



Protect Clean Water, Protect Communities: Why Congress Must Preserve STAG Funding in FY26

Clean water is a cornerstone of public health and environmental protection, as well as essential for economic prosperity. Across the country, state programs rely on **State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG)**—especially Clean Water Act (CWA) Sections **106, 319, and 604(b)**—to ensure their waters are safe, their communities are resilient, their economies grow, and their environment is protected for future generations. But these critical programs are now under threat.

What's at Stake

The proposed **elimination of STAG funding** in the FY 2026 federal budget proposal would dramatically impact the nation's waters, public health and economic growth. These funds are the lifeblood of state programs and without them, states may be forced to slash essential services, lay off expert staff, halt restoration projects, and delay or even forgo clean water protections.

If Congress fails to act:

- **Core water programs will collapse.** Some states would lose up to 100% of staff in areas like nonpoint source pollution control, TMDL development, and water quality monitoring.
- **Permits will be delayed, and businesses will suffer.** Municipal and industrial dischargers will face regulatory uncertainty, stalling infrastructure upgrades and economic growth.
- **Monitoring will vanish.** States will be unable to track harmful pollutants like PFAS or bacteria in rivers, lakes, and coastal waters, putting public health at risk.
- **Federal requirements may go unmet.** Many states warn they may lose authority over core Clean Water Act programs, forcing EPA to take over implementation. . Loss of staff will also put states at risk for not meeting federal requirements which will still be in place if STAG funding is eliminated. States and EPA will face increased 3rd party litigation.
- **Local projects will stop midstream.** Community-led watershed efforts, green infrastructure development, and flood resilience planning would be abandoned.
- **Public health will be endangered.** Without sufficient monitoring, permitting, and enforcement, states cannot ensure water is safe to drink, swim in, or fish from.

A Decade of Progress—Now at Risk

STAG funding has enabled states to make smart, cost-effective investments in clean water:

- Upgraded wastewater treatment plants that protect rivers and lakes.

- Targeted nutrient reduction strategies that combat harmful algal blooms.
- Technical assistance for farmers to prevent runoff and safeguard soil and water.
- Education programs that have empowered residents to protect their watersheds.
- Provide source water protection to reduce drinking water treatment costs.

Without this federal support, states say they would likely be facing widespread environmental degradation, dated permits that become backlogged, fewer inspections and compliance reviews, weaker enforcement, and missed opportunities for strategic infrastructure investment. Rural and underserved communities would be hit the hardest.

What Full Funding Could Do

Fully funding STAG programs wouldn't just preserve progress—it would unlock even greater benefits:

- **Stronger public health protections** through traditional, robust, scientific and legally defensible clean water program decisions.
- **Accelerated and transparent permitting and compliance**, enabling local economies to grow and ensuring regulatory certainty.
- **Expanded protection and restoration efforts** of impaired and vulnerable watersheds.
- **Improved community resilience** to floods, droughts, and other climate impacts.
- **Greater collaboration** between states, tribes, local governments, regulated entities and nonprofits.

STAG funding is not just a cost to be eliminated from a financial worksheet. It is an investment—in people, in communities, in the economy, and in the environment.

The Message

We urge Congress to reject the FY 2026 budget proposal and **fully fund STAG programs** to protect clean water for millions of Americans; and spur tourism and economic development.

Let's not reverse decades of progress. Let's keep the water clean, the communities strong, and the future safe.