

County News

HELP FOR NEPAL

Fairfax County, Va. Search and Rescue team members hunt for survivors in the midst of the devastation

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES ■ WASHINGTON, D.C.

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CDBG Coalition hopes to protect, increase funding

By CHARLIE BAN
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

While celebrating a House appropriations bill markup that boosted the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to \$3 billion, the CDBG Coalition pushed for measures that would sustain the program in the future

at a Capitol Hill briefing April 28. The coalition, organized by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and including NACo, reiterated a wish list of \$3.3 billion in funding and an adjustment for inflation, which has been absent since the program's 1974 introduction.

In its 41 years, the number of CDBG recipients has increased to more than 1,200 from its inaugural 594, but the initial funding level, \$2.7 billion, has increased much less than the rate of inflation. It's a need-based, formula-driven funding program to states and local governments through the U.S. Department of Housing

and Urban Development.

"If you would adjust for inflation, the program would probably be funded at about \$12 billion," said Gene Lowe, the U.S. Conference of Mayors' assistant executive director. "We simply have been nowhere near that."

Dauphin County, Pa. Commissioner George Hartwick described the extent to which CDBG has helped his county.

"We've been able to do some creative things with leveraging dollars," he said, pointing out

See CDBG page 2



Dauphin County, Pa. Commissioner George Hartwick discusses the importance of CDBG funds to his county.

Photo by Alix Kashdan

Justice and Mental Health Act introduced

By YEJIN JANG
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

A bill that would provide more resources to address the increasing population of those with mental illness in jails has been introduced in both the House and Senate by Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) and Rep. Doug Collins (R-Ga.). The Comprehensive Justice and Mental Health Act (CJMHA) would reauthorize the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act.

CJMHA would provide counties with funding to expand specialty courts (e.g. drug courts and veteran's courts) and crisis intervention training for law enforcement. It would also:

- continue support for mental health courts and crisis intervention teams
- authorize investment in veterans treatment courts
- support state and local efforts to identify people with mental health conditions at each point in the criminal justice system in order to appropriately direct them to mental health services (sequential intercept model)
- increase focus on corrections-based programs such as transitional services and

screening practices that identify inmates with mental health conditions

- support the development of curricula for police academies and orientation, and
- develop programs to train federal law enforcement officers in how to appropriately respond to incidents involving a person with a mental health condition.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



Cook County sheriff's program tears down walls and builds up confidence ▶ Page 13

Incoming NACo president, Sallie Clark, invites leadership applications ▶ Page 3

Minnesota county judge takes DUI rates for a ride ▶ Page 6

Nevada, California escape ESA listing of grouse ▶ Page 8

Flexibility, focus on economic development big selling points for CDBG program

CDBG from page 1

one dollar in CDBG funding can typically be leveraged to raise \$4.77 in private financing. “Being able to have flexible utilization of dollars to solve some extremely complex issues in redevelopment, infrastructure and road repairs — we’ve combined it with our infrastructure bank to address major projects,” Hartwick added.

He emphasized what the 30

percent set-aside of CDBG funding for rural projects has meant.

“In northern, rural parts of the county, if it wasn’t for our ability to utilize CDBG dollars we may not have any public infrastructure at all,” he said. “The idea of providing water and sewer lines and the ability for us to put in critical roadway has been crucial.”

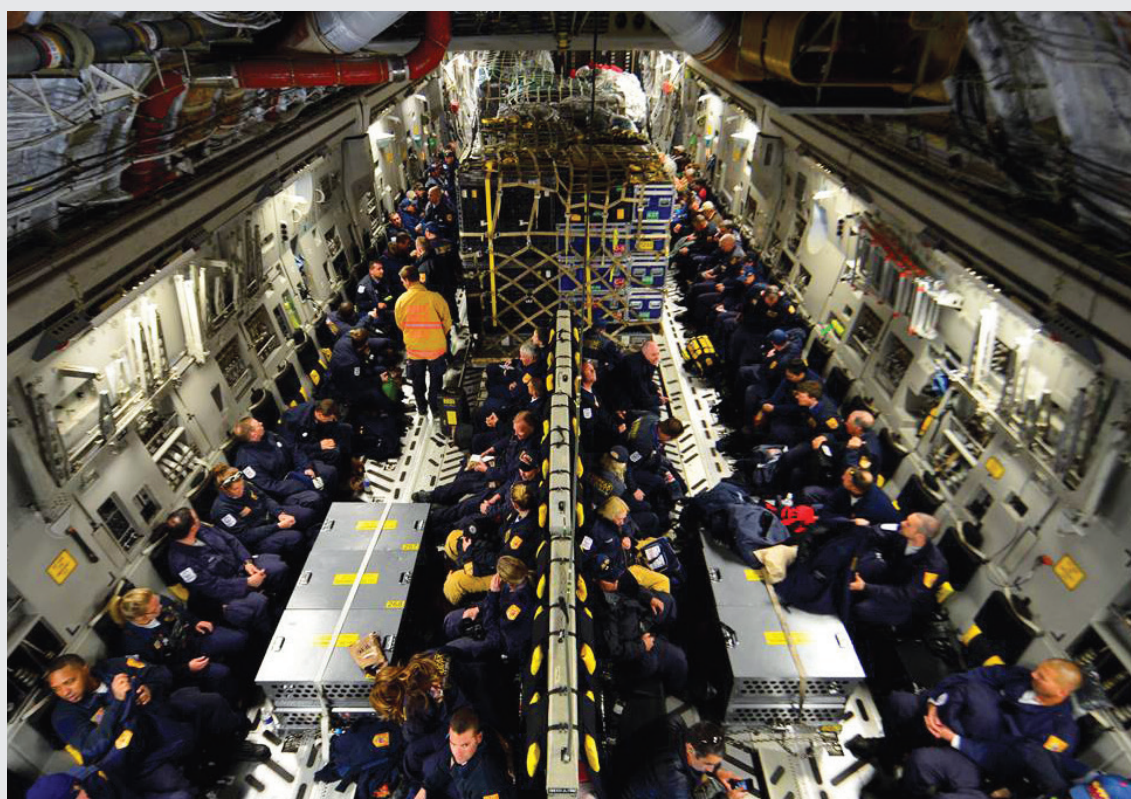
Tim Ware, executive director of the George Washington Regional Commission in Fredericksburg, Va.

echoed that sentiment.

“At a time when local governments in rural communities are striving to overcome economic competition, aging infrastructure and scarce federal resources, it is vital that federal policymakers continue to maintain strong funding for the CDBG program,” he said.

Reps. Jim McGovern (D) and Joe Kennedy (D), both of Massachusetts, also voiced support for CDBG funding during the briefing.

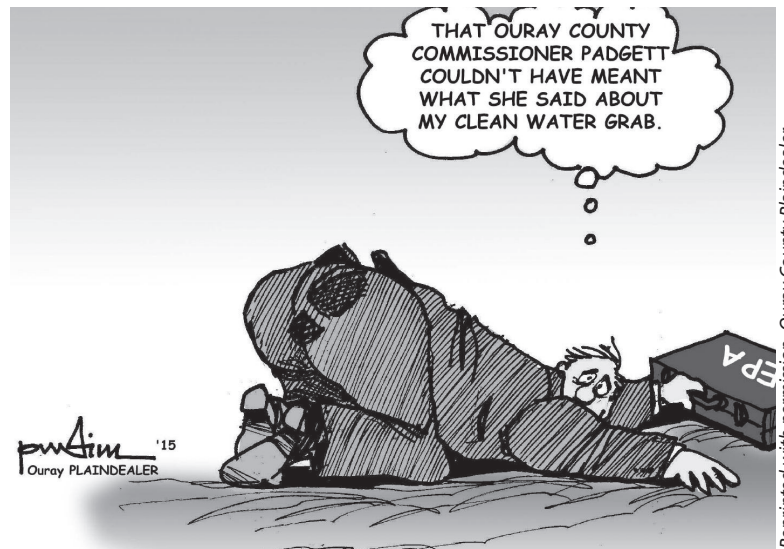
Nepal gets a hand from Fairfax, Los Angeles counties



(Clockwise from top) A Fairfax County, Va. Urban Search & Rescue team awaits takeoff for Nepal. USAR Team members from Fairfax and Los Angeles counties help rescue a teen five days after the quake. A team member marks debris.



Photo credits: Also clockwise from top: Photos courtesy Airman 1st Class William Johnson/U.S. Air Force, DART/USAID, Fairfax County Fire & Rescue



Reprinted with permission, Ouray County Plaindealer

‘Waters of the U.S.’ bill heads to House floor

By JULIE UFMER
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

A bill that would require the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to withdraw the proposed Waters of the U.S. rule within 30 days and to rewrite a new proposed rule after consultation with state and local governments is headed for the House floor within the next several weeks. The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) passed the Regulatory Integrity Protection Act of 2015 (H.R. 1732) April 15.

H.R. 1732 would require the agencies to document where consensus was reached with state and local governments and where it wasn’t reached, and how the agencies addressed those concerns.

The measure currently has 55 co-sponsors. NACO sent a letter to T&I Committee Chairman Bill Shuster (R-Pa.) and Ranking Member Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) in support of the Regulatory Integrity Protection Act.

In April 2014, the EPA and the Corps jointly released a new proposed rule that would amend the definition of Waters of the U.S. within the Clean Water Act and dramatically expand the range of public safety infrastructure that falls

under federal permitting authority. Since its publication, NACO has expressed concerns about the scope of the proposed rule and called for it to be withdrawn until further analysis and more in-depth consultation with state and local officials could be completed.

A bipartisan Senate bill that also urges the EPA and Corps to restart the Waters of the U.S. rulemaking process was introduced April 30.

The Waters of the U.S. rule is expected to be finalized within the next several months.

