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Perry County Pursues \$11.2 Million in Federal Funding to Expand Rural Drinking Water Access

Proposed \$14 million investment builds on previous infrastructure improvements and could provide public water service to approximately 560 additional families

PERRY COUNTY, Ind. — Recognizing the longstanding need to expand access to reliable drinking water throughout Perry County, the Perry County Commissioners are working alongside three rural water cooperatives to pursue \$11.2 million in federal funding for a proposed rural water infrastructure expansion.

The Perry Rural Water Expansion project would extend public water distribution systems into underserved areas where some families continue to rely on private wells or must haul water because dependable public drinking water service is unavailable.

Combined with an identified \$2.8 million local match, the proposed project represents approximately \$14 million in potential infrastructure investment and could provide public water service to approximately 560 additional families.

Community Input Reinforces Longstanding Infrastructure Needs

Expanding access to potable water has been a recognized priority in Perry County for years. The county's challenging terrain, widely dispersed rural homes and significant construction costs have made extending water infrastructure an ongoing challenge.

Results from the 2025 Perry County Baseline Survey further reinforced the importance of addressing infrastructure needs. More than 380 residents participated in the survey, which gathered feedback on quality of life, housing, infrastructure and economic development. More than half of respondents to the public water question agreed or strongly agreed that expanding availability should receive greater attention.

A separate Perry County Water Interest Survey, first conducted in 2021 and updated in 2023 and 2024, also documented households interested in connecting to public drinking water systems.

Building on these findings and previous infrastructure efforts, county leaders identified the fiscal year 2027 Community Project Funding opportunity through U.S. Rep. Mark Messmer's office as another potential resource to advance rural water expansion.

“Access to safe, dependable drinking water has been a need in Perry County for many years, and we recognize the challenges that families continue to face in areas without public water service,” said Perry County Commissioner Randy Cole. “We have made progress, but there is still a significant need throughout our rural communities. When this federal funding opportunity became available, we saw another way to work with our rural water partners to pursue the resources needed to reach more families.”

Building on Previous Water Infrastructure Investments

Perry County has already supported targeted water infrastructure improvements through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.

In 2025, approximately \$500,000 in ARPA funding supported water-line extensions that provided public water service to roughly 20 additional families.

While these improvements represent meaningful progress, they also demonstrate the financial challenges associated with extending infrastructure throughout the county.

Perry County's hills, valleys, forested areas and creek crossings, combined with the distance between rural households, significantly increase the cost of constructing water distribution lines. Larger investments and partnerships are necessary to expand service to additional areas.

The proposed federal funding would support construction of new water distribution lines and related infrastructure, extending service from existing public water systems into currently unserved rural areas.

Strengthening Infrastructure for Future Growth

Beyond improving access to drinking water, the proposed expansion could also support Perry County's long-term housing and economic development efforts.

Access to dependable water infrastructure is an important consideration for residential construction, business development and future investment. Areas without adequate water service face additional barriers to development, limiting opportunities for new housing and commercial growth.

The proposed project could help address these challenges by expanding access to public water infrastructure and making additional properties suitable for future development, including areas near the Interstate 64 corridor.

“Investing in infrastructure is essential to meeting the needs of our residents and preparing Perry County for future growth,” said Perry County Councilwoman Kelli Harding. “We have identified the local matching funds necessary to pursue this opportunity, which could allow us to leverage a much larger federal investment. Expanding public water access is about improving

everyday life for families while creating opportunities for housing, business development and long-term economic growth.”

Next Steps for Rural Water Expansion

U.S. Rep. Mark Messmer requested \$11.2 million in federal Community Project Funding for the Perry Rural Water Expansion project. The House Appropriations Committee has since included \$850,000 for the And-Tro Water Authority District 1 Water Service Extension Project in its fiscal year 2027 appropriations bill. While this represents progress toward securing federal support, the funding remains subject to final congressional approval and has not yet been awarded.

If funding is approved, the project would move through additional engineering, utility coordination and planning to determine priority service areas, construction phases and implementation schedules.

Potential service areas would be evaluated based on documented household interest, existing utility capacity, engineering feasibility and available resources.

Perry County will continue coordinating with participating rural water cooperatives and funding partners as the proposal advances.

While the federal funding request represents an opportunity to expand rural water infrastructure, it is one part of the county's continuing efforts to address longstanding infrastructure needs and support the future of Perry County communities.

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