

Louisa County Rural Water Initiative



**Working to
improve
the quality
of life in
Rural
Louisa
County**



Why Rural Water?

Rural water provides a safe, healthy, and reliable pure drinking water supply. Rural water is a water utility highly regulated at the national level by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and in Iowa at the local level by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Of course rural water can be used for purposes other than just for drinking water, such as livestock. The water produced by a rural water utility such as the Wapello Rural Water Association (WRWA) is subjected to constant testing with the results reported to the DNR. Small deviations from accepted standards require immediate remedy and public notice to the users of the water.

The fixed cost of connecting to rural water as compared to the cost of maintaining is always of interest. The cost of rural water will be discussed in the Q&A section which follows. It is estimated that the depreciated and maintenance cost of an average deep well, pumps, electricity, and water treatment equipment and supplies is about \$100/month.

The Major Agencies Involved

USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT: Low interest loans and construction grants are very necessary for the development of a rural water system. The electricity for most rural residents comes from an electrical cooperative (Eastern Iowa REC in Louisa County) which was made possible by the Rural Electrification Act of 1936. Likewise USDA Rural Development is a mandatory player in rural water as the major agency for low interest loans and for grants.

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA): The EPA sets the standards for all public drinking water utilities and enforces these standards through a state and/or local agency. A rural water system and a city water system can not operate without meeting EPA requirements and standards for assuring quality of drinking water. If they fail to do so the system will be shut down and monetary fines will be assessed to the operating agency. In certain cases agency personnel may be subject to legal action.

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES (DNR): The DNR is the State of Iowa agency that implements and enforces the EPA drinking water standards. It is also the reporting agency for the required EPA reports from the water utilities. The DNR issues the construction permits for the building of a water utility. The DNR issues the operating permits for the operation of a water utility. All water utilities must have a DNR licensed operator who runs the system.

WAPELLO RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION (WRWA): When Louisa County meets the USDA Rural Development requirements for rural water, WRWA will build and operate the system in Louisa County. They have committed to Louisa County by completing the preliminary engineering work required to develop a rural water system. WRWA is non-profit association headquartered in Ottumwa. They are limited by the USDA Rural Development on the amount spent on overhead expenses.

Frequently Asked Questions

MONEY QUESTIONS

M1. Cost of a connection/hookup to rural water?

AM1. The estimated cost as of July 2009 is \$1,000. This cost is based on the estimated contract cost of building the system at the time of construction. The Louisa County Board of Supervisors has approved a plan in which your hookup fee will be deposited in an **Escrow Account**. Your hookup contract will stipulate that if the development of the Louisa County Rural Water project is not a viable project your hookup fee will be returned to you in full. The Louisa County Board of Supervisors has approved an **“Easy Payment Plan.”** When you sign the hookup contract you will write a check for \$250 and agree to pay \$250/year for the next 3 years which will be billed by Louisa County.

M2. Is there a minimum charge? How many gallons?

AM2. There is a monthly **Facility Charge** to cover the **Debt Service** and **Fixed Costs** to provide the service. Currently this charge is \$33.22/month. This is set annually based on the debt service and fixed cost divided by the number of paying members (services). No water is included in the **Facility Charge**. This charge may change annually based on the annual review of the WRWA operations by auditors and USDA Rural Development.



M3. Is the cost discounted for all gallons above the minimum gallons? D

AM3. The usage is billed per each 1,000 gallons based on a stepped rate. The current rates are:

First 2,000 gallons @ \$2.60/1,000 gallon,
Next 4,000 gallons @ \$11.10/1,000 gallon,
Next 14,000 gallons @ \$7.40/1,000 gallon,
All over 20,000 gallons @ \$3.70/1,000 gallon.

Note: These rates/steps are for the existing WRWA existing systems; the rates/steps for a new system will be based on the new system, may or may not be the same.

M4. Would there be tiers of users and/or industrial-size rates for customers such as a hog facility? AM4 There are four types of service offered:

- Household (only one household per service)
- Business/Livestock
- Bulk – Offered to towns that have a public water

distribution system. The bulk service would replace the existing water supply (well(s) and treatment facilities). The town would continue to own and operate the distribution system. The WRWA responsibility ends at the rural water delivery point which is the WRWA master water meter installed at the city. Block grants are available to the cities to help them pay for the hookup fee to rural water.

(d) Franchise Service – Incorporated towns that do not have a public water system. The service would be treated the same as the rural service.

M5. Two residences are close enough that water could be piped from one to the other. Would they be allowed to pay only one hookup fee?

AM5. The DNR does not allow more than one household be connected to a water meter (hookup). Two closely adjacent households would have to have two water meters (hookups).

M6. Would city people have to pay a hookup charge? AM6. See AM4.

TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

T1. Do I have to connect everything to rural water, for example both my house and my hog house, to qualify? AT1. No. You can keep the private supply (well) for other uses but the rural water piping can not be connected to the private water supply. A minimum 18” gap between the two systems is required.

Important: You will have one water meter near your house. It is important that you list all your possible uses when you sign up because the size of the meter at your location is based on your stated usage on your application. If you don’t state your hog house and cattle lot on your application and add them to your system as an afterthought you may be disappointed because the maximum flow rate of your water meter is limited. When the WRWA designs the system they assess all the facilities along the way and they size the water main along your property based on anticipated current usage as well as provision for new houses that may be built in the future. But, it is cost prohibitive to put in big water mains everywhere that could serve anything that might come along. T2. Assume I have a house connected to rural water. The hog house is 1/8 mile down the road. Is there a charge for a second hookup? If so, would there be a discount for the second hookup?

AT2. Considering the distance involved the WRWA recommends a 2nd hookup. There is no discount for a 2nd hookup.

Note: The WRWA strongly recommends that livestock producers maintain onsite water storage equal to 24 hour usage regardless of whether the producer is on a private well supply or a rural water supply.

The WRWA supply is highly reliable, but an accident, such as a highway construction crew inadvertently breaking a major water main, can result in an appreciable delay in water service due to the time required to repair the break.

T3. My house is connected to rural water. My hog house is on my well. If the well goes bad or the electricity goes off, could I use rural water for the hog house? Would there be a time limit for emergency cases such as these?

AT3. Yes, in this emergency situation you can connect your rural water household connection to your hog house. You would be allowed to exceed the demand for the household service as long as it did not take away from the other users. Please see AT2 above. The DNR requires an 18 inch physical distance between your WRWA pipe and the well pipe during the installation of the rural water system to your house. Thus, you would have to maintain that 18 inch physical distance when you re-plumb the hog house from the well to the rural water system

T4. If my house is on Rural water would I still be able to use my well to water flower beds and yard?

AT4. Absolutely. No need to get rid of your well if you don't want to do that.

T5. Will a water be treated chlorinated? Fluoride added?

AT5. The EPA requires the water to be chlorinated and fluorinated along with following many other rules and regulations. The WRWA is required to take samples on a regular basis throughout the system and file the laboratory reports with DNR. Failure of WRWA to meet EPA/DNR water quality standards results in serious action against the WRWA.

T6. Effects on washing machines, dishwashers, tubs, showers, tubs, etc.

AT6. They will last longer. They will all look better. The rural water is highly treated to make it as pure as possible. At first you will see minerals in your water as the rural water scrubs your system. That is sometimes confused as rural water not being pure. The scrubbing will stop after awhile.

T7. Will water softener be necessary?

AT7. No! Rural water goes through considerable treatment that makes it soft.

T8. Who is responsible for installing the water line from the water meter to a house or other facility? Who is responsible for maintaining this water

line?

AT8. WRWA will install a meter pit about 10 foot inside your property line in the mowed portion of the yard where the pit will be protected. It is up to you to do the plumbing from there. It is up to you to maintain your line. WRWA will maintain their lines and equipment.

T9. What if a pipe breaks and lots of water runs before it is discovered. Would there be a break on the cost of the leaked water when compared to my average water?

AT9. There is a leak adjustment if the leak is 3 times the average usage. The customer must repair the leak as soon as it is identified.

T10. Would city people be assessed via a meter reading as is done now?

AT10. This was answered in AM4.

T11. Will people be allowed to continue to have their own wells?

AT11. Yes. See AT2 and AT4.

T12. Would a home be allowed to have a hydrant, say for fire protection?

AT12. No fire hydrants. Rural water systems are built with plastic pipe.

The cost of cast iron pipe is prohibitive.

A pumper fire truck would pull a suction on the pipe. Plastic pipe is designed to withstand a high internal pressure, but it will collapse and break if a suction is pulled on the pipe. However, the WRWA provides high volume access points to fire departments at various places along the water system. A fire department tanker can fill from those access points.

BILLING

B1. How would I be billed?

AB1. You will be billed monthly based on usage.

B2. What happens if I don't pay my water bill?

AB2. No different than not paying your electricity bill. You will receive a shut off notice.

B3. Is there a minimum billing, i.e., I am gone for several months and no water is used? Would there be a vacation plan?

AB3. The present minimum billing is about \$33/month. There is no vacation plan, but the WRWA recommends that you have them remove the water meter while you are gone and have them re-install it when you return. They do not charge for this service

GENERAL

G1. Would people with cabins be allowed to hook on to rural water? As those are not year-round residences, how would they be assessed?

AG1. Cabins are treated the same as a household customer.

G2. How many people must sign for rural water for it to become a reality?

AG2. A minimum of 70% of the eligible rural customers must initially sign up.

G3. If I don't sign up for rural water initially, what would be the price for a hookup at a later date?

AG3. Initial installation of the system has the economy of scale. The WRWA construction contractor has crews installing water mains, installing stubs to the individual properties, and installing water meters. Then, there is pressure testing before the trenches are filled. If you sign up later the WRWA will have to come in and install a stub and water meter to your property. If your demand exceeds the capacity of the main running by your property then this main will have to be replaced back to the high capacity distribution main. So, it is impossible to assign a fixed dollar amount, but it will certainly be more than the cost of a hookup when the system is initially installed.

G4. If the minimum sign-up is reached, what will be the likely timetable for implementation?

AG4. WRWA estimates that it will take 2 years to do the required DNR environmental studies, and to acquire easements for installing the system. With regard to easements, when possible the WRWA installs the system on private property. The vibrations of traffic in road right-of-ways has a bad effect of breaking pipes.



Once the environment studies are completed, DNR issues a construction permit, and the easements are obtained, the WRWA estimates the time required to obtain USDA Rural Development funds, time for an engineering firm to develop the construction plan and specifications, bidding the project, issuing a construction contract, and completing construction will be about 3 years.

G5. Considering potential flooding, what impact would high water have on rural water? Would the flooded areas affect the non-flooded areas?

AG5. While flooded areas may impact individuals, the WRWA system design allows those areas to be temporarily shut off. In addition, the WRWA has redundant supplies of water to their mains. Essentially, a flooded area will not effect the remainder of the system.

G6. Is there any benefit of rural water to the cities of the county? *AG6.*

Answered in AM4.

G7. Will city people have an opportunity to express their opinions to the city decision makers?

AG7. City people must individually interact with their city government, mayor, council, etc.

SOME LINKS OF INTEREST

http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ia/cp_utilities.html

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/water/index.html>

<http://www.epa.gov/safewater/dwh/http://water.usgs.gov/>

Home usage calculator: <http://ga.water.usgs.gov/edu/sq3.html>

Livestock usage calculator: http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/app19/calc/livestock/waterreq_dataentry1.jsp

<http://www.iowaruralwater.org/>

If you need more information after reading the "QUESTIONS & ANSWERS"

1. Send an e-mail to lcruralwater@gmail.com or...
2. Call the Auditor's Office at 319-523-3371 and leave a telephone number. Someone will return your call.

Louisa County Rural Water Initiative Presented by the Louisa County Board of Supervisors: Chris Ball, Paula Buckman and Frank Jamison, with support by Louisa County Rural Water Advisory Committee Note: We have compiled the information in this brochure from various sources and believe the information to be accurate to the best of our ability. Please bring any mistakes to our attention as soon as possible and we will act appropriately.