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Quick Takes

TOP 5 MOST COMMON NON-PRESIDENTIAL COUNTY NAMES

1. Clay 18
2. Montgomery 18
3. Union 18
4. Marion 17
5. Wayne 16

The Clay County Courthouse in Alabama

As ranked by: USA Travel Guide



Courtesy of USGENWEB ARCHIVES

Legislation would repeal 'Cadillac tax' on health care plans

By **BRIAN BOWDEN**
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

A bipartisan measure to repeal the so-called "Cadillac," or excise tax, on high-cost insurance plans — supported by NACo — was introduced at a Capitol Hill press briefing.

Rep. Joseph Courtney (D-Conn.) unveiled the legislation, the Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act, along with co-sponsor Rep. Dina Titus (R-Nev.) and representatives from the public and private sectors including Berks County, Pa. Commissioner Christian Leinbach representing NACo, April 28.

The 40 percent excise tax, a provision of the Affordable Care Act, will be imposed on employers for health insurance benefits above \$10,200 for individual coverage and \$27,500 for family coverage beginning in 2018. NACo opposes taxing

county employee health benefits.

Leinbach voiced NACo's support for the bill because counties continue to grapple with the budgetary challenges left over from the recession, and the excise tax, he said, is "an unfunded mandate" that would require counties to dramatically raise deductibles and reduce benefits, making it more difficult to hire and retain county employees.

"Not only would the excise tax hinder our efforts to attract and retain top-notch employees, but it would also have significant impacts on county budgets and impose additional burdens on taxpayers," he said.

The tax is expected to cost his county nearly \$3.6 million by 2022, and over the course of five years, a total of \$11.6 million.

The Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act has already attracted 65 co-sponsors, Courtney said.



Photo by Alix Kashdan

At a Capitol Hill news conference, Berks County, Pa. Commissioner Christian Leinbach voices NACo's support for a bill that would eliminate the excise tax, also known as the Cadillac tax, on health care benefits for county employees.

Memo: NACo Members From: Incoming President Sallie Clark

Looking ahead to my year as NACo president, I want to take this opportunity to let you know about the appointments that I will have the privilege of making to NACo's leadership team.

These appointments include:

- Policy Steering Committee and subcommittee chair and vice chairs
- LUCC and RAC chairs, vice chairs and members
- Standing committee chairs, vice chairs and members
- Ad Hoc Committee, Task Force and Advisory Board chairs, vice chairs and members
- At-large NACo Board Director

Membership on policy steering committees is done through a nomination process by state associations of counties; it is not part of the presidential appointments.

More information about each committee and its specific appointment terms can be found online at www.naco.org/presidential_application.

To be considered for a presidential appointment to any of the following committees or as an at-large director for the NACo Board of Directors, you must complete the online application at www.naco.org/presidential_application before June 8.

Our association exists because of its members, and we need your expertise and knowledge to help make



NACo stronger and more effective. Please apply now. Thank you.

First Vice President Sallie Clark
Commissioner
El Paso County, Colo.

NEW IN MAY FROM NACo's

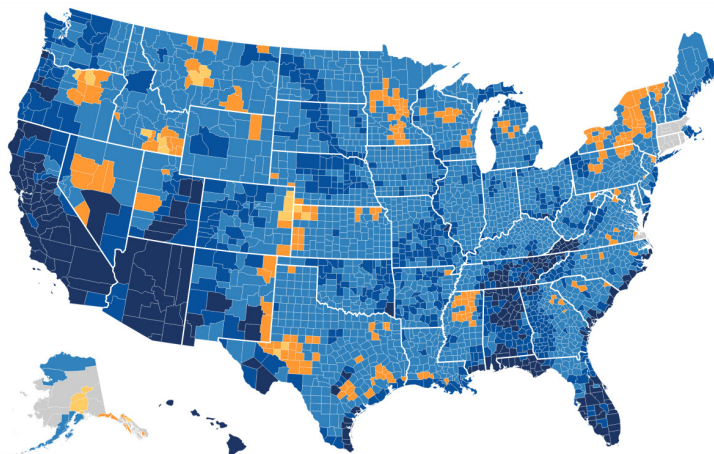
COUNTY EXPLORER

1,348 species are listed as Endangered or Threatened in the 3,069 counties, as of May 2015.*

99.4% of the nation's 3,069 counties have at least one listed species within their boundaries.

217 species have been newly listed as Endangered or Threatened in the 3,069 counties since 2004.

81% of counties have at least one species newly listed as Endangered or Threatened since 2004.



*This total includes species classified as Endangered, Threatened, and Threatened due to Similarity of Appearance.

2015 Endangered Species
Number of Endangered and Threatened Species Listings

Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data, as of May 2015.

www.NACo.org/CountyExplorer



COUNTY INNOVATIONS AND SOLUTIONS

Boulder County, Colo.



Left Hand Outdoor Challenge participant Megan Kocina checks a GPS against a map on an orienteering course.

Photo by Benjamin White-Patarino

Teens Flock to Outdoor Challenge

By CHARLIE BAN
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

In a world of near-ubiquitous electronic interaction, high school students still ache for a chance to be a part of the natural world.

That's what Boulder County Parks and Open Space found out when teens responded so well to the Left Hand Outdoor Challenge. It is named, as are many parks and programs in Boulder County, Colo., after Chief Left Hand, one of the Native Americans the department considers the earliest stewards of the land.

"When you consider the opportunities for environmental education, there just aren't that many for younger people," said park ranger Sarah Andrews, who has been working on the program for most of its three years. "We wanted to give them a chance to unplug and connect back to being outside. There's something healing for them, just to be outside."

The nine-month program offers

different monthly modules that touch on variety of land stewardship topics for 28 students annually, ages 14 to 18. They include park planning, winter survival and orienteering, wildland firefighting and search and rescue, among others. The participants can learn all facets of environmental stewardship and could consider a career in any of the fields to which they are exposed over the course of the program.

"We wanted to do as much as we could without technology, and we're finding the kids appreciate that," Andrews said. "They like using just a compass and a map."

As three years' worth of challenges have gone on, Andrews and fellow ranger Jason Vroman learned what worked and what didn't for the kids. They learned they had to vary the voices the participants were hearing, so they enlisted the help of different organizations and agencies to bring in speakers. Kids also responded to competitive aspects, like who could

tie the most fencing, or the popular firefighter physical challenge.

"We try to work in competition in every challenge," Andrews said. "We have a lot of high-achieving kids in the program. They're always looking forward, thinking about skills for college and their careers."

By the same token, the participants spend a lot of time in school, and Andrews and Vroman found classroom-based lessons didn't have as much resonance.

"We don't want this to be like more school," Andrews said. "We try to keep them out of classrooms now, and sneak math and science in, in a way that isn't too obvious."

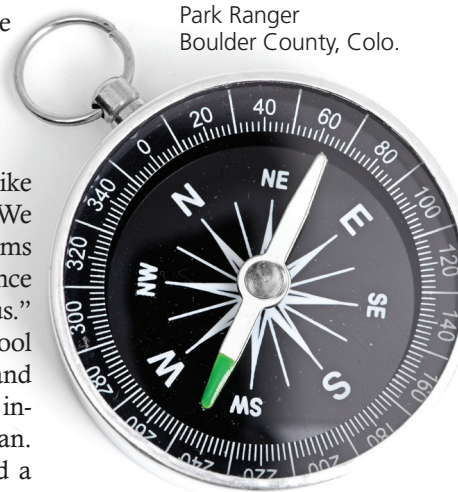
The program follows the school year, from September to May, and requires an application and an interview with Andrews and Vroman.

"Some of them haven't held a formal job before, so this is their first interview," Andrews said. "They can at least leave that with a little more experience."

It's more than just basic training for park rangers. The last cohort

"We wanted to do as much as we could without technology, and we're finding the kids appreciate that"

— Sarah Andrews
Park Ranger
Boulder County, Colo.



been reintroduced.

"This wasn't the kind of thing that we, as rangers, would get to do," Andrews joked.

The program welcomes volunteers, including Gabi Boerkircher, who works for the county's communications office.

"I'm at a desk all day, so it was education for me too. I didn't know anything about stewardship," she said. "I like that some kids come in, thinking they're outsiders but by the end who drop that act and they're involved just like everyone else."

Transportation expenses make up the majority of the program's costs, which are covered by Parks and Open Space funds, a departmental grant and in-kind donations from the Boulder County Youth Corps.

**Read this story online at www.countynews.org to see a video from the Left Hand Outdoor Challenge.*

(County Innovations and Solutions features national award-winning programs.)

had an opportunity to learn about the endangered black-footed ferret, then got to view them at night in a park in Fort Collins where they had

A great American aging boom is underway

By **HADI SEDIGH**
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

For every action, states Newton's third law of motion, there is an equal and opposite reaction, and so it should follow that for every baby boom, there will come an aging boom. Roughly a half century after the most famous of American baby booms — one that began after World War II and continued into the mid-1960s — a great aging boom is upon us. According to the Census Bureau's projections, the number of Americans who are 65 or older will have doubled between 2000 and 2030. Further, between 2030 and 2040, Census projections predict

a 60 percent surge in the number of Americans who are 85 or older, thanks to advancements in medicine, nutrition and public health which have led to increased life expectancy.

These changes in the American populace will have a broad impact on counties, which provide many programs and services relied upon by the country's growing aging population. Housing, transportation, recreation and health care are all areas where counties will face challenges as the population ages.

The Older Americans Act (OAA), first passed in 1965 and last reauthorized in 2006, provides much needed funding to help meet these challenges.

According to the National As-

sociation of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), a NACo partner and longtime leader on aging issues, OAA has for 50 years "provided an ideal, well-established, trusted and community-based service infrastructure responsive to the needs of older people and their caregivers."

States receive OAA funding according to a formula based on each state's share of the nation's population of individuals 60 and older, and are required to pass these funds to area agencies on aging (AAA), which coordinate programs and services for senior citizens at the local level. Nearly 30 percent of the 635 AAAs across the nation are county-based.

