visited two communities that our team in Puerto Rico has been assisting, thanks to USDA/RD funding.

The communities visited included:

- Hacienda Santa Rita in Guánica, Puerto Rico – A community that has been affected by illegal dumping, resulting in debris and waste residuals flowing into the local ravines and rivers. RCAP Solutions has been providing solid waste technical assistance and training to this rural community located on the southern part of the island.
- Pozo de Agua Water System in Caguas, Puerto Rico – A water system that has been facing challenges with maintaining sustainable infrastructure after Hurricane Maria in 2017. RCAP Solutions helped this community with a feasibility study, environmental report, and applications for loan funding for equipment upgrades and system improvements.

Community & Environmental Workshops

RCAP Solutions' Community and Environmental Resources (CER) team has delivered more than seventy educational workshops for the water, wastewater, and solid waste sectors in the past year. These events range from intimate, in-person training events with a handful of system managers to regional and national webinars reaching hundreds of industry professionals and regulators. Covering topics such as emergency response, PFAS contamination, infrastructure funding and financial planning for utilities, GIS mapping asset management, and homeowner well and septic system maintenance, our workshops are designed to address topical issues facing system operators and managers. Recent EPA-funded

trainings have focused on the latest updates and regulation revisions to the Lead and Copper Rule, as public water systems only have until October 16, 2024, to submit their lead service line inventories. Beyond the successful training events provided to operators, board members, utility employees, schools, and daycares in Maine, several Lead Learning Labs were conducted in New York State to provide attendees a hands-on understanding of lead pipe identification, service line replacement, and community engagement.

Since 2021, CER staff have conducted a series of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) based quarterly workshops funded under USDA's Rural Community Development Initiative and HHS Office of Community Services' Rural Community Development Program, complementing mapping efforts in dozens of rural, low-income communities across our service area. Providing quarterly workshops increase the capacity of system managers and operators to effectively use GIS tools, ensuring that rural utilities and communities have access to the latest technology and the means to use it.

Recent workshop examples are pictured to the left, including: RCDI GIS Mapping (top) and NY Lead Learning Labs and a display showing different types of pipes (middle/bottom).

[More information on our Community & Environmental Workshops here.](#)

Legislative Advocacy

We had an incredible year, with a wide range of meetings and activity, allowing our teams to advocate for underserved communities on the national, state and local levels. Some examples include:

Brian Scales, our President & CEO;
Olga Morales-Pate, CEO of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP); and Ruthann House, President & CEO of Great Lakes Community Action

Partnership; were in Washington, D.C. on May 15, 2024 representing the RCAP network at The White House's "Rural Communities in Action" Event!

Speakers at this event, which highlighted how the Biden-Harris Administration is investing in rural communities, included; Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack; Secretary Pete Buttigieg; Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services Andrea Palm; Neera Tanden, White House Domestic Policy Advisor; Steve Benjamin, Director, White House Office of Public Engagement; Samantha Silverberg, Deputy Assistant to the President for Infrastructure Implementation; Dr. Basil Gooden, Under Secretary for Rural Development, USDA; Farah Ahmad, Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development, USDA; Senator Debbie Stabenow; and more.

[Watch a recording of the event here.](#)

RCAP hosted our annual "**Lunch with Legislators**" at our headquarters office in March. During this interactive briefing with the Central Massachusetts delegation, we detailed the positive impact of our housing, community, and environmental programs. We were honored to be joined by so many legislators, legislative staff, and local government officials to engage in a conversation about the issues facing families throughout Central Massachusetts and talk about how RCAP Solutions helps. The event was graciously sponsored by the office of David LeBoeuf, State Representative and featured special guest Scott Soares, State Director (MA/CT/RI) at USDA Rural Development.

RCAP was joined by USDA Rural Development (Southern New England Region) for a working lunch and meeting at our Worcester headquarters office in March. We discussed our housing programs available to individuals and families in Central Massachusetts and learned more about the USDA's housing, lending, and grant programs – with the goal of intertwining these services and increasing awareness of these opportunities throughout the communities we serve. Special thanks to our incredible program staff, as well as USDA Holden, MA Area Office Director, Lyndon Nichols, and USDA

Rural Housing Service staff members Jacob Sargent, Crystal Howe, and Jim Lavin for joining us.

RCAP Solutions Partnering with USDA RD to Help Very-Low-Income, Rural Homeowners with Funding to Repair, Improve, and Modernize Their Houses

RCAP Solutions and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development announced a partnership in June to help very-low-income, rural homeowners with funding to repair, improve, and modernize their houses. The USDA's Section 504 Home Repair Program provides funding in the form of a 1% fixed-interest loan up to \$40,000 to complete single-family home repairs or to remove health and safety hazards. In addition, applicants 62 years of age or older are eligible for a \$10,000 grant. The loan and grant may be combined for up to \$50,000 in assistance. In order to qualify for assistance, the family must be very-low-income and live in an eligible rural area. You can visit the USDA Income and Property Eligibility website for complete details. RCAP Solutions is acting as the "loan packager" on behalf of USDA Rural Development and eligible homeowners; performing credit checks for applicants, providing guidance on bids and repairs that need to be made, and ensuring all documents listed in the application checklist are submitted.

