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Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
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Congresswoman, Congressmen, Distinguished members of the committee my name is Tom Fritts and I am the Vice President of Residential Sewage Treatment Company of Grandview Missouri, near Kansas City. I am also the past president of the National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association. I am honored to speak to you today on behalf of the onsite wastewater industry. The purpose of my testimony is to request increased funding for our industry from the Environmental Protection Agency, specifically from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund Program and from the EPA Office of Wastewater.

I would first like to describe what the onsite industry is. It is the segment of the wastewater industry which provides sewage treatment when there is no conventional sewer available to do so. While there are slight differences in definition, onsite systems are also called decentralized or distributed wastewater treatment systems. The most widely known onsite systems within our industry are septic tanks; however, it encompasses a wide range of technologies which are designed to serve individual homes, a cluster of homes, a subdivision or small community, as well as commercial and industrial complexes.

Regardless of the type of system, they all share a common trait. They take advantage of the vast capacity of soil to remove or transform pollutants that are in the effluent as it percolates through the soil thereby avoiding point discharges to surface waters and maintaining the quality and quantity of our groundwater.

By definition, onsite wastewater management systems are a 'green technology' because treated effluent recharges local aquifers. A new innovation in decentralized wastewater management is the reuse or recycling of treated effluent. With appropriate safeguards, local regulations or bylaws may allow the treated water to be used for irrigation, toilet and urinal flushing or make-up water for commercial boilers. These applications reduce the demand for potable water and aid in the protection and preservation of the available water sources.

Ours is a growing and evolving industry supported by small businesses across the country. In fact, our organization estimates that the onsite wastewater industry employs as many as 150,000 people, virtually all of whom work for small businesses in the private sector. These include not only the companies which

manufacture the components of the onsite system, but also the engineers who design the systems and the contractors who install, operate, and maintain them.

More than 65 years ago, my father-in-law who started the family business (which is now in the 3rd generation) would talk about installers who would dig septic tank excavations with a shovel. Most anyone with a strong back could be in the business. Today it takes someone with a strong mind, an entrepreneurial spirit and a knack for running a small business.

In my lifetime I have seen the humble back yard septic tank evolve into a range of sophisticated wastewater treatment solutions that lets families live wherever they want and lets businesses locate nearby to serve them, and even provides entire communities with options for treating wastewater so they don't have to automatically default to an expensive and disruptive sewer project.

Onsite and decentralized wastewater treatment systems are an effective solution to protecting water quality. They are a valuable component of watershed management plans and sustainable development programs. Onsite and decentralized wastewater treatment systems can benefit both urban and rural areas by providing affordable solutions and reducing risk to the environment in unusual situations and difficult locations. These systems can provide optimal water management to homes, businesses and industrial centers. Their recycling capability can support water resource management goals in many arid areas of the country.

Their use can support municipal wastewater treatment infrastructure by providing options for pretreatment and sewer mining and provide an alternative when centralized plants have reached or exceeded capacity. Virtually any treatment technology employed in a centralized sewage treatment plan can be found in onsite wastewater treatment systems. In fact onsite systems can be designed to provide equal or better levels of treatment as compared to conventional sewage treatment plants.

For smaller communities, decentralized and onsite systems can usually be built and maintained for less money than a centralized sewage treatment facility. And for larger utilities, decentralized systems (which they refer to as distributed systems) are an option which can help to offset the exponential increases in capital expenditures faced by utilities in the next two decades as they face replacement of aging infrastructure. As society demands more efficient use of financial resources and sustainable environmental wastewater management, the use of managed decentralized wastewater treatment systems can be an effective solution which satisfies both imperatives

There is one other very important benefit...they safely help replenish our dwindling underground aquifers through recharge of treated water onsite. While homeowners and many centralized sewage treatment systems draw their

drinking water from underground aquifers, only onsite systems are designed to replenish aquifers. Most centralized sewage treatment systems discharge their treated water directly to rivers or streams where it ultimately ends up in an ocean.

Nearly 85 million Americans – more than 25% of the country - are being served by the onsite industry and that number is growing. Because of this, technology has exploded. It sometimes reminds me of the computer industry of 30 years ago. There are a many new technologies which have come online which treat wastewater in ways which are cheaper and more efficient and effective.