An OAA reauthorization bill (S. 192) was approved with unanimous, bipartisan support by the Senate's Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in January. The bill, which has been endorsed by n4a and the National Council on Aging, would reauthorize OAA through FY20, and makes some changes to the formula through which state funding levels are set. It is unclear at this juncture when the bill will be considered on the Senate floor, and there is currently no OAA reauthorization legislation in the House of Representatives.

NACo supports the reauthoriza-

tion of OAA in a manner that provides maximum flexibility for county governments to target resources to address the needs of the elderly in their community and also calls for full funding for the programs authorized under the OAA.

NACo is urging county leaders to ask their senators to co-sponsor S. 192 and to support floor consideration and passage of the measure in the

Senate, and to urge their House members to address the rapidly approaching aging boom by supporting reauthorization of OAA in a manner that emphasizes local flexibility.

In the FY16 appropriations process, county leaders should urge their senators and representatives to restore full, pre-sequester-level funding for OAA.



Profiles in Service

Karen Crane

NACo Board of Directors
Assembly Member
Borough of Juneau, Alaska

Number of years active in NACo: Three years

Years in public service: Five years

Occupation: Retired — served as State of Alaska Director of Libraries, Archives and Museums

Education: B.A., MLS

The hardest thing I've ever done: take my father to an assisted living facility

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Shelby Foote, David McCullough and Abraham Lincoln, and it would be fun to have President Obama join the discussion

A dream I have is to: walk the moors in Scotland.

You'd be surprised to learn that I: follow NASCAR.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: take a job in Alaska without visiting first or knowing much about the job situation. Also the best thing I have ever done.

My favorite way to relax is: reading.

I'm most proud of: pushing myself to run for office — it was definitely outside my comfort zone.

Every morning I read: *Juneau Empire* and then *The Alaska Dispatch* online.

My favorite meal is: Alaska Black Cod and risotto.

My pet peeve is: intolerance.

My motto is: "It can get worse, so make it better."

The last book I read was: *Clouds of Glory, the Life of Robert E. Lee* by M. Korda.

My favorite movie is: *Casablanca*

My favorite music is: Classical, Vivaldi

My favorite president is: a toss-up between Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt.

My county is a NACo member because: it keeps us up to date on national issues important to our borough, provides tools and training and provides an opportunity to see how other counties are dealing with similar issues.

BIRTHDAYS ARE BOOMING

TOP FIVE COUNTIES with the highest percentage of residents aged 65 years and above (2013)

County	%
Sumter County, Fla.	51.8
Charlotte County, Fla.	37.0
La Paz County, Ariz.	35.5
Citrus County, Fla.	34.5
Lancaster County, Va.	34.2

TOP FIVE COUNTIES with the highest percentage of residents aged 85 years or above (2013)

County	%
Hooker County, Neb.	8.0
McIntosh County, N.D.	7.6
Douglas County, S.D.	6.2
Smith County, Kan.	5.9
Hutchinson County, S.D.	5.9



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Judge spearheads 83 percent drop in DUI cases in rural Minnesota county

By CHARLIE BAN
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

It's a tall order to get drunks to check their hubris at the door of a bar and admit they can't drive home, but an Isanti County, Minn. judge has set the stage for just that.

With subsidized cab rides home and better-trained bartenders, the rural county has seen an 83 percent reduction in DUI charges in the 10 years since the Safe Cab program debuted in late 2004.

"The troubling thing is that before someone is arrested for driv-

ing under the influence, they've probably done it at least 80 times," said Judge James Dehn. "So there are always places to improve. And we knew where the drunks were coming from."

When he started hearing DUI cases in 1997, he interrogated defendants when they pleaded guilty, and he's now above 1,200. Where did they have their last drink? What was it? What was their blood alcohol content? Those answers went into a database that was analyzed by a statistician at the University of Minnesota at

Duluth.

The numbers showed an average blood alcohol content of 0.171, more than twice the 0.08 legal limit, but 62 percent could be traced back to specific bars. Working with Isanti/Kanabec Toward Zero Deaths, a traffic safety organization, he had a plan.

"I had something to take to the bar owners throughout the county," Dehn said. "I could tell them, 'You've had this many people leave your bar too drunk to drive,' and they were ready to listen."

And he had something else to offer — a discount on dram shop liability insurance premiums. Those policies cover bars in case a patron causes an accident, and the 15 percent discount kicked in after they sent their bartenders to additional seller training sessions, to help them identify signs of intoxication and disarm a patron of car keys.

Handling the other side of the problem, getting patrons home, Dehn has put together a pot of money to fund the Safe Cab program, which subsidizes \$15 of a cab ride. It's funded by three beer distributors, numerous bars in the area and a collection of private donors. Since it began in 2005, the program has given more than 7,000 rides to 13,000 people.

"If you'd have told me years ago that I'd be able to get beer distributors to pay into something like this..." Dehn mused. "It's been a real team effort to fund this, and it's been remarkable stewardship for the community on the part of these businesses."

Meanwhile, the professor who was analyzing DUI statistics for Dehn? He hasn't gotten enough data to make a difference for three years.

"He jokes that he feels like the Maytag repairman," Dehn said. "I can't say drunk driving has stopped, but I feel like we've done a lot to cut down on the problem. Maybe we've saved a life. We've definitely proven that even in a small rural community, there are alternatives to driving home drunk."

Isanti County government contributes roughly \$2,000 a year to the program, which County Administrator Kevin VanHooser said was an absolute bargain when he figured what the county saves. "We would spend more than



Photo courtesy of James Dehn

Isanti County Judge James Dehn poses with a Safe Ride cab.

that housing and trying one DUI offender," he said. "There's no way to measure exactly what we would be spending if this program didn't exist."

He praised the bars and distributors who pay into the Safe Cabs fund. And he's not the only one.

"It's been so successful because it's a partnership," said Bob Bollenbeck, coordinator for Toward Zero Deaths. "It goes beyond the cost-sharing, which makes it work in the first place, but the buy-in from the bars and distributors helps change the culture in Isanti County."

"Those businesses are big fans because they're keeping the customers alive and safe, and it's the right thing to do."

Bollenbeck was skeptical when the first month of the program in late 2004 totaled three cab rides, but soon the numbers climbed and

the DUIs dropped.

"In the early 2000s, 10 percent of our population had at least one DUI," he said. "We knew there was a need, we just didn't know if people would make use of the program in time. We don't make any judgments about drinking, we just push people to make good decisions when it's time to go home. We might not have as good of a reception if we tried to push too hard."

The program has expanded to Chisago, Pine, Wright, Kanabec, Ottertail, Sherburne and Rice counties, with ambitions to reach downtown Minneapolis in Hennepin County.

"It's catching on," Bollenbeck said. "Because it's a rural county, it can be an effort to go get the cars the next morning from the bars, but then the bars' kitchens can do some business selling sandwiches."

WORD SEARCH

Missoula County, Mont. Facts

Learn more about this featured county in 'What's in a Seal?'

M Z D Z B B Q S M Z F I B M H H V U X J
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J P E R B C E K X I F W J W F T I J S H

- ANGEL'S BATHING POOL** (lake)
- BIG SKY BREWING** (Montana's largest brewery, located in Missoula County)
- BITTERROOT** (one of the county's two main rivers)
- CHOKECHERRY** (native shrub)
- GLEIM BUILDING** (brothel constructed in 1893; a billiard parlor from 1916 until the mid-20th century)
- HELL GATE** (ghost town)
- IDAHO COUNTY** (neighboring county to the southwest)
- MOUNT JUMBO** (iconic mountain that overlooks Missoula)
- OSPREY** (native bird of prey)
- PILTZVILLE** (census-designated area)
- PONDEROSA PINE** (Montana's state tree, found in Missoula County)
- RATTLESNAKE** (U.S. protected Wilderness Area within Lolo National Forest)

- RIVER CITY ROOTS** (Missoula's "signature" annual festival)
- ROCKY MOUNTAINS** (run through Missoula County)
- SALISH** (a.k.a. "Salishan" — Pacific Northwest language that gave Missoula its name from the native word "nmesuletkw," meaning "place of frozen water")
- SAPPHIRE RANGE** (mountain range that runs through the county)
- SMOKEJUMPERS** (Missoula serves as a training ground for these remote-area firefighters)
- SULFUR CINQUEFOIL** (invasive species of weed present in Missoula County)
- VALLEYS** (five large ones in Missoula County)
- WILMA** (historic theater in Missoula)

Water utility sues three Iowa counties over farm runoff

By CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

A trio of Iowa counties is suiting up for a potentially costly legal battle that could expand a key definition in the federal Clean Water Act.

Des Moines Water Works (DMWW) is suing the boards of supervisors in upstream Buena Vista, Calhoun and Sac counties — whose economies rely heavily on agriculture — to have their drainage districts declared “point sources” of nitrate pollution.

“It is an unprecedented suit in terms of the nature of the claims that the water works is making, and it involves several questions that haven’t been litigated before,” said Neil Hamilton, who heads the Agricultural Law Center at Drake University.

Point sources under the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) include industrial drainage pipes and factory outfalls but not agricultural runoff, which is considered a non-point source and is not regulated by the law. The Board of Supervisors in the three counties serve as trustees of 10 drainage districts named in the lawsuit.

In its lawsuit, the water works

alleges that drainage district infrastructure constitutes “discrete conveyances” of nitrate pollution under the CWA that are not exempt from regulation and are required to have an NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) permit. The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Iowa on March 16.

DMWW also claims it has spent millions of dollars removing nitrates from its water sources, primarily the Raccoon River, which drains the three counties being sued. DMWW anticipates spending \$76 million to \$183.5 million by 2020 to design and build a new nitrate removal facility, according to company officials.

According to DMWW’s lawsuit, health concerns associated with nitrate contamination include blue baby syndrome and potential disruption of the endocrine system. DMWW is the state’s largest water utility, serving about 500,000 customers in the Des Moines area.

There are more than 3,000 drainage districts in Iowa, according to the nonprofit Iowa Drainage District Association (IDDA), and an estimated 9 million acres — 26 percent of the state’s land mass — is drained. The three

boards of supervisors aren’t commenting in advance of filing their response, due by May 22. However, Sac County supervisors voted on March 31 to set up a “special revenue fund and special expense fund” to support their defense, according to their meeting minutes.

The IDDA is also soliciting donations from counties throughout the state for a defense fund. John T. Torbert, the association’s executive director, expects the IDDA to play a significant role in defending the counties. “Therefore, we are not making much public comment on it,” he said.

So far, at least two north-central Iowa counties — Winnebago and Wright — have each pledged \$5,000 a year for up to three years to help Buena Vista, Calhoun and Sac supervisors defend their boards.

“I think the general consensus is that we’d like to support this, said Winnebago Supervisor Terry Durby, “because we believe that it may be a starting point and is going to trickle down to affect other counties.” Rick Rasmussen, a Wright County supervisor, explained, “We’ve all got to stick together.” He said his county’s contribution will come from drainage district funds, not the taxpayers.

Kristi Harshberger, general counsel for the Iowa State Association of Counties, said if the water works were to prevail “then there would be similar claims from other places. Everybody would look upstream to place blame whenever they’re having problems with their water.”

The lawsuit raises many unanswered questions, said added, including whether supervisors can be held liable for what they do as trustees of drainage districts and whether drainage districts can even be held responsible for pollution.

Drainage districts have no control over what fertilizers farmers use, she explained. “I think it’s going to be very difficult to prove that they (drainage districts) should somehow be responsible for that when I don’t know how they would monitor, control or police that given the powers they currently have under the law.”

Kristine Tidgren, staff attorney for the Center for Agricultural Law and Taxation at Iowa State University, said, “I think it’s an uphill battle for this case to be successful for the plaintiffs for multiple reasons.” If the water works wins, there’s no system in place for drainage districts or farmers to request an EPA discharge permit. “But the issue is important enough to a broad enough number of stakeholders that it definitely is a case that many people are watching.”



A water intake on the Raccoon River is one source for Des Moines Water Works, which is suing three Iowa counties over nitrate runoff.

Photo courtesy of Des Moines Water Works

CN SPOTLIGHT



Photo by Arthur Scott

NACO First Vice President Sallie Clark and Sen. Chris Coons (D-Del.) celebrate his NACO 2015 County Alumni Award on April 23. Coons served previously as New Castle County, Del. executive and County Council president. Clark also presented awards to Reps. Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) and Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.)

SIGN UP NOW FOR NACO'S POPULAR ... AND FREE WEBINARS.

Using Technology to Connect Health Care for People with Mental Illness

May 7, 2–3:15 p.m.

The push to integrated care, particularly for those with serious mental illness, led a comprehensive community provider and more than 30 North Carolina counties to explore their fragmented health care landscapes and transform them by effectively leveraging technology. By enhancing the interoperability of their counties’ services and hospitals and working with law enforcement and the courts, the counties are helping to keep people with serious mental illness in cost effective treatment and out of hospitals and jails by improving care and outcomes.

Register Today! Contact: Emmanuelle St. Jean, 202.942.4267

Strategies for Employers Providing Retiree Health Coverage

June 4, 2–3:15 p.m.

Many counties currently offer retiree health benefits to their pre-65 employees. Rising costs, prescription drug coverage and the Affordable Care Act have impacted the retiree coverage health plans covered. Join us to learn what strategies counties are using to continue providing retiree health coverage while containing costs.

Register Today! Contact: Emmanuelle St. Jean, 202.942.4267

U.S. Supreme Court Decision: Health Insurance Marketplace Tax Credit Subsidies

July 30, 2–3:15 p.m.

A critical provision of the Affordable Care Act is to provide tax credit subsidies to qualifying individuals and families purchasing health insurance coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace. The Supreme Court case *King v. Burwell* challenges whether the subsidies can be provided to those who obtain coverage via the federal marketplace. The Supreme Court’s ruling may have a profound impact on counties as the local safety net and as employers. Join us to learn the implications.

Register Today! Contact: Emmanuelle St. Jean, 202.942.4267

NACO National Association of Counties

SEASON TO STRUT

Bi-state bird escapes threatened species listing



A female greater sage grouse doesn't seem too interested in the displaying male behind her who's come a-courting.

Photo courtesy of University of California, Davis

By CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

There was no grousing from county officials who gathered in Nevada recently to learn the fate of a subspecies of sage grouse. Would it be listed as a federally threatened species? The answer from U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell was “no.”

She credited collaboration between local, state and federal entities, along with private landowners for crafting successful conservation plans.

The bi-state greater sage grouse is found only in an area straddling the California-Nevada line and is a

“distinct population segment” from other sage grouse that inhabit those states and nine others in the West. The greater sage grouse is still being considered for Endangered Species Act (ESA) protection in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, North and South Dakota — as well as other parts of Nevada and California.

Western state county officials are hopeful that the bi-state decision might bode well for the future.

Lesley Robinson, president of NACo's Western Interstate Region and a Phillips County, Mont. commissioner, said, “When Secretary Jewell and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) made the

SAGE GROUSE BY THE NUMBERS

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service estimates **2,000 to 9,000** of the bi-state subspecies of greater sage grouse live in an area that includes Douglas, Lyon, Mineral and Esmeralda counties, and Carson City, in Nevada, and Alpine, Mono and Inyo counties in California.

As for the larger sage-grouse population in the West, it ranges from **200,000 to 500,000** birds. Of that number, Wyoming is home to **37 percent** and Montana has **18 percent**, while Nevada and Idaho are tied at **14 percent**. No other western state exceeds **7 percent**.

decision not to list the bi-state sage grouse, they took into account the efforts made by the states and local landowners to conserve habitat.

“I hope that the same consideration is made when deciding whether or not to list the greater sage grouse.”

Jewell announced April 21 that USFWS biologists “have determined that this population no longer needs

ESA protection.” She added that “the collaborative, science-based efforts in Nevada and California are proof that we can conserve sagebrush habitat across the West while we encourage sustainable economic development.”

A “key factor” in the decision not to list the birds, she said, was the development, in the early 2000s, of

the Bi-State Action Plan by partners in a cross-border Local Area Working Group (LAWG). Over the past 15 years, the LAWG's executive committee has raised more than \$45 million in federal and state funding to ensure the projects are completed over the next decade. These include livestock management, keeping urbanization in check, disease and predation studies, and removal of pinyon and juniper trees — a threat to the sagebrush the birds need as habitat.

Mono County, Calif. Supervisor Tim Fesko was at event and says he was “really stoked” at the news.

He credited local, state, federal, tribal and private conservation partners. Mono also took a “local leadership role” to work with private landowners to mitigate impacts, follow habitat-management best practices and obtain funding for conservation efforts.

“There were many ranches that got put into conservation or took conservation easements on their property, which basically says we're going to take development rights off it,” he said.

Across the border, Lyon County Manager Jeff Page said the working group provided an opportunity to comment on federal land management agency studies.

“I think that everybody that is in this conversation realizes that if we're going to save the sage grouse then we need to take a more proactive approach to ensuring that their habitat is taken care of — restoring some old habitat areas and dealing with predator control,” he said.

Speaking of predators, despite the dwindling numbers of sage grouse, humans — at the top of the food chain — are legally allowed to hunt sage grouse in some states, or counties within states. Page and Fesko find that perplexing. State game officials say, the activity is highly restricted to a small number of birds per hunter in areas where the birds plentiful and not in isolated groupings. Further, they say, habitat loss is the greater threat.

Both men praised the working relationships with federal and other partners.

“The feds get banged a lot,” Page said. “From my perspective, working with the federal agencies, we had our difficulties; we had our hard times.

“But we all worked together, cooperated and coordinated together, and I think because of that the right answer came our way. I think they actually listened to us and we actually listened to them. That's something that hasn't always happened.”

*See this story at www.countynews.org for a link to male sage grouse strutting their stuff to attract a mate.

Financial Services News

County's Deferred Comp Plan Recognized for Innovations

San Diego County, Calif. has been honored by two leading retirement publications for its efforts at promoting its deferred compensation program. *Pensions & Investments* presented the County Deferred Compensation Program with an Eddy Award for an innovative retention education campaign, while *PlanSponsor* named the county as a finalist for its Plan Sponsor of the Year award.

Like many government and private sector retirement plans, the county saw its deferred compensation program assets rolling to outside firms that generally charge participants higher fees and provide them less one-on-one attention than that afforded through the county deferred compensation plan. The P&I award saluted the county for coming up with a unique way to stanch rollovers through a campaign targeted to the employee group it had identified as most likely to move account assets.

Working with Nationwide, the county launched a campaign that capitalized on one of its distinct attributes: diverse vistas. Called "Relax: Stay in the Plan," the campaign used drink coasters with pictures of various sites ranging from flower fields to the desert to the coastline, as well as daytime and nighttime photos of the San Diego city skyline.

On the back of most coasters were brief descriptive reminders about the program such as, "No Commissions. Lower Fees." or "One Plan. Many Benefits." To reinforce the relaxing theme, one coaster featured a recipe for a

smoothie.

"We try to do things in a different way," Dan McAllister, county treasurer-tax collector, told P&I. He added that the campaign goal was to encourage older workers and retirees to keep their money in the deferred compensation plan. Retaining funds gives the county more clout in negotiating better fees and services, while also helping participants reduce the costs of saving for retirement.

The coaster campaign resulted in a 4.26 percent reduction in assets rolling out compared to the same period of the previous year.

PlanSponsor Recognition

San Diego County's deferred compensation program offers both a 401(a) Incentive Retirement Deferred Compensation Plan and a 457(b) Deferred Compensation Plan with a Roth option. Working with Nationwide as plan provider, the county delivers participants a holistic retirement planning experience driven by ongoing education. That more than 15,000 participants have saved over \$1 billion is a testament to its success.

