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| Logo  Description automatically generated | **North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality** |  |
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| **Priority Rating System Guidance and Form for Division of Water Infrastructure** **State Revolving Fund Supplemental Appropriations for Helene/Milton/Hawai’i (SRF SA-HMW) for Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems** |
|  | (Last updated: July 2025) |

This guidance aids the applicant in understanding and implementing the Priority Rating System (PRS) when applying for the State Revolving Fund (SRF) Supplemental Appropriations for Helene/Milton/Hawai’i (SA-HMW or SRF Helene) funding administered by the Division of Water Infrastructure (DWI) for decentralized wastewater treatment systems (DWTS) projects.

**Use this guidance only for applications seeking funding for DWTS projects through this program.** Clean Water State Revolving Fund DWTS Pilot Projects, drinking water and wastewater projects are covered under a separate guidance.

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**Priority Rating System Guidance**

1. General Program Overview
* There is approximately $21.6 million for awards within the CWSRF Helene program to improve the resilience of DWTSs under the SA-HMW-DWTS funding program.
* $11 million of the total program funding will be reserved for applications for DWTS repair/replacement-only projects as differentiated from projects extending centralized sewer to homes currently served by DWTSs and planning projects. Division staff will determine application caps at the application cutoff deadlines for each cycle. Note that applications representing multiple partners collaborating on a regional approach to DWTS repair/replacement may exceed these caps. If not all funds are awarded by the State Water Infrastructure Authority (SWIA) by the April 2026 meeting (application-round cutoff on March 2, 2026), then remaining funds may be awarded to previously awarded projects.
* There is a 2% closing fee; however, the closing fee may be paid as part of the award, if desired and identified in the project budget. The amount available for project work would accordingly be reduced by the amount of the closing fee; applicants may want to consider covering the fee with other funds to maximize funds available for project work.
* Projects may request up to 7% of the funds awarded for project grant administration for allowable costs. Grant administration costs should be identified in the project budget.
* Funds will be awarded as 100% principal forgiveness (PF) loans, so no portion of the funding will be repayable.
* Funding recipient must spend all funds within 5 years of the date of the funding award offer, or by December 31, 2031 (whichever comes first).
* This program can fund CWSRF-eligible projects that serve one or more of the following purposes:
* Improve the resilience of DWTS to flooding,
* Assess the potential to connect homes served by DWTS to centralized wastewater treatment systems, or
* To fund such connections
* Projects or programs that repair or replace DWTS that meet the requirements above and which are located in areas that were affected by Hurricane Helene are eligible. Applicants from counties that are one of the counties declared under the Stafford Act for FEMA-PA will be considered to be in a Helene-affected area. All other applicants must provide information to justify that their area was affected by Hurricane Helene in a manner that would have affected decentralized wastewater treatment systems.
* <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4827/designated-areas>
* Applicants can partner or contract with organizations to manage projects. The following are considered Eligible Applicants:
* A local government unit (LGU) or a nonprofit water corporation, as defined in G.S. 159G-20, in areas affected by Hurricane Helene
* A Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI) or a nonprofit organization that provides financing assistance to homeowners to repair or replace DWTS in North Carolina
* Developing Responsible Management Entities (RMEs) as a way to pool ongoing operational expenses and management of DWTSs (especially advanced treatment systems with extra operational requirements) and is an eligible resiliency effort and can be included as part of a DWTS repair/replacement project. Award funding can go toward planning and development of an RME, however they cannot fund operational expenses.
* The definition of a DWTS for purposes of this program includes:
* Subsurface systems permitted by the County Health Departments or Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
* Surface discharging systems permitted by the Division of Water Resources (DWR) through a general permit (i.e., NCG550000)
* Non-discharge spray / drip irrigation systems permitted by the Division of Water Resources (DWR)
* Unpermitted direct discharges of either greywater or blackwater
* Both (1) projects to extend sewer to areas with damaged or failing DWTS and (2) programs to “find-and-fix” damaged or failing DWTS are invited to apply.

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1. Submittal Requirements
* Request all the priority points you want to receive. DWI does not award unrequested priority points, other than as specified in this guidance document.
* Eligible applicants may submit multiple applications if those applications have either different project areas and/or have different project purposes and are applying for different line item priority points. Use the [Rolling Application](https://edocs.deq.nc.gov/Forms/RollingApplication) form to apply for these projects.
* Submit all required supporting documentation for the requested priority points as part of the narrative. DWI will not request additional information or documentation and will determine priority points based solely on the information submitted.
* In the narrative, provide the page number or clear reference to a specific page in the supporting documentation to support the claim for priority points for each line item, if applicable. This enables a more efficient review. Points may not be awarded if documentation cannot be located by reviewers.
* Where the guidance requires summaries in the narrative, provide only relevant additional information.
* DWI reviews each application as a stand-alone application. DWI will not search other applications from the same applicant for missing information. Provide all relevant information in each application, even if it is also included in a different application.

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* + - * 1. Priority Rating System Score Sheet

**A completed PRS score sheet for DWTS SRF Helene Funding must be submitted with the funding application**. To claim points for a particular line item, mark “X” on the score sheet. Applicants may only mark one box per application score sheet.

* + - * 1. Priority Rating System Narrative

**A PRS narrative, along with supporting documentation as required by this guidance, must also be submitted with the funding application.** The narrative is part of the application.

* The narrative must be consistent with information in the DWI Rolling Application for Funding (DWI Application) and other supporting information.
* The narrative must be complete to provide for accurate rating, and concise enough that critical information is not lost in unnecessary text. Text should only provide information related to this PRS (e.g., do not describe other benefits that are not included in the PRS).
* When the narrative is supported with additional documentation, please reference a page number, section number, or other clear reference to the page location to aid staff in finding the specific part of the supporting documentation relevant to each line item in the narrative.
* Maps are very useful in determining priority points. Maps should include sufficient labels of geographical references (e.g., streams and roadways) and be at a readable scale. Individual line items may require specific maps as listed below. When required, include maps in the supporting documentation file.

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1. Priority Rating System Narrative Guidance
	1. **Project Purpose**

An application can earn points in Category 1 based on the Project Purpose as documented in this section. **Although a project may serve several purposes, an application can earn points for only one Project Purpose.** If you are unsure of how to classify the application, please contact DWI staff.

**Important to Remember**

To earn priority points for a Project Purpose, **all parts of the project must serve the claimed Project Purpose and increase resilience related to DWTS**. If any part of the project does not serve the higher-scoring Project Purpose, the application earns only the points for a lower-scoring Project Purpose that all elements of the project serve.

The project narrative must fully describe the proposed project and how each element serves the Project Purpose claimed on the PRS score sheet. The claimed Project Purpose must be consistent with all information provided in the application. An application cannot earn points for a combination of Project Purposes.

If the project does not qualify for the line item claimed under Category 1, it will be automatically considered for other project purpose line-item points (e.g., “rolls down”), provided all required documentation is provided. For example, if points are claimed for Line Item 1.B but the project does not qualify for those points, then the project will be considered for Line Item 1.C points, provided all required information for Line Item 1.C is provided.

**Important to Remember**

**Note:** Projects that do not receive Project Purpose points may still be eligible for funding.

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* + 1. At Least 50% of the Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems in the Project Area or to be Remedied by the Project Were Damaged by Hurricane Helene

Hurricane Helene ravaged communities across the western part of North Carolina, rendering many DTWSs damaged. A damaged DWTS means that it sustained impacts from Hurricane Helene that rendered systems within the project area either unable to operate or operating at a reduced level. Damages can be caused by various impacts, including erosion/soil loss, flooding, landslides, etc.

**Points Available**

DWTS – 15 points

This line item requires the applicant to demonstrate that at least half (50%) of the DWTSs that will be remedied by the project were damaged by Hurricane Helene. The proposed project can address non-Helene damaged systems; however, the cumulative count of DWTSs addressed by the project must always remain above the 50% threshold.

Note that work to remedy a non-permitted direct discharge (greywater or blackwater straightpipes) will be counted for the 50% threshold for Line Item 1.A due to the severity of environmental health risk associated with those systems.

Additionally, the proposed project must add resiliency components to protect against future flooding or rapid hydraulic change (e.g., flood-induced damages). See the appendix at the end of the document for examples.

Projects submitted for Line Item 1.A will generally fall into two categories: extending sewers to failing/failed decentralized systems and programs that repair/replace failing/failed DWTSs. Requirements for these types of projects are explained below.

*Required Documentation for Projects Extending Sewers*

* On a map, demarcate the project area. A project area may be across multiple locations and does not have to be contiguous. Indicate the homes and businesses in the project area that potentially will be connected to the sewer system. Maps should include major roadways, streams, and other features to orient the viewer, and provide a North Arrow, scale, and legend. Show the existing sewer collection piping that will be utilized for connecting the proposed sewer extension.
* Briefly describe the Hurricane Helene impacts to DWTSs within the project area. Utilize flood maps, landslide maps, or documented damage to show the likelihood of Helene damage to DWTSs within the project area.
* Briefly include the communication plan to gauge the commitment of homeowners to connect to the public sewer extension project prior to construction.
* Include a project budget sealed by a professional engineer in the application.
* The project must meet the 50% threshold for 1.A, which will require documentation of the numbers of Helene impacted DWTSs connected vs total DWTSs connected. Although documentation is not required at the time of application, it will be required prior to approval of plans and specs. Documentation must be provided by the County Health Department, a registered sanitarian or a licensed soil scientist, authorized onsite wastewater evaluator or Engineer, the DWR Regional Office, or third party as approved by DHHS or DWR, depending on DWTS type. If the DWTS is permitted through DWR, the permit number must be provided. Photos may be included to document that the impacts were caused by Hurricane Helene.

*Required Documentation for DWTS Repair and/or Replacement Projects*

An Applicant or program proposing to repair, replace, or remedy individual Helene-damaged DWTSs should be able to identify the area(s) or individual DWTSs they plan to address in the project and prioritize those where Helene-damaged systems are known. If an Applicant is unable to identify which specific DWTSs will be included in the project at the time of application but wishes to use the awarded funds to identify where damages or failures are occurring and repair/replace those DWTSs (e.g., “find-and-fix”), the Applicant must provide detailed plans on how their project and/or program will be implemented to identify qualified DWTSs and ensure and document that at least 50% of the DWTSs that are improved during the project were damaged by Helene. (Note that disbursements of funds will not be made if the cumulative work to date does not meet the Line Item 1.A threshold of 50%.)

* On a map, demarcate the project area in which the project will be conducted. A project area may be across multiple locations and does not have to be contiguous. Maps should include major roadways, streams, and other features to orient the viewer, and provide a North Arrow, scale, and legend.
* Briefly describe the Hurricane Helene impacts to DWTSs within the project area. Utilize flood maps, landslide maps, or documented damage to show the likelihood of Helene damage to DWTSs within the project area.
* Describe in detail how the proposed project will identify Helene-damaged DWTSs within the project area.
* Discuss how the proposed project will repair these DWTSs and how the repairs will increase the DWTSs resiliency to storm impacts including floods and landslides.
* Describe how implementation of the proposed project will document the ratio of Helene-damaged to non-damaged system repairs/replacements. For example, the applicant can propose that the program manager will submit copies of repair permits from the local health department that notes that repaired DWTSs were damaged by Helene with or prior to submitting disbursement request.
* Discuss the administration of the program, including who will be managing which aspects of the program, and program procedures for the following: DTWSs system identification, property owner coordination, repair/resiliency assessments, contractor procurement, funds management, permitting, inspections, close-out, etc.

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* + 1. At Least 50% of Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems in the Project Area or to be Remedied by the Project are Failing or Failed

Though Hurricane Helene may not have directly impacted certain DWTSs or caused them to fail, projects and programs may target DWTSs within a Helene-impacted project area that are failing or failed.

This line item requires the applicant to demonstrate that at least half (50%) of the DWTSs that are remedied by the project within the project area are failing or failed. The proposed project can also address functional, compliant systems by enhancing storm resiliency; however, the cumulative count of systems addressed by the project that are failing or failed must always remain above the 50% threshold.

**Points Available**

* DWTS – 10 points

Note that work to remedy a non-permitted direct discharge (greywater or blackwater straightpipes) will be counted towards the 50% threshold for Line Item 1.B due to the severity of environmental health risk associated with those systems.

Additionally, the proposed project must add resiliency components to protect against future flooding or rapid hydraulic change (e.g., flood-induced damages). See the appendix at the end of the document for examples.

Projects submitted for Line Item 1.B will generally fall into two categories: extending sewers to failing/failed decentralized systems and programs that repair/replace failing/failed DWTSs. Requirements for these types of projects are explained below.

*Required Documentation for Projects Extending Sewers*

* On a map, demarcate the project area. A project area may be across multiple locations and does not have to be contiguous. Indicate the homes and businesses in the project area that potentially will be connected to the sewer system. Maps should include major roadways, streams, and other features to orient the viewer, and provide a North Arrow, scale, and legend. Show the existing sewer collection piping that will be utilized for connecting the proposed sewer extension.
* Briefly describe the failing and failed DWTSs within the project area. Utilize documented damage to show the likelihood of failing and failed DWTSs within the project area.
* Briefly include the communication plan to gauge the commitment of homeowners to connect to the public sewer extension project prior to construction.
* Include a project budget sealed by a professional engineer in the application.
* The project must meet the 50% threshold for 1.B, which will require documentation of the numbers of failing and failed DWTSs connected vs total DWTSs connected. Although documentation is not required at the time of application, it will be required prior to approval of plans and specs. Documentation must be provided by the County Health Department, a registered sanitarian or a licensed soil scientist, authorized onsite wastewater evaluator or Engineer, the DWR Regional Office, or third party as approved by DHHS or DWR, depending on DWTS type. If the DWTS is permitted through DWR, the permit number must be provided. Photos may be included to document conditions.

*Required Documentation for Repair and/or Replacement Projects*

An Applicant or program proposing to repair, replace, or remedy individual failing or failed DWTSs should be able to identify the area(s) or individual DWTSs they plan to address in the project and prioritize those where failing and failed DWTSs are known. If an Applicant is unable to identify which specific DWTSs will be included in the project at the time of application but wishes to use the awarded funds to identify where failures are occurring and repair/replace those DWTSs (e.g., “find-and-fix”), the Applicant must provide detailed plans on how their project and/or program will be implemented to identify qualified DWTSs and ensure and document that at least 50% of the DWTSs that are improved during the project were failing or failed. (Note that disbursements of funds will not be made if the cumulative work to date does not meet the Line Item 1.B threshold of 50%.)

* On a map, demarcate the project area in which the project will be conducted. A project area may be across multiple locations and do not have to be contiguous. Maps should include major roadways, streams, and other features to orient the viewer, and provide a North Arrow, scale, and legend.
* Briefly describe the general failing and failed conditions of DWTSs within the project area.
* Describe in detail how the proposed project will identify failing and failed DWTSs within the project area.
* Discuss how the proposed project will repair these DWTSs and how the repairs will have increased the DWTSs storm resiliency.
* Describe how implementation of the proposed project will document the ratio of failing and failed to non-failing and failed DWTS repairs/replacements. For example, the applicant can propose that the program manager will submit copies of repair permits from the local health department that notes that repaired DWTSs were failing or failed in the disbursement request.
* Discuss the administration of the program, including who will be managing which aspects of the program, and program procedures for the following: DTWSs system identification, property owner coordination, repair/resiliency assessments, contractor procurement, funds management, permitting, inspections, close-out, etc.

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* + 1. All Other Projects to Repair, Improve, or Replace Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems

An Applicant may have DWTSs in a project area where it may not be possible to document that a majority are either Helene-damaged or failing, but may have ongoing issues or other resiliency needs. To successfully claim this line item, an Applicant must describe the types of repairs, improvements, or replacements that need to be made for DWTSs within the project area.

**Points Available**

* DWTS – 5 points

Additionally, the proposed project must add resiliency components to protect against future flooding or flood-induced damages. See the appendix at the end of the document for examples.

Projects submitted for Line Item 1.C will generally fall into two categories: extending sewers to decentralized systems, and programs that repair/replace DWTSs with flood resiliency. Requirements for these types of projects are explained below.

*Required Documentation for projects extending sewers*

* On a map, demarcate the project area. A project area may be across multiple locations and does not have to be contiguous. Indicate the homes and businesses in the project area that potentially will be connected to the sewer system. Include major roadways, streams, and other features to orient the viewer, and provide a North Arrow, scale, and legend. Show the existing sewer collection piping that will be utilized for connecting the proposed sewer extension.
* Briefly include the communication plan to gauge the commitment of homeowners to connect to the public sewer extension project prior to construction.
* Include a project budget sealed by a professional engineer in the application.

*Required Documentation for repair and/or replacement projects*

* On a map, demarcate the project area in which the project will be conducted. A project area may be across multiple locations and do not have to be contiguous. Maps should include major roadways, streams, and other features to orient the viewer, and provide a North Arrow, scale, and legend.
* Discuss the types of repairs, improvements, and replacements needed for DWTSs within the project area.
* Discuss how the proposed project will identify DWTSs within the project area that it intends to provide repair/replacement work.
* Discuss how the proposed project will repair these DWTSs and how the repairs have increased the DWTSs flood resiliency.
* Discuss how the proposed project will document the system repairs/replacements in real-time with project updates and disbursement requests.
* Discuss the administration of the program, including who will be managing which aspects of the program, and program procedures for the following: DTWSs system identification, property owner coordination, repair/resiliency assessments, contractor procurement, funds management, permitting, inspections, close-out, etc.

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* + 1. Planning Project to Assess Options to Improve Resiliency Against Flood Damage

An Applicant may propose to study options that would help improve the resiliency of DWTSs against storm damage. To successfully claim these points, an Applicant must be able to describe how it will study DWTSs within a specified area to determine the best resilience strategies.

**Points Available**

* DWTS – 2 points

The proposed project must be reasonably expected to result in a capital project. Types of projects may include

* Feasibility studies or preliminary engineering plans to connect homes served by DWTSs to cluster systems or centralized systems
* Risk/vulnerability assessments considering recent flood damage/floodplain maps and future climate projections
* Alternatives analyses

Scopes may include the development of (1) Asset Management Plans; (2) Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Plans; (3) Preliminary Engineering Plans; and/or (4) feasibility studies for establishing a Responsible Management Entity as part of the project.

*Required Documentation*

* Delineate the area where the study will occur by describing it or mapping it. Include items such as street/highway names, stream/river names, and other geographical features.
* Describe what will occur (e.g., survey of homes and businesses with DWTSs, development of an assessment and repair program) during the study.
* Describe how the Applicant will use the study to assess the potential for connections to a centralized wastewater system, increase resiliency of individual DWTSs, or develop a strategy to facilitate greater resiliency for households and businesses that rely on DWTSs.

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**Priority Rating System Score Sheet for SA-HMW CWSRF Decentralized Wastewater Treatment System Resilience Projects**

| **2025 SRF SA-HMW Funding PRIORITY RATING SYSTEM for Decentralized Wastewater Treatment System Projects** |
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| *Instructions: For each line item, mark “X” to claim the points for that line item. Be sure that your narrative includes justification for every line item claimed. At the end of each category, provide the total points claimed for each program in the subtotal row for that category. Then add the subtotals from each category and enter the Total of Points for All Categories in the last line. Note that some categories have a maximum allowed points that may be less than the total of individual line items.* |
| **Line Item #** | **Category 1 – Project Purpose***(Points will be awarded for only one Project Purpose)* | **Claimed****Yes/No** | **Points** |
| **1.A** | At least 50% of the decentralized wastewater treatment systems in the project area or to be remedied by the project were damaged by Hurricane Helene±  |  | 15 |
| **1.B** | At least 50% of the decentralized wastewater treatment systems in the project area or to be remedied by the project are failing or failed± |  | 10 |
| **1.C** | All other projects to repair, improve or replace decentralized wastewater treatment systems± |  | 5 |
| **1.D** | Planning projects to assess options to improve resiliency against flood damage  |  | 2 |
| **Maximum Points for Category 1 – Project Purpose** | **15** |
| **Total of Points for All Categories** | **15** |
| ± Project will repair, improve or replace the decentralized wastewater treatment system with added resilience or replace the decentralized wastewater treatment system with a connection to a centralized wastewater system. |

**APPENDIX A. Examples of Projects Eligible Under the SA-HMWClean Water SRF Decentralized Funds** *(from EPA Office of Water Memorandum, “Award and Implementation of the 2025 State Revolving Fund Supplemental Appropriation for Hurricanes Helene and Milton and the Hawai’i Wildfires (SA-HMW)”, dated March 13, 2025)*

1. **Projects that protect decentralized wastewater treatment systems from rising waters**
	1. Anchor all buoyant components (e.g., fiberglass tanks, air-filled textile filters, pump basins, etc.) to prevent floating during flood events.
	2. Properly grade and slope areas around septic system components to reduce flood scouring.
	3. Brace septic system components properly to withstand saturated soil conditions.
	4. Plant resilient native plants with shallow root systems to hold soils and prevent erosion near drainfields.
	5. Elevate all electrical components above base flood elevation.
	6. Add artificial buffers or swales, curtain drains, and fill caps to protect infrastructure and divert excess water away from decentralized systems.
	7. Install backflow valves to prevent return flow and protect property from sewage backups.
2. **Projects that protect decentralized wastewater treatment systems from power risks associated with flooding**
	1. Install backup power systems/connections to ensure that systems remain operational during power outages.
	2. Install power shutoffs for emergency situations.
3. **Projects that reduce the risk of decentralized wastewater treatment system failure associated with flooding**
	1. Install measures that reduce the amount of wastewater entering the decentralized treatment system.
4. **Projects that increase decentralized wastewater system capacity to handle flood risks**
	1. Install additional drain lines, larger septic tanks, and holding tanks.
	2. Elevate drainfields to create more vertical separation distance (e.g., a mound system) or install alternative dispersion for drainfields (e.g., shallow pressurized drainfields or drip dispersal) allowing decentralized systems to return to normal operation more quickly after a flood event.
5. **Consolidation of decentralized wastewater treatment systems to reduce flood risk**
	1. Install cluster systems to consolidate treatment and dispersal off-lot in a site that is more resilient (e.g., less flood risk, better soil conditions or terrain).
	2. Design and install shared cluster systems to pool financial resources so that resilient features and management practices can be incorporated.
	3. Integrate advanced treatment options into cluster systems to generate treated wastewater for reuse (e.g., membrane technologies)

**VI. Planning projects that assess the potential to connect homes served by decentralized wastewater treatment systems to centralized wastewater systems due to vulnerability to flood damage or that analyze the best approach to integrate system and community sustainability/resiliency priorities in the face of a variety of uncertain futures including natural disasters and more frequent and intense extreme weather events, provided the planning work is reasonably expected to result in a capital project, including but not limited to:**

1. Feasibility studies to connect homes served by decentralized treatment systems to centralized treatment systems
2. Risk/vulnerability assessments considering recent floodplain maps and projected sea level rise
3. Alternatives analysis
4. Asset Management Plans
5. Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Plans

**VII. Projects that make connections from homes served by decentralized wastewater treatment systems to centralized wastewater treatment systems**

1. Installation/construction of collection system components and equipment
2. Decommissioning of decentralized wastewater systems so that they no longer pose risks to human health and the environment

**(DWI note: other activities to improve DWTS resiliency may be eligible and we encourage applicants to consider activities with local needs and conditions in mind)**