In fact, nearly two decades ago the Environmental Protection Agency endorsed onsite wastewater systems. Their 1997 Report to Congress on Use of Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems stated that this technology is a viable solution to treating and dispersing wastewater.

Onsite wastewater treatment systems are a permanent part of our nation's wastewater infrastructure which serves more than 25% of our country. Sadly, our industry faces myriad challenges which have been largely ignored by the EPA. Among these challenges are homeowner education, technical support, lack of support for research, replacement of failing systems and professional education.

Congressman Cole I know that as an enrolled member of the Chickasaw Nation you are committed to serving the Native Americans living in Oklahoma and all across our great nation. The onsite industry can help increase business opportunities in Indian country, grow their communities and increase tribal economic development. NOWRA is proud to have recently trained more than 300 tribal community professionals through Rose State College in Oklahoma on septic systems and how to run a septic system business.

Congressman Calvert as a lifelong resident of Riverside County, you are experiencing first hand the dire issue of water depletion from our aquifers. Onsite systems such as septic tanks treat wastewater and then disperse it back into the soil where it recharges the aquifers. Most of the water from municipal treatment plants ends up in rivers where it flows to the oceans to become saltwater. Using US Census numbers from 2010 it can be estimated that onsite wastewater systems discharge an average of 9.9 billion gallons of water back to the soil on a daily basis. That is more than 3.5 trillion gallons per year.

If I have convinced you that we are an important part of the solution to aquifer depletion, small business growth and infrastructure development I'm sure you are curious to hear how much money we want...We don't want any.... At least we don't want any new money.

We have two requests. Currently more than 99.5% of the EPA Clean Water State Revolving Fund goes to municipal wastewater and stormwater projects. Less than ½ of 1% goes to onsite wastewater activities – in spite of the fact that more

than 25% of the country is served by onsite systems. This pattern of funding has been consistent all the way back to the start of SRF funding in the early 1990s. We believe it is fundamentally unfair that for more than 2 decades, the 85 million taxpayers who use onsite systems have been subsidizing the government-owned treatment plants that serve the rest of the country.

We request that for the current fiscal year – as well as future years -- that at least 20% of EPA's annual contribution to the Clean Water State Revolving Fund be specifically designated to supporting the use of onsite and decentralized wastewater treatment systems and the 85 million taxpayers who use them. We further request that those funds be designated for disbursement and distribution by the authority in each state which has direct regulatory oversight and enforcement authority over onsite wastewater treatment plants.

Secondly, EPA has exactly one full-time employee (FTE) who focuses on Decentralized Wastewater. We would like to see at least 20% of the Office of Wastewater's funding be dedicated to increasing staffing and resources for the Office of Decentralized Wastewater. Among the specific requests:

- Place at least one FTE in each EPA regional office to support state and regional initiatives involving decentralized wastewater treatment.
- Add at least one "circuit rider" with expertise in decentralized wastewater to each region to support decentralized wastewater project planning and implementation, regardless of the funding source (i.e. USDA, HUD, etc.)
- Designate a specialist in the EPA Clean Water State Revolving Fund Branch to assist state funding authorities in revising policies and project scoring systems to ensure fair inclusion of onsite/decentralized systems.
- Significantly expand EPA's training of industry professionals through grants to entities which exclusively specialize in decentralized training.
- Provide increased direct financial support to the National Environmental Service Center and the Small Flows clearinghouse so that homeowners, business owners and industry professionals have an up-to-date source of information related to onsite and decentralized technology.
- Provide funding for EPA's Septic Smart program so that its materials can be more easily distributed to homeowners.
- Provide direct financial and staff support to state onsite wastewater regulators to facilitate increased training of industry regulators and mechanisms to support better enforcement of state onsite regulations.
- Expand research grants and onsite wastewater training centers and demonstration projects to help local decision-makers and design engineers better understand the benefits of onsite and decentralized wastewater treatment systems and technologies.

On behalf of the National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association and the onsite industry we thank you for your time.