

KRWA Circuit Riders Are Conducting “Similar Systems Data Collection”

The Kansas Rural Water Association’s (KRWA) mission is to provide training and education to sustain water and wastewater utilities. That mission is accomplished through the help of various programs and agency funding. With agency funding often comes with a host of requirements. One of the more recent is the “Similar Systems Data Collection” that has been included in the National Rural Water Association (NRWA) Circuit Rider Program contract. KRWA is involved as a result.

It’s appropriate to remind readers that the longest-running programs to help KRWA accomplish its mission are those programs funded through US EPA and USDA Rural Development and which continue to be administered through the National Rural Water Association. A small training contract was first available to KRWA in 1976 through NRWA. In 1980, the USDA Farmers Home Administration, in collaboration with NRWA, established the Rural Water Circuit Rider Program. Those were very lean days for KRWA with virtually no resources to provide

training or technical assistance. The NRWA-administered programs were beyond critical to make sure some help could be provided by KRWA to public water systems. I recall one KRWA board meeting when we developed a rental contract against the purchase of several chart recorders. KRWA is extremely fortunate today – and water and wastewater systems are well-served because KRWA has the necessary resources to provide for staffing and tools needed to help local communities which is KRWA’s mission.

The Circuit Rider program provides a nationwide team of drinking water specialists to provide mentoring and technical assistance to water utility managers, operators, administrative staff and boards. The mentoring is designed to be on-site, hands-on training, activity-based, where participants take ownership in learning how to resolve their current and future problems. The program is designed to protect USDA Rural Development’s current water utility infrastructure investments and help systems plan for a more sustainable future.

The NRWA Circuit Rider program in Kansas presently provides the majority of necessary funding for three staff positions at KRWA. These are for “Circuit Riders” Jon Steele, Doug Guenther and Greg Metz. Nationally, the NRWA Circuit Rider Program is made up of 49 State Rural Water Associations (CT/RI are combined as one) and Puerto Rico, totaling 147 Circuit Riders. Former KRWA Circuit Rider Rita Clary, who is familiar to many cities and water districts in Kansas, now works at the NRWA as Circuit Rider Program Manager. As a side note, in her first weeks at NRWA, Rita was enlisted to go to Puerto Rico to assist public water systems there following hurricanes Maria and Irma. Rita’s experiences at KRWA helped provide the necessary training for her to excel at NRWA.

As part of a recently signed contract between USDA Rural Development and NRWA, the Circuit Riders are required to ask each system they visit to complete the Similar Systems Data Collection Form each month. The intent of the Data Collection Form is to evaluate program eligibility and according to text in the contract, “to support data pertaining to ongoing revenue adequacy, cost of service, and income planning analyses, affordability consideration and as a planning resource”.

The point of this explanation is to ask representatives of rural water districts and communities to help support the completion of the Simple System Data Collection Form by KRWA staff. The information collected by the Data Collection Form will provide an invaluable tool to USDA. Only federal USDA employees have access to the information outside of the KRWA-NRWA data collection structure. Frankly, no question is being asked that

The NRWA Circuit Rider Program . . .

Circuit Riders provide hands-on training and technical assistance to small, rural water systems on an everyday basis, 24/7. Onsite help is delivered when and where a rural community needs it. The program is limited to providing help to communities serving a population of 10,000 or less has included:

- ◆ Identifying and evaluating affordable solutions to drinking water problems in rural areas
- ◆ Assisting systems to rapidly respond and recover after emergencies such as hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, wildfires, ice storms and the health pandemic, COVID-19
- ◆ Protecting the environment and public health by improving treatment processes
- ◆ Improving financial sustainability through better management practices, more efficient operations and maintenance of system components
- ◆ Assistance provided concerning matters of operation and maintenance, regulatory compliance, energy efficiency and loan/grant applications
- ◆ Enhancing compliance with federal and state regulations
- ◆ Assistance directed toward USDA Rural Development borrowers and potential borrowers

The Similar Systems Data Collection Form links each NRWA Circuit Rider Program staff to an ESRI ArcGIS login page. From there, median household income maps link the Circuit Rider to another map with the median household income data by county.



Each "dot" on the map is an actual On-Site (ONS) contact with GPS coordinates made by a Circuit Rider.

is not already considered an open record. A central goal is to provide assistance to USDA Rural Development's lending processes. While the Similar Systems Data Collection is voluntary, KRWA encourages systems to work with KRWA Circuit Riders to complete the information requested. For the data

needs to be accurate to be useful. The Data Collection Form can also be emailed to the city or RWD to allow more time to gather the data.

If anyone has a question about the program, please contact the KRWA office or contact one of the three Circuit Riders directly, those being Jon Steele, Doug Guenther or Greg Metz.

Staff changes . . .

KRWA has accepted a letter of retirement from Greg Duryea. Greg has worked as a technical assistant and more recently as assistant general manager at KRWA. He began with KRWA in 1993. He has provided invaluable service to KRWA. Ken Kopp who is a Water Rights / Source Water Protection staff person has been named assistant general manager. Ken is a licensed geologist in Kansas; he is responsible for the weekly KRWA E-news and will expand in a role to assist with monitoring the various other programs that KRWA operates in addition to other Association needs. Prior to his tenure with KRWA, he worked for 23 years as an Environmental Scientist for the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Water Resources. Ken will also continue to provide assistance with water rights issues.

Elmer Ronnebaum is KRWA General Manager; he has been employed by KRWA since 1983. He served seven years on the KRWA board of directors prior to that. He also helped develop a large RWD and served for fourteen years on a water district board of directors.



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