

# Affordable Water?



by George VonPless

The other day fellow ARRA Circuit Rider, Liz Tedford, and myself were discussing various issues that we assist rural communities with, and we got around to the topic of the cost of providing a safe and reliable supply of water.

Most of rural New York has long been blessed with an ample supply of good water. The cost of infrastructure that has been in place for many years has faded from our memories and pocketbooks. Until you no longer have a safe and reliable supply of water at the turn of the faucet, that is, then, like many other services, cost becomes foremost in everyone's mind.

Everyone wants water but at what price? Most of us in rural New York have taken the availability and quality of water at a bargain price for granted. Most of our supply flows through systems that have been around since the time of our grandparents or great grandparents. Unfortunately, these systems don't last forever and must be replaced at 2009 prices.

After a trip with my wife to the grocery store, I had the opportunity to think about the value of water provided by our local water authority. My wife enjoys the convenience of "water to go", that is one or more 16.9 oz bottles of water that cost the equivalent of \$7.50/gal., if purchased individually at \$.99/bottle. By purchasing it in a case of 35, we get it for the bargain price of \$1.08/gal. The real bargain, is that the cost of water at the kitchen sink is only \$.0004/gal. Obviously, personal preference enters into this example but one can see that safe, reliable water supplied through your local municipality or water authority is a great bargain compared to purchase at a retail outlet.

Recent breaks in the service main of our local water authority tells me that my current cost of approximately \$160/year will rise as replacement of the existing system and service lines is inevitable, if I wish to enjoy the convenience of a flush toilet, wash my clothes and a shower. I haven't calculated how many bottles of water I would need to take a shower but I'm quite sure the cost would reduce this ritual from daily to weekly. Would a dollar a day be too much to be able to accomplish the aforementioned activities? I don't believe so, but there are those who believe it would.

Trying to put the cost of water, even at \$2.00/day into perspective, I look at the cost of other services that

I, and many others, are willing to pay for such as phone, cable television and internet access which has a package cost of approximately \$4.50/day (basic plan). If you add a basic cell phone plan, it bumps the cost to approximately \$6.00/day for services that might improve the quality of life, but don't sustain life.

It is understandable that any increase in essential services is difficult and almost always met with opposition; however, the aging infrastructure in our rural communities has served us for a long time but is reaching the end of its useful life and needs to be replaced. Fortunately, there currently exists, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), loan and grant funds to meet these needs. Liz and I are here to assist you in taking advantage of this opportunity.

More often than not, the issue of affordability is the determining factor on whether or not communities move forward with the work necessary to insure a safe and reliable water supply. My question would be, when you look at supply alternatives and the cost of services that we all enjoy isn't water a bargain? 💧