In fact, how the county reached \$1 billion in assets was one of the reasons that the county's deferred compensation program was recognized by *PlanSponsor* magazine. Despite continued debate around pension funding in the state of California, the program grew to \$1 billion in participant assets, a \$500 million increase over five years. This success began with an informal outreach initiative in 2012 that was

designed to educate and engage department heads throughout the county on how they can help workers understand the value of deferred compensation participation. Following an evaluation period, the county expanded the initiative in 2013 with a detailed annual access plan, and increased visibility and presentations at key meetings.

The initiative was even more successful when it treated participants to an ice cream celebration during the county's Retirement Dreaming fair held during National Save for Retirement Week in October 2014. To show employees that the county values them and cares about their futures, McAllister brought county leaders with him to hear ideas and concerns about retirement in a positive environment. The unusual nature of the event generated deferred compensation program enrollments, contribution increases and requests for account review appointments.

Employers who want to learn more about Nationwide's participant education programs can contact Linda Barber at barberl@nationwide.com.

Public employees who are interested in getting more information about the opportunities available through participation in the NACo Deferred Compensation Program should contact Lisa Cole by email at lcole@naco.org or by phone at 202.942.4270.

Financial Services News was written by Bob Beasley, communications consultant, Nationwide.



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NACo on the Move

► NACo Officers and County Officials



Humphries

• Sheriff Len Humphries of Fremont County, Idaho has been appointed to the First Responder Network Authority's (FirstNet) Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC). Humphries will represent NACo and counties on the PSAC. FirstNet is charged with building, operating and maintaining the first high-speed, nationwide broadband network dedicated to public safety. PSAC is charged with offering guidance, information and subject matter expertise to FirstNet from a public safety perspective. It also advises FirstNet on the build-out, deployment and operation of the nationwide public safety broadband network and on matters related to the intergovernmental responsibilities or administration.

• NACo President Riki Hokama spoke at the National Association of County Engineers Joint Exposition and Annual Conference in Volusia County (Daytona Beach), Fla. April 22 about his presidential initiative on transportation and NACo activities.

► NACo Staff

• Matt Chase, executive director, spoke on the national economic recovery at the N.C. Tomorrow 2015 Summit: Building Communities for Tomorrow's Jobs April 27 in Wake County (Raleigh), N.C.

• Yejin Jang, associate legislative director, served on a panel discussing local government and wireless infrastructure siting at the PCIA-Wireless Infrastructure Association's conference April 28 in Broward County, Fla.

• Berenice Medina has joined NACo as the operations specialist for Financial Services. She is from Canyon County, Idaho and holds a bachelor's degree in public communications from American University's School of Communication. Medina will work on eConnectDirect and support the operations of all other FSC programs.



Medina

• Daria Daniel, associate legislative director, gave a presentation on a workshop panel entitled Access, Equity and Diversity in Local Workforce Programs at the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, Policy Development Conference in Alexandria, Va. April 21.

• Paul Beddoe, deputy legislative director, traveled to Berks County, Pa. to speak about the federal funding outlook at the breakfast on April 16 at the Area Agency on Aging legislative meeting.

► Coming Up

• Andrew Goldschmidt, director of membership marketing, will be exhibiting on behalf of NACo at the New Jersey Association of Counties' Annual Celebration of County Government in Atlantic County May 6-8.

Photo courtesy of Kent County, Del.



NACo Executive Director Matt Chase (c) visited Kent County, Del., site of the Delaware Association of Counties meeting, April 16. Pictured with Chase are (l-r): Kent County Administrator Mike Petit de Mange; Levy Court President P. Brooks Banta; Chase; Commissioner Allan F. Angel; and Delaware Association of Counties Executive Director Richard C. Cecil.

THE STEPPING UP INITIATIVE

BY JUDGE STEVE LEIFMAN



When I first became a judge, I discovered something that my legal and judicial training had not prepared me for. It was something all too familiar to anyone who worked in the criminal justice system, but was seldom discussed. Day after day, defendants would stand before me, often appearing disheveled and distraught. Most were charged with relatively minor offenses such as loitering or panhandling. Some exhibited

impulsive behaviors, speaking in pressured, incoherent sentences. Others were guarded and withdrawn, appearing to have little understanding of the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Before being arrested, many were living on the streets, struggling with addiction and histories of trauma. However, homelessness, substance abuse, and trauma were not typically the root causes of their difficulties.

Rather, these were merely symptoms of a larger set of personal and social factors contributing to unfortunate and often repeated involvement in the criminal justice system of people from many different backgrounds who all shared one thing in common: serious mental illnesses.

Upon release, many are unable to secure the types of supports necessary to facilitate adaptive re-entry and reintegration because services in the community tend to be poorly coordinated and difficult to access. Even when services are available,

they tend to be severely under-resourced: between 2009 and 2012, states slashed spending on public mental health services by \$4.35 billion. The result is high rates of recidivism to the justice system, compromised public health and safety, chronic homelessness, and disproportionate use of high cost and inefficient acute care services.

If we treated people with primary health care needs the way we treat people with mental illnesses, there would be rampant lawsuits and criminal indictments.

For example, a person who needs a knee replacement undergoes surgery, remains hospitalized until they are medically cleared, and then is sent to a rehabilitation center until they are ready to resume their life activities; all paid with insurance, Medicaid, or Medicare.

On the other hand, a person in a psychiatric crisis without financial means who is admitted to a hospital or crisis unit receives treatment only as long as they are considered dangerous to

themselves or others — frequently within hours or a few days. The person is then discharged, often to homelessness, and eventually finds their way into the criminal justice system, again and again and again.

Fortunately, there are promising solutions being developed as the result of innovative relationships and collaborations being formed at the interface of the criminal justice and mental health arenas.

Examples of effective problem-solving initiatives include crisis intervention teams that teach law enforcement officers to better recognize and respond to psychiatric emergencies in the community; jail diversion programs and mental health courts that utilize specialized dockets and provide judicial monitoring of treatment linkages and engagement; reentry programs that assist with linkages to treatment and support services upon completion of jail or prison sentences, and community corrections programs.

If we are to craft a more sensible, equitable and sustainable

system of care that benefits people with mental illnesses and taxpayers alike, it is imperative that we work deliberately to examine and fix the system as a whole, and not just react as crisis situations arise.

This is a community problem requiring a community solution. None of us created this crisis alone and none of us will solve it alone. By leveraging resources and working collaboratively across the justice system and the community, stakeholders can develop effective partnerships. In doing so, we can craft more equitable and sustainable policies and legislation that will help to minimize incarceration, reduce recidivism, improve public safety, and promote stronger, healthier communities.

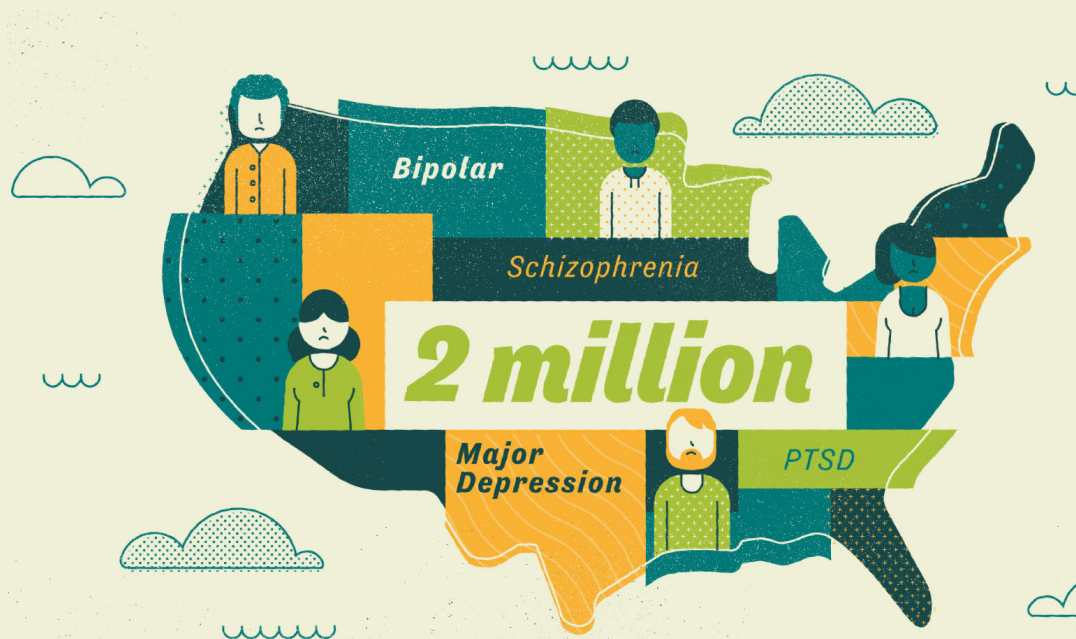
Judge Steve Leifman is chair of the Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Court for the Supreme Court of Florida and associate administrative judge for the County Court, Criminal Division of the 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida.

Stepping Up Toolkit, Webinar, Website will get you on your way

The Stepping Up initiative's online toolkit gives counties the resources and tools they need to successfully implement an initiative to reduce the number of individuals with mental illnesses in their jails through the Six Actions for Implementing an Effective Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails (Six Actions).

GETTING STARTED

- **Tell Your Constituents.** Send out a press release; hold a press conference or town hall; post to social media.
- **Register for the Getting Started webinar.** The webinar will take place at 2 p.m. EDT on Thursday, May 14.
- **Help Pass a County Resolution or Proclamation.** County governments must pass a resolution to be formally recognized as signing on to the Call to Action on the Stepping Up website. There is no deadline for passing a resolution or proclamation, but counties are encouraged to join their colleagues by passing a resolution or proclamation by July 1, 2015 in order to be highlighted at NACo's Annual Conference and Exposition.
- **Review the modules** to familiarize yourself with the tools and resources available to start your initiative (see sidebar). Each module includes a webinar highlighting strategies for that action, an exercise from the Stepping Up Planning Guide and key resources and examples aligned with that module.



