



**Subcommittee on Rural Development, Biotechnology, Specialty
Crops, and Foreign Agriculture
Hearing to review rural water infrastructure
March 23, 2010**

Rhonda Locklear, Water and Wastewater Director for the Town of Pembroke

On behalf of the Town of Pembroke, North Carolina

Thank you Chairman McIntyre and Ranking Member Conaway for allowing me the opportunity to testify before this committee. I want to specifically speak from a holistic point of view to explain how USDA investments in infrastructure have enhanced the quality of life in my hometown of Pembroke, North Carolina.

I am Rhonda Locklear and I am a native of Robeson County and a member of one of the largest American Indian tribes, known as the Lumbee. I am presently the Water and Wastewater Director for the Town of Pembroke. I am a graduate of Pembroke State University, a university that is drenched in local roots that is now known as the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. I am also a proud member of the North Carolina Rural Water Association, an association committed to providing the highest quality support to the systems across the state through training and on-site technical assistance.

The USDA investments in the Town of Pembroke have delivered tremendous results for both the economic and public health of the entire community. Prior to these investments, the economic growth was paralyzed due to inadequate drinking and wastewater treatment and capacity limitations. Any amount of rain water caused excessive inflows and infiltrations into our wastewater treatment facility which washed all microorganisms needed for wastewater treatment into the Lumber River. Essentially no treatment occurred for a period of at least 10 days after a significant rain, which is the time required for a community of microorganisms to be re-grown. This scenario was constantly repeated, requiring the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources Division of Water Quality to issue a Special Order of Consent permit. Facilities with this type of permit cannot accept any additional flow until the facility has been upgraded. This action essentially halted the economic growth of our community.

Existing homes, businesses, and institutions could not expand without the basic services of water and sewer. New businesses would not entertain locating in an area without these services. Our community's economic growth and development catalyzed in 1992 when USDA loaned \$1.4 million to the Town of Pembroke. With this loan, the wastewater treatment facility was upgraded from 500,000 gallons per day to 1.3 million gallons per day. The upgraded facility also included a fully certified laboratory, which is one of two municipal labs in Robeson County. I began my career in the water industry serving as the first Chemist in this lab.

Storm water is still an issue, entering the wastewater facility through an aged collection system of pipes and manholes, yet the plant is consistently removing 94 percent of the pollutants. Repairing and replacing water and sewer lines would eliminate this problem but it is a great endeavor and must be accomplished over a number of years. Pembroke is representative of small rural communities and systems across the nation that will continue to need USDA support and assistance in the future.

Now I would like to address the direct benefits of these investments. Due to the expanded capacity of the wastewater treatment facility, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) was able to expand to become the fastest growing university in the UNC system. The student body was approximately 1,723 in 1992, increasing to 6,433 as of spring 2010. Beginning in 2006, UNCP entered their largest expansion; five new buildings are underway totaling \$33 million in construction cost and the creation of numerous jobs. UNCP Pembroke is currently the largest employer in the Town of Pembroke with 287 instructors and 307 functional staff. With property values escalating from \$30 million in 1992 to \$140 million in 2009, it's easy to see the direct positive financial impact these investments continue to have on our community.

Following that initial investment, Pembroke once again sought to increase their water capacity as well as improve its quality. State and USDA assistance enabled us to build a new water treatment plant. Two new wells supply water to one treatment unit. Prior to this, Pembroke could not remove iron or effectively add chemicals that enhanced water quality and usages. A fourth elevated water storage tank was also added to our distribution system to increase the system's water pressure. This allowed Pembroke to meet the minimum water pressure requirements for fire regulations necessary to keep insurance rates down. At the same time we looped together water lines that were formally dead ends. This prevented iron and other debris from accumulating in dead zones, avoiding potential health hazards.

Combined, water and wastewater are the single most important service required for community health and economic growth. Businesses like Wal-mart, