

## Looking Back, Going Forward

This year has presented many new opportunities to serve our membership. The COVID-19 crisis created many issues for systems that we could have never imagined. Systems throughout the country were affected by this crisis, unlike anything we have witnessed in the past. We were forced to come up with innovative ways to help keep systems operational. Our fleet of generators were put to uses that we could never fathomed, as they were taken to hospitals in Georgia. For more details on our coronavirus efforts, check out our website at <https://www.frwa.net/news/covid-19-update>.

FRWA ordered 8,000 KN95 masks and resold them to systems at cost each mask included a fiber mask to protect it. EPA and FEMA donated cloth mask to protect the essential workers. FRWA coordinated with nine other locations to provide distribution sites throughout the state.

Although, the memory of the last few months is still prominent in our minds, there were many milestones in FRWA history during the past year. The 2020 Focus on Change was added to the FRWA legacy of presenting informative and successful training sessions to the industry professionals throughout the state. This year was celebrated as the thirtieth anniversary of the partnership between FRWA and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection hosting over 1500 attendees at six different locations.

FRWA enhanced our emergency response resources with the purchase of a semi with a mounted crane and an equipment trailer to be used to deliver equipment to systems in need. FRWA also acquired a number of additional generators to allow us to better meet the needs of our membership during an emergency.

In September of last year, the Association received the 2019 National Rural Water Association's Outstanding Achievement in Member Services. The award was presented during the annual Tribute to Excellence awards ceremony at the WaterPro Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. FRWA was selected from Rural Water Associations nationwide for this annual award.

**Apprenticeship Program** The FRWA Apprenticeship Program launched in October of 2019. The program will help water and wastewater utilities develop skilled and trained employees through apprenticeship. Apprenticeship is a tried and true method of enhancing employees' skills and technical knowledge. Our goal is to provide the future work force the technical training and on-the-job learning needed to become effective operators.

The Apprenticeship Program is approved through the US Department of Labor and Florida Department of Education. New hires, as well as current employees, are eligible for the two year program. Requirements include on the job training the system supplies and related technical instruction that will be held roughly two days a month.

**WATER (Water Assistance Tracking and Emergency Response) Tracker** FRWA has been coordinating since July 1, 2019 with the Department of Environmental Protection and FlaWARN to develop a system to better serve Florida's water and wastewater systems during emergency operations. The initial "go live" date was scheduled to be June 1 but due to the unanticipated impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the roll out of the new system, named WATER Tracker, was moved to April 13, 2020.

Florida's WATER Tracker combines the needs of Florida Water Agency Response Network (FlaWARN) and the Florida Rural Water Association (FRWA) Resource and Response Tracking for emergency events such as hurricanes, natural disasters, acts of terrorism and any unplanned events that can disrupt the drinking water and wastewater operations for Florida. WATER Tracker allows Florida's drinking water and wastewater utilities to report detailed operational status, specific resource needs, and post available resources during disruptive emergency events. The operational status, along with the reported needs of a utility, is imperative to assess damage, mobilize resources and distribute aid.

Florida was spared any official hurricane or tropical storm landfalls during the 2019 hurricane season, although Nestor came ashore near St. Vincent Island on October 19 as a "post-tropical cyclone. The most memorable storm of the 2019 season was Hurricane Dorian, a name almost certain to be retired. FRWA went into emergency

response mode as we watched the catastrophic category five monster taunt Floridians for days as it crawled through the Bahamas. Its fatal eye wall then passed less than 100 miles from the Atlantic Coast, before it turned north, only grazing Florida as we breathed a sigh of relief.

**REVPlan** The Florida Rural Water Association has partnered with Raftelis to offer the systems of Florida a free online tool called RevPlan that is designed to enhance the asset and financial management for small water utilities. The online tool is designed to provide an online tool for small water utilities to achieve financial resiliency to maintain their utility assets for long-term sustainability. RevPlan will assist users in identifying the various utility funding requirements over a five-year planning window. These funding requirements include capital funding, operating costs, and debt repayment. RevPlan allows the user to identify any rate adjustments necessary to meet the utility funding requirements and the impact rate increases may have on ratepayers. Numerous Florida Rural Water Association members have already used RevPlan for their utility financial planning and asset management integration.

**FDEP State Revolving Fund (SRF) Engineers and Project Liaison.** The SRF Professional Engineers work with SRF applicants (water and wastewater systems) and their engineers as they submit Requests for Inclusion (RFI) to make sure that the projects are correctly sized for the community and actually fit community needs. The PEs also review and provide comments on Facility Plans and Business Plans and if necessary they may author the plans for small communities. The PEs also review the project to assure that the project matches the Facility Plan. If needed they will do site visits as well, attend the pre-construction conference, during construction and at the end of construction.

**The SRF Project Liaison** will coordinate with SRF Staff and PEs by performing periodic site visits to assure and assist the engineer, owner and contractor with compliance with SRF procedures and standards (Davis-Bacon Wages, American Iron & Steel requirements, record keeping, reports, etc.). Specialists may attend the pre-construction conference, during construction and at the end of construction.

The SRF Project Liaison functions as an intermediary between stakeholders involved in the funding process for utilities. Those stakeholders involved in the State Revolving Fund process include those members seeking funding (Sponsors), DEP, FRWA, Engineers, Consultants, and others. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection appropriates approximately \$250 million dollars each year to Water, Wastewater, Storm Water, and other projects through low cost loans from the SRF. This assistance is designed to minimize project costs and delays, and to inform members/sponsors what to anticipate throughout the process.

**Energy Efficiency Program** On average, a water utility spends 30% of their annual budget on energy costs. This cost continues to grow as new regulations require electric companies to reduce their impact on the environment. By improving your system's energy efficiency, you can reduce the cost of purchasing electricity. FRWA's Energy Efficiency Program helps your system reduce energy costs. The process is simple. You schedule an on-site visit and provide the last twelve months' electric bills. Following the visit, a report is written which gives you helpful tips and customized advice for your unique system. The report can help your system secure funding from SRF or USDA Rural development, as well as inform you of other funding sources and incentives. This service is FREE to our members but would typically cost \$15,000.

**DW Security/Vulnerability Assessment Program** Due to a number of catastrophic events that have taken place over the past 15 years, a few key presidential directives led to a water sector specific risk assessment along with guidelines for implementing both physical and cyber security measures. Florida Rural Water Association was selected to do a drinking water and wastewater security and Vulnerability Assessment program throughout the state of Florida by the FDEP. FRWA meets with the water utilities to improve the benchmarking of standards for both the water and wastewater utility business. The reports that are generated will assist the strengthening of Florida's water system against cybersecurity, intrusion, natural disasters, terrorism, vandalism, and will benefit the stakeholders of Florida in the same manner. By assisting systems in identifying areas of vulnerability, including vulnerable areas within the SCADA systems, all systems within Florida will benefit. The new regulations that have been developed with the drafting of the new America's Water Infrastructure Act is a driving factor for the increased awareness and concern for improving our water resources and the Vulnerability Assessment reports are being developed to protect the Utilities.

The Florida Rural Water Association has been serving the systems of Florida for over forty years. This year like never before, we look back with a feeling of accomplishment and forward to a new world as we step into the future of keeping the water in Florida safe and flowing.