... more tools to move you along

- **Visit the Resource Library.** The Resource Library is a clearinghouse of publications, webinars, best practices, and examples of relevant legislation and resolutions that have been shared by various organizations, associations, academic institutions, government agencies and others to assist counties in their initiative efforts. Have something you want to share? Email it to info@stepuptogether.org

Register and save the dates for the next five webinars.

- *Collecting and Reviewing Prevalence Numbers and Assessing Needs of People with Mental Illness in Jails and Co-Occurring Substance Use Disorders* [June 11, 2 p.m. EDT.](#)

- *Examining Treatment and Service Capacity to Serve People with Mental Illness* [July 23, 2 p.m. EDT.](#)
- *Developing a Plan to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illness in Jails* [Aug. 13, 2 p.m. EDT.](#)
- *Implementing Research-Based Approaches to Reducing the Number of People with Mental Illness in Jails* [Sept. 10, 2 p.m. EDT.](#)
- *Creating Processes to Track Progress* [Oct. 8 2 p.m. EDT.](#)

Check your email. As active members of Stepping Up, counties will continue to receive information about upcoming events and resources via email and on this website.

Ask questions. Have additional questions or need help? Email us at info@stepuptogether.org.

Register now for the May 14 webinar

Getting started with Stepping Up: A National Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails

Thursday, May 14

Join us to learn more about Stepping Up: A National Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails. On this webinar, project partners at the National Association of Counties (NACo), the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Foundation will discuss the benefits of signing on to the initiative, how to get started, technical assistance opportunities and activities, and will answer any questions about the initiative. Presenters will also provide recommendations for who to include on your county team or how you can leverage existing teams to move forward with the initiative. They will describe experiences from counties that have successfully established teams of stakeholders and kept them engaged throughout reform efforts. Counties can sign on to the Initiative starting May 5.

Visit the Stepping Up website and sign up your county, today • <http://www.stepuptogether.org>

STEPPING UP INITIATIVE SAMPLE RESOLUTION

Stepping Up Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails – Date

WHEREAS, counties routinely provide treatment services to the estimated 2 million people with serious mental illnesses booked into jail each year; and

WHEREAS, prevalence rates of serious mental illnesses in jails are three to six times higher than for the general population; and

WHEREAS, almost three-quarters of adults with serious mental illnesses in jails have co-occurring substance use disorders; and

WHEREAS, adults with mental illnesses tend to stay longer in jail and upon release are at a higher risk of recidivism than people without these disorders; and

WHEREAS, county jails spend two to three times more on adults with mental illnesses that require interventions compared to those without these treatment needs; and

WHEREAS, without the appropriate treatment and services, people with mental illnesses continue to cycle through the criminal justice system, often resulting in tragic outcomes for these individuals and their families; and

WHEREAS, [INSERT YOUR COUNTY’S NAME] and all counties take pride in their responsibility to protect and enhance the health, welfare and safety of its residents in efficient and cost-effective ways; and

WHEREAS, [INSERT COUNTY SPECIFIC INFO/DATA TO HIGHLIGHT e.g. Bexar County has developed its Restoration Center which helps people stay out of jail by offering mental health and substance use disorder treatment]; and

WHEREAS, through the Stepping Up initiative, the National Association of Counties, the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Foundation are encouraging public, private and nonprofit partners to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails;

NOW THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED, THAT I [NAME, TITLE OF CHIEF ELECTED OFFICIAL], do hereby sign on to the Call to Action to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in our county jail, commit to sharing lessons learned with other counties in my state and across the country to support a national initiative and encourage all county officials, employees and residents to participate in Stepping Up. We resolve to utilize the comprehensive resources available through Stepping Up to:

- Convene or draw on a diverse team of leaders and decision makers from multiple agencies committed to safely reducing the number of people with mental illnesses in jails
- Collect and review prevalence numbers and assess individuals’ needs to better identify adults entering jails with mental illnesses and their recidivism risk, and use that baseline information to guide decision making
- Examine treatment and service capacity to determine which programs and services are available in the county for people with mental illnesses and co-occurring substance use disorders, and identify state and local policy and funding barriers to minimizing contact with the justice system and providing treatment and supports in the community
- Develop a plan with measurable outcomes that draws on the needs and prevalence assessment data and examination of available treatment and service capacity, while considering identified barriers
- Implement research-based approaches that advance the plan
- Create a process to track progress using data and information systems, and to report on successes

PASSED AND APPROVED in this _____ day of _____, 2015.

Counties make NCGM special for their residents

By TOM GOODMAN
PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIRECTOR

Counties across the country held activities to celebrate National County Government Month. Here are some examples:

San Luis Obispo County featured NCGM on its website

San Luis Obispo County, Calif. featured NCGM on the front page of its website with a photo of the Main Street Bridge in Cambria. The caption beneath the photo tells readers that "Investing in your community matters, which includes transportation and infrastructure projects and services that are the building blocks for safe, health, livable, prosperous and well-governed communities."

The message encouraged residents to "get involved, volunteer, thank a county worker or just enjoy the new bridges, repaved roads and other benefits of infrastructure projects in SLO County." The county held a volunteer work day and a tour of the county airport as part of its NCGM activities.

Somerset County activities for NCGM

Somerset County, N.J. held a series of activities at different county locations during NCGM, such as free emergency preparedness training, a medicine collection drop-off at the Sheriff's Office, a household hazardous waste drop-off and an open house by a dozen county divisions at the Human Services Building and events at county senior centers.

The county has participated in this national effort to raise public awareness about counties for 25 years, since NACo started it in 1991.

Counties adopted NCGM proclamations, resolutions

El Paso County, Colo. and St. Mary's County, Md. both passed proclamations for NCGM. The Fillmore County, Minn. Board of Commissioners approved a resolution recognizing NCGM in March. When approving the resolution, Chairman Duane Bakke noted the transportation theme for NCGM and pointed out that Fillmore County has added the half-cent sales tax to fund local road and bridge improvements because of the uncertainty of state and federal funding.

Other counties that adopted proclamations include Catawba County, N.C.; Deschutes County, Ore.; Fannin County, Texas; Grundy County, Iowa; Roosevelt County, N.M.; Williamsburg County, S.C.; Hubbard County, Minn.; Sandoval County, N.M.; Brazoria County, Texas; and Chisago County, Minn.

Winners selected for Cape May County My County Poster Contest

Winners of the 23rd annual My County Poster Contest in Cape May County, N.J. were announced in late April as part of the county's NCGM activities. The 12 winners had their posters on display in the courthouse. The annual event is held to bring awareness of the responsibilities of county government to fourth graders, who regularly study the topic as part of their curriculum.

Atlantic County featured online quiz, fun facts and full schedule of events

Atlantic County, N.J. celebrated county government month with an online quiz about the county, fun facts on the website and a full schedule of events that included health screenings, volunteer appreciation ceremonies, park cleanups and child safety seat inspections.

Phelps County endorsed state bill to provide funding for infrastructure

In a special meeting, the Phelps County, Mo. Board of Commissioners, noting the transportation and infrastructure theme of NCGM, voted to endorse Missouri Senate Bill 540, which proposed a six-cent-per-gallon tax on motor fuel with an annual adjustment for inflation.

Guest column highlights county government in Larimer County

During NCGM, *The Coloradoan*, a daily newspaper in Larimer County, Colo., ran a guest column by Commissioner Lew Gaiter III that highlighted the role county government plays in serving its citizens and the differences between counties and municipalities. Gaiter concluded by saying that all local governments "work hard to ensure the needs of our communities are met."



Photo courtesy of Cook County, Ill. Sheriff's Office

An enthusiastic group of high school students were hosted by Darke County, Ohio commissioners on Student Government Day April 22. The event has been held for more than 20 years, and this year it was held in conjunction with National County Government Month.

Ride-along offers look at state of bridges and culverts

Following the transportation and infrastructure theme of NCGM, Peoria County, Ill. officials took a reporter on an inspection tour of bridges, culverts and road projects and live-tweeted during the tour. It was done to inform residents of the highway department's activities and the services the county provides.

Open houses and tours mark NCGM

The City and County of Honolulu held a Honolulu Hale (City Hall) open house on April 28 in celebration of NCGM. Featured were displays of county programs, services, vehicles and apparatus. Tours of Honolulu Hale included an opportunity to watch Council committee meetings in progress and meet councilmembers. In addition, the county showcased the Royal Hawaiian Band and Glee Club on the Hale lawn.

Gila County, N.M. marked NCGM with a series of events that included an open house at county offices. On Earth Day, the county landfills accepted green waste at no charge to encourage residents to clear property of weeds and brush in preparation for wildfire season. The county also sponsored an art contest for all schools within Gila County focused on "Recycling and Our Environment."

Stearns County, Minn. hosted an open house at its highway department to enable adults and kids to see various road repair and maintenance equipment used by the department. Some of the machines on display

included snowplows, pavers, rollers and bulldozers. But the best part, according to one official, was seeing how much fun the kids had checking out the displays.

Hernando County, Fla. celebrated NCGM by having two open houses, one at the government center and the other at the health department. The open houses included presentations by county staff and department displays.

Cumberland County, N.C. provided tours of its emergency communications center as part of its NCGM activities. Twin Falls County, Idaho also held an open house during which elected officials met and spoke with residents.

In Lake County, S.D. fourth graders toured the county courthouse to learn what each department does. The five county commissioners led the tours and used the visual aid of a dollar bill to explain to the students where tax money is spent: 62 cents to the county schools, 21 cents to the county itself, 16 cents to townships and cities, and 1 cent to the fire department and water district.

County employees offer their views on public service

Albemarle County, Va. took a slightly different approach to NCGM. The county produced a video in which county employees described what public service means to them. Emergency personnel and other county figures are featured in the four-minute clip.