[Full press release can be found here.](#)

RCAP Solutions and USDA Rural Development (Southern New England Region) officiated the partnership with a ceremonial signing event.

RCAP Solutions Presents at MEHA Title 5 Seminar

RCAP Solutions' Jim Starbard, Regional Director (MA/CT/RI), was a featured speaker at the [Massachusetts Environmental Health Association's](#) 2024 Title 5 Seminar, held in February. He gave an engaging presentation to a room

of over 240 environmental health professionals about Total Coliform Sampling – the process of testing private drinking water wells to determine if the groundwater source or well itself is contaminated with coliform bacteria and E. coli.

RCAP Solutions earns a 2024 Platinum Seal of Transparency

RCAP Solutions has earned a 2024 Platinum Seal of Transparency with Candid! This seal is the highest level of recognition available from Candid and places RCAP Solutions in the very top percentage of non-profits for transparency and accountability. By sharing our impact, strategies, and financials, we aim to be transparent about our efforts to support the power and potential of communities. [Learn more through our Non-Profit Profile.](#)

[Learn more about how you can support our work by clicking here.](#)

Team Member Updates

Buck, ME

Bright, PA

LaVigne, NY

Lochhead, VT

Tortora, ME

Agostini, NJ

RCAP Solutions had several new hires to the Community & Environmental Resources team in the past year:

Sarah Buck, New Project Director, ME; *Ms. Buck re-joined RCAP Solutions after five years at the RCAP national office as Chief Programs Officer. She previously served RCAP Solutions as the Deputy Director of Community Resources, and RCAC, another regional partner, where she developed and managed the Agua4All program. Ms. Buck brings extensive experience in fund development, grants and contracts management, strategic program development and implementation, capacity building, professional facilitation, community outreach, and education and training.*

Mark Agostini, Community Specialist, NJ; *Mr. Agostini's experience serving as compliance specialist for a drinking water plant brings expertise focusing on meeting regulatory requirements, plant optimization, and*

community/stakeholder engagement. Prior to working in public water, Mark served as a special education teacher.

John Bright, Community Specialist, PA; Mr. Bright has worked at multiple wastewater treatment plants and collection systems, responsible for the operation, maintenance and supervision of both small and large municipal, investor owned, and contract operated facilities. He is adept in wastewater operations, maintenance, health and safety management, and also brings a proficiency in aviation services, public relations and advertising.

Jesse LaVigne, Community Specialist, NY; Mr. LaVigne's experience includes water plant operation with a focus on GIS systems integration and workflow development. He has also worked extensively in data logging automation, lead service line identification, and custom software and game designs.

Joshua Lochhead, Community Specialist, VT; Mr. Lochhead worked in the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)'s Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division where he was responsible for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund's set-aside programs. This included: asset management, user rates setting/training, leak detection, and valve exercising to help public water systems achieve technical, managerial, and financial capacity.

David Tortora, Community Specialist, ME; Mr. Tortora's experience includes working as a water operator at a treatment plant in Connecticut, providing clean drinking water to over 50,000 residents. His other positions have included parks and recreation supervisor, program coordinator, and environmental scientist. He has also volunteered in countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, and Australia.

[State services and full staff listings and bios can be found here.](#)

Join Our Team!

We're asking our staff why
RCAP Solutions is their
employer of choice!

[Click here to meet David
Tortora, Community
Specialist, who helps rural
communities in Maine
with their drinking water
and wastewater needs!](#)

David describes the
organizational culture at
RCAP Solutions as

"supportive" – the support that we provide to communities extends to our internal operations as well.

Our team is growing and we're in search of talented individuals who have a passion for serving individuals, families, and their communities. We have a variety of positions available in community and environmental resources, housing, and our corporate office.

To view our diverse array of available positions in the Northeast and Caribbean, please visit:
<https://www.rcapsolutions.org/careers/>

Changemakers Wanted for Volunteer Opportunities!

Thoughtful, strategic, dynamic, innovative, professional... Do any of these attributes describe you?

We seek energetic leaders, representing New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands, with a wide range of expertise who want to change the world and empower communities to thrive.

For more information on our board and committee opportunities, please visit:
<https://www.rcapsolutions.org/board-volunteers/>

RCAP is an equal opportunity provider and employer and does not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities.

RCAP Solutions mission is to foster personal and public self-reliance and improve the quality of life for individuals, families and the communities in which they live.

[Click here for more information about RCAP Solutions.](#)

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