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Water project gets \$2.8M grant

by Clinton Thomas
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MARYVILLE, Mo. — Few things turn a plan into a project faster than a fat grant check.

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources pledged \$2.8 million in grants to the Water Partnership for Northwest Missouri on Tuesday during the group's meeting at Northwest Missouri State University.

The money will help pay for the construction of new wells, a water plant and transmission lines to connect eight water districts in Northwest Missouri: Rock Port, Tarkio, Fairfax, Craig, Burlington Junction, Hopkins, Clearmont and Atchison County District No. 1.

The project represents a small piece of the water partnership's Sketch No. 7 plan. The plan will use seven hubs to provide a plentiful source of drinking water to 12 counties in Northwest Missouri.

DNR Director Doyle Childers said the grants represented about 25 percent of the funds that the state set aside for drinking water projects.

"This is a pretty major commitment to make the plan happen," Mr. Childers said. "We can provide the help, but we can't make the decisions."

The group received pointers on where to apply for additional funding and how to streamline its decision-making process from Bill Jarocki, director of the Environmental Finance Center at Boise State University.

Mr. Jarocki praised the water partnership for addressing an issue that the government often overlooks. He said the group's next step should be to attach concrete numbers to its plan that answer the questions of skeptics. How much will it cost? How will it affect rates? How much money will be saved by addressing the problem before it's too late?

"Most people don't disagree with what we're trying to do, provide plenty of safe drinking water," Mr. Jarocki said. "The problem comes when you go to people and ask them to pay up."

The water partnership's Sketch No. 7 plan calls for 280 miles of transmission lines to be built in five phases. Upon completion, 83 water districts would obtain water from the seven hubs of Bethany, Cameron, Maryville, Middle Fork Water Co. in Gentry County, Plattsburg, Savannah and Missouri American Water in St. Joseph.