Several speak of the positive impacts county government has had on the community, like renovating a volunteer fire department building

to better protect the public. "It's one community, as far as I'm concerned," said Mandy Burbage, senior planner. "I enjoy being part of the government that makes it a great place to live."

Try transit offered in Manatee and Sarasota counties

Try Transit Day, the annual day to promote transit in Florida's Manatee and Sarasota counties by offering free rides throughout the counties was the feature activity for NCGM because of this year's theme. In addition, Manatee County held a number of activities and displays to highlight county services, including a series of workshops for veterans.

Displays, demonstrations highlight county services at mall

Summit County, Utah went to a local outlet mall for NCGM providing information booths and demonstrations by county departments and agencies including public works, planning, health, recreation and the sheriff's office.

New airport terminal part of NCGM

Onslow County, N.C. showed off the new terminal at the Albert J. Ellis Airport as part of its NCGM activities. "It's a huge economic development tool for the community and for the county to help generate additional jobs and additional businesses," said Airport Director Chris White. He estimated the airport adds \$191 million in economic impact each year and helps generate about 340 local jobs.

Cook County inmates can 'deconstruct' and learn

By CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Andy Dimnych had a decision to make after landing back in a Cook County, Ill. courtroom for violating probation. The judge gave him two options: four years "downstate" — slang for a state prison — or he could sign up for Sheriff Tom Dart's boot camp program. Dimnych, 21, chose the latter.

That military-style program subsequently morphed into Restoring Neighborhoods Workforce (RENEW), which trains jail inmates and detainees to deconstruct derelict buildings in poor neighborhoods throughout the county. One of its goals is to give nonviolent offenders skills they can use after they've served their time. It's been up and running for about one year with 51 participants thus far.

"We take down buildings from the top down, all by hand, using saws and hammers and different tools," Dimnych said. "We recycle all the metal we can." He'll graduate from

the program May 11.

Program participants learn deconstruction techniques during their confinement.

"We give them extensive training in it, they're OSHA certified," Dart said, "and we put a lot of time and thought into the training side of this, because our goal is to get the buildings down safely but also to have this skill that will translate (to possible employment) later on." Volunteers from local colleges are also working with the program to identify candidate buildings ripe for deconstruction.

Once trained, teams of about 10 are deployed to the field under the supervision of correctional and civilian staff, the sheriff said. The program also focuses on developing "teamwork" skills.

He developed the program after observing that recidivism numbers from the boot camp "were not very impressive" — too many people were ending up back in jail. Dart hopes providing offenders with a skill will improve their odds once

their sentences are completed. Still in its infancy, RENEW's impact on recidivism remains to be seen, program officials said.

Inspiration for the program came via unofficial "windshield surveys" as Dart drove through some of the county's poorest neighborhoods on his way to and from work. He saw abandoned homes and old, vacant buildings that appeared to be on the verge of collapsing.

"It occurred to me as I was driving through all this how unfair it was for towns and villages that don't have a lot of resources, and certainly weren't helped by the recession," he said — "that they're destined to have these burnt-out structures, abandoned structures, falling-down structures in their towns and communities forever because they don't have the resources to remove them."

The Village of Dixmoor, population 3,300, had them in abundance, according to village Trustee Michael Smith.

One of RENEW's biggest projects to date was disassembling

a 23-unit townhouse complex last year that had been vacant for some 20 years. It was a magnet for crime and squatters. "It had become an eyesore," Smith said, "and it also stopped the progression of economic development in that area."

The townhouse site has now been reduced to bare ground.

Before RENEW, the village was able to afford about \$20,000 to have asbestos removed. But Smith said it would have cost a "couple of hundred thousand dollars or more," to demolish it — money the cash-strapped village, still emerging from the recession, didn't have (Dixmoor's annual budget is about \$4 million). So RENEW was a godsend.

Dart said the program has identified every vacant property in the village — 58 of them — and is working with Dixmoor officials to determine which of them require landscape maintenance or boarding up. The program has also been active in the city of Chicago Heights, and Dolton and

Ford Heights villages, all south of Chicago.

The sheriff said his office is looking to double the number of program participants within the next few weeks. Additionally, he wants to open it up to first-time offenders, a move that would require the state Legislature's approval. He'd also like to see the judicial system take more advantage of the current program.

Smith would welcome that. He said the program is revitalizing Dixmoor and helping to "put our village back on the map."

While Dart hopes the program will provide a one-way trip out of the criminal justice system, he also derives great personal satisfaction from RENEW's results.

"Talking with the people in the community has been so heartening for us," Dart said, "because literally when I've gone out to a lot of these locations, people come out of their houses, they hug you, they're crying — they thought they never would see [these building] come down."



Inmates and house-arrestees do site maintenance along with building deconstruction in the Cook County sheriff's RENEW program.

News From the Nation's Counties



Photo by MarathonFoto

► MARYLAND

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY Executive Rushern Baker **completed the Boston Marathon** April 20. He started running after his predecessor, the late Wayne Curry, advised him to reduce his stress level. Baker began running with county police and fire cadets, accompanying them on runs through county neighborhoods.

Though he usually spends his time thinking about work when he runs, and making big decisions or putting the finishing touches on plans while boosted with adrenaline, his chief of staff made him promise to focus on the race, and he did, soaking in both the cheers from the crowd and the chilly rain that fell throughout his nearly-six hour run.

► ARIZONA

Baywatch actress Pamela Anderson recently joined **MARI-COPA COUNTY** Sheriff Joe Arpaio for the roll out of a new menu: **vegan meals**.

Anderson, representing People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, helped Arpaio serve the meatless, animal-product-free fare.

"It's not just a money issue because health is important; it's 2,600 calories, and that's a lot of calories," Arpaio told the *Phoenix Business Journal*. "They may not like the food, but if they don't, the other alternative is to not go to jail."

PIMA COUNTY is poised to **take on some major debt** — if voters okay it in November.

By a vote of 4–1, the Board of Supervisors approved placing \$815 million in bond questions on the fall ballot.

The county is seeking authorization to borrow \$200 million for road improvements, \$191.5 million for parks and recreation, \$112 for natural area conservation and historic preservation, \$105.3 million on public health, welfare, safety, neighborhoods and housing, \$98.6 million for tourism promotion and \$91.4 million on economic development, libraries and workforce training, and \$16.9 on flood control and drainage.

If all of the bonds are approved, the average county homeowner would pay about \$70 more per year in property taxes for 12 years.

► CALIFORNIA

LOS ANGELES COUNTY's district attorney is asking the Board of Supervisors for nearly \$1 million to fund a special unit to review claims of **wrongful convictions**, the *Los Angeles Times* reported. It would include three veteran prosecutors, a senior investigator and a paralegal, according to D.A.

Jackie Lacey.

The proposal comes after a series of high-profile wrongful convictions. Last year, for example, a county Superior Court judge freed a woman who had been behind bars for 17 years for a murder she didn't commit. The judge ruled that her conviction was based on the testimony of a witness who later was found to be a habitual liar.

County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas said, "It's another dimension of checks and balances in the criminal justice system, which I think is sorely needed."

Similar units already exist in **SANTA CLARA, VENTURA** and **YOLO counties**, and in **DALLAS COUNTY**, Texas.

The use of body cameras by police in the field is on the increase. Now in the **SAN FRANCISCO** County Jail, deputies are being required to wear them inside the jail.

Sheriff Ross Mirkarimi said at least 30 deputies will be outfitted with cameras as part of a pilot program in one county jail, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

The experiment comes amid allegations of deputies' forcing inmates to fight, gladiator-style, for gambling and entertainment.

► INDIANA

The **outbreak of HIV**, the virus that causes AIDS, has spread from **SCOTT COUNTY** to neighboring **JACKSON COUNTY**. Between the two, 135 cases have been identified — most of them in Scott. Five confirmed cases are in Jackson.

The predominant mode of transmission, health officials say, has been sharing needles among illegal drug users. In March, Gov. Mike Pence (R) signed an emergency order that temporarily legalized a needle exchange program. He extended the order another 30 days on April 20.

► KANSAS

SEDGWICK COUNTY commissioners have endorsed a building code change that scales back a proposal to **require carbon monoxide detectors** in all residences.

The Wichita Eagle reported that commissioners are expected to update the code later this month to require the devices only in newly built houses, not those being remodeled or renovated.

► NEVADA

The **CLARK COUNTY** commission has called for an overhaul

of the county's **court-appointed guardianship** operation. They have called for a blue-ribbon panel to examine the shortcomings and gaps in the system that leaves elderly and mentally incapacitated residents vulnerable to private contractors looking to profit off their infirmity.

Long-running problems with the program that oversees about 8,500 cases each year were laid bare in a series of *Las Vegas Review-Journal* articles published in April, which showed a lack of oversight by the courts, allowing vulnerable people to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars to their private professional guardians while wards of the county. In those cases, the court failed to enforce current state laws, such as the requirement to file a yearly accounting of money spent on behalf of wards, and ignored the wishes of wards and their families.

► OHIO

A newly launched program aims to attract more than \$100 million in private financing for **energy efficiency upgrades** in **CUYAHOGA COUNTY**.

Eutectics LLC, a Minneosta-based alternative-energy financing firm, will set up what the county is calling a Clean Energy Financing Hub, for which the county will pay up to \$225,000, *The Plain Dealer* reported.

Eutectics in turn has pledged to make available up to \$120 million — raised by its own network of public and private investors — to help building owners buy upgrades including more efficient lighting systems, heating and cooling equipment and solar panels.

The company would lend money for the upgrades with the idea of the customer paying it back through eventual savings in their energy bills.

The county will help match the company with potential customers, which could include business owners, landlords, local governments, educational institutions and eventually, homeowners.

The county and the company each will receive a 1 percent fee from each financing deal.

County officials said they hope that means the county will at least make back the money spent on launching the program, if not eventually turn a profit.

A group of **MEDINA COUNTY** residents is hoping to make it the first in the state to create a **new**

The H.R. Doctor Is In

Mother Remembered

Now that many of us have spent Earth Day and Arbor Day in total awe of the power and beauty of Mother Nature in shaping our existence, it is time to focus on the celebration of a much more personal shaper of each of us — our very own mothers.

Every one of us was brought into the world by a mother. Reproductive sciences may be able to help with in vitro fertilization or in screening for genetic diseases, but somewhere along the line, a mom (not to mention a dad) was very heavily involved in the process.

Mothers are amazing. We owe our lives to them and in most cases the growth and development of our

“ Mothers are amazing. We owe our lives to them and in most cases the growth and development of our attitudes and behaviors. ”

attitudes and behaviors. Though family structure has changed especially fast in recent decades, most single-parent households are headed by moms. Shamelessly reinterpreting a line from the anthem of the British Empire, *Land of Hope & Glory*, let us consider “How can we extoll thee, we who are born of thee?”

Our mothers, perhaps even more than our dads, introduce us into the world of relationships. They nurture us and support us as we cry tears of joy at a wedding or a graduation.

They hug us and comfort us as we cry tears of grief and sadness when we experience something we regard as terrible. They may be the first person we think of when we need to talk to, Skype, email, etc. a trusted someone for advice or help.

We may even return home to live with them after we have “left home,” as about 20 percent of children between ages 25 and 34 do in our country. In 1980, in case you are curious, that number was about 11

percent. They may also be dependent on us later in their lives and live with us, as about 4 percent do.

It is altogether fitting to create a holiday celebrating mothers, notwithstanding the urging of the greeting card companies. They fully deserve our applause and honor every day of the year.

Mom, for all that you have done for me, for all that you have done that I may never realize, and in sincere apology for all the opportunities I missed to be more in your life than I was, I thank you and I award you my personal medal for bravery and service far above and beyond the call! I am what I am because of you.

How can I best extoll thee? I can honor you and the people and causes about which you cared. I can insure that your life, with all its passion and caring, becomes ingrained in the mind of my own beautiful daughters and granddaughter. I can see that you live on and on through them and through me.

Rest well, Mother, in the knowledge that you are remembered as a woman of valor and as the shaper of the lives of others.

Phil Rosenberg
The HR Doctor



American Community Survey delivers key data for county decision makers

By JOHN THOMPSON
DIRECTOR, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

To make informed decisions that affect their residents, county officials need credible, reliable and readily available data about the changing needs of their community. Questions such as where to build schools and fire stations and how to allocate scarce resources are informed by data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey.

The American Community Survey (ACS) is the largest continuous household survey in the United States. By surveying about 2 percent of households a year, it provides a wealth of information about the economic, social and demographic characteristics of American people and communities. The ACS offers comprehensive, representative statistical information that helps drive decisions about resources important to local areas, including:

- schools, job training centers and hospitals
- roads, bridges and transportation projects
- location of new businesses
- care for children, veterans and seniors
- emergency services
- housing values and rent costs

The ACS is a national resource, and its value to counties is immense. It gives every county — regardless

of its size — access to a wide range of data that measure its progress and well-being. The survey covers every geographic area in the U.S., making it the only uniform measure that every county nationwide can use. It is the only available source of data for many of the issues that it covers, with a breadth that is unparalleled. It is from a trusted, unbiased source, and it levels the playing field by providing all of its data to the public free of charge.

The survey’s effect on counties begins when federal decision makers use ACS data to disburse over \$400 billion a year in federal funds. As these funds trickle down into states and local areas, community leaders in turn use ACS data to analyze how the needs of their neighborhoods are evolving, and how to use their resources to meet those needs.

Local communities use the information provided by the ACS in a seemingly endless variety of ways — including comprehensive planning, economic development and research on local issues and conditions.

For example, the Greater Houston Partnership — a regional economic development organization — uses ACS data to answer companies’ questions about issues such as commuting times and the availability of science and engineering workers. Following Super Storm Sandy in 2012, emergency responders in New Jersey used demographic data from the ACS to estimate the volume of traffic in affected areas. Officials from Oklahoma County, Okla. and the United Way used ACS data on poverty, home ownership and

the prevalence of disabilities to identify ways to make their county more senior-friendly. These are just a few of the many ways that ACS data are tailored to help guide myriad specific decisions across the country.

Participation in the ACS is a civic duty, and the high quality of ACS data is a direct result of Americans’ widespread participation. It is also mandatory, as an official part of the decennial census program.

In 2011, Canada’s version of the ACS became voluntary in response to respondent complaints. Even though it increased the number of households it surveyed, Canada’s response rate fell to 69 percent in 2011 from 90 percent in 2006. Our concern with a voluntary survey is based on the effect it would have on the reliability of the data, especially for rural and small communities. Canada lost the ability to publish data for many rural counties. To compensate for a similar effect here, it would cost approximately \$90 million annually to maintain our current data quality.

At the same time, we must balance this need for quality data with the need to improve the respondent experience. We are exploring whether it’s possible to shorten the survey, make it easier to respond and reduce the number of follow-up contacts.

- Can we remove questions by using other data sources, including information people have already provided to the government?
- Can we better phrase our questions to reduce concern, especially for those who may be sensitive to providing information?

- Can we ask some questions every other year, or every third year?
- Can we soften the “mandatory” language on the survey envelope without adversely impacting the response rate?

The ACS makes our governments smarter, our businesses more competitive, and our citizens more informed. At the Census Bureau, we’re constantly amazed by the innovative ways in which

local areas use ACS data to solve problems and make their communities better. We’re proud to provide the most timely, comprehensive and statistically precise data source for those decision-making processes.

For more information about the data available from the American Community Survey, or for help accessing and using the data in your decision making, visit www.census.gov/acs.

What’s in a Seal?

Missoula County, Mont.



The seal of Missoula County, Mont. represents several significant facets of the county. As its artist, DeWayne Arthur Williams, Jr., explained in 2014: “The tree symbolizes the economically important conifers in Missoula County — the Ponderosa pine and the Douglas fir. The roots of the tree refer to the renewable aspect of this resource. The tree also represents several wildernesses within the county and the natural beauty and recreation they provide. The snowflake showcases several ski areas in the county.

“A Native American silhouette notes the county’s first inhabitants and their culture. The non-Native (American) silhouette indicates a blending of those cultures through various studies and events at the University of Montana. Below these silhouettes tumbles a chute symbolizing whitewater and abundant angling opportunities in the streams passing through Missoula County. The mountains invite viewers to enjoy the variety of outdoor activities they provide.”

Tyler R. Gernant, Missoula County clerk and treasurer, contributed.

Dallas County, Texas moves to take guns from domestic abuse offenders

NEWS FROM *from page 14*

county charter through a ballot initiative.

The charter that would include a community “bill of rights” aimed at preventing projects such as a proposed 36-inch gas pipeline to be built across 20 miles of the county, the *Medina Gazette* reported.

► OREGON

The nearly 1,000 kittens who come through the **MULTNOMAH COUNTY Animal Services** shelter this spring and summer will have a brighter future thanks to a \$15,000 grant from the Petco Foundation and \$60,000 the Kitten Triage Project hopes to raise through an online Indiegogo campaign.

The shelter repurposed an old trailer in 2013 for short-term medical care and vaccinations, which has enabled the shelter to increase its “save rate” to 93.6 percent that first year, up from 66 percent in 2012. By 2014, the shelter save rate rose to 96.6 percent, allowing them to save over 1,000 kittens in 2014 alone, *The Oregonian* reported.

► TENNESSEE

There won't be any more squabbling over books in **SUMNER**



Photo by USFWS/Phil Delaney

► MINNESOTA

Don't blink or you might miss it. The **Minnesota dwarf trout lily** is in bloom in the only place on earth it does so: in **GOODHUE, RICE and STEELE counties**, *The Kenyon Leader* reported.

The plant was listed as an endangered species in 1986, and its habitat is less than 600 acres of woodland in southeastern Minnesota. It grows on slopes dominated by maple and basswood, and floodplains where elm and cottonwood trees are plentiful, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The plants have adapted to flower and grow before the trees above them leaf out.

COUNTY, now that the County Commission has approved a resolution clarifying a years-long dispute with the city of Hendersonville regarding the **ownership of the city's library**.

The city and county will both be on the deed as owners. The county will staff the library and fund operations as well as maintain casualty and liability insurance. Hendersonville will provide routine maintenance and landscaping. The city will also contribute funds annually to aid in the operation of the facility, according to the resolution. Under the plan, the library will be recorded as an asset only on county books. In recent years, both the county and the city have claimed the library as an asset, raising red flags with auditors, *The Tennessean* reported.

► TEXAS

DALLAS COUNTY is about to start taking guns out of the hands of **domestic violence offenders**. Officials expect to collect upwards of 700 weapons annually at a private gun range that has agreed to provide storage space for the project.

Federal and state law forbids those convicted of domestic violence or with emergency protective orders from possessing firearms, but Dal-

las didn't have a way to accept the surrendered guns. A \$37,000 state grant will cover start-up and personnel costs.

Offenders can either make arrangements with the sheriff's department to turn them in to the gun range, or they can relinquish them to a third party who has the legal right to have a gun. Judges also will be talking to victims and checking for concealed handgun licenses or other records that show the offender may have a weapon, *WFAA News* reported.

► WASHINGTON

A bill in the Legislature will align **ferry systems funding** increases with inflation. Prior to Senate Bill 5307, revenue streams to county ferry systems in **PIERCE, SKAGIT and WAHKIAKUM counties** were largely dependent on available state gas-tax funds and often subject to shifting political winds.

Pierce County had been diverting money for its ferry operation from county road funds, *Tacoma Weekly* reported.

(News From the Nation's Counties is compiled by Charles Taylor and Charlie Ban, senior staff writers. If you have an item for News From, please email ctaylor@naco.org or cban@naco.org.)

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