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Water Board Receives Prestigious EPA Award

OKLAHOMA CITY –The Oklahoma Water Resources Board's Financial Assistance Program, which has funded the infrastructure needs of the state's water and wastewater systems since 1983, has been recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for its innovation and stability in financing measures aimed at protecting the nation's waters.

EPA's first ever *Pisces Award* was conferred to Joe Freeman, chief of the OWRB's Financial Assistance Division, at the annual Council of Infrastructure Financing Authorities State Revolving Fund (SRF) Conference luncheon, held October 31 in Chicago. The new award recognizes states that have exhibited the most innovative and effective financial performance in advancing EPA's goals through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) Loan Program.

"It is truly an honor to receive this extremely prestigious award," says Freeman. "It validates that we are achieving the lofty goals we have in place for our Clean Water financing program, as well as the OWRB's other loan and grant programs that help thousands of Oklahomans each and every year." Widely successful since its creation in 1987, the CWSRF provides funding to states to facilitate the construction of municipal wastewater facilities and implementation of nonpoint source pollution control and related water quality protection projects.

According to EPA, "The Oklahoma Water Resources Board is considered a CWSRF leader due to its watershed approach to lending. In 2001, the OWRB adopted the Integrated Priority Ranking System, which ranks projects for funding based on the goals of the Clean Water Act and the State's Unified Watershed assessment to eliminate human health threats, restore impaired surface waters, and protect high quality waters and their uses. It has adopted a targeted effort to identify high priority projects and contacts communities within targeted watersheds or that are in violation of National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) discharge permits."

Nominations for the award were made by each of the 10 EPA regional offices located throughout the U.S. Each nominee had to have a pace level greater than 80% and audits that had revealed no serious programmatic or financial problems. In addition, nominees had to demonstrate outstanding performance related to the following criteria: better management practices, watershed approach, promotion of creative use of technologies, leveraging practices, innovative partnerships, innovative lending practices, and whether the noted performance could be replicated by other states.

The OWRB serves as the state's primary financing vehicle for local government water and wastewater projects. The agency is authorized to assist political subdivisions and

municipal corporations of the state, therefore eliminating the risk of lending to private entities. The OWRB's five financial assistance programs—consisting of the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Fund Loan Programs, State Loan Program, Emergency Grant Program, and Rural Economic Action Plan Grant Program—are collectively responsible for more than \$1.4 billion in financing for community water and sewer infrastructure projects in Oklahoma. The effort was launched through a \$25 million dollar appropriation by the State Legislature in 1983.

For more information on the OWRB's Financial Assistance Program contact Joe Freeman at 405-530-8800 or visit the OWRB's Web site at www.owrb.state.ok.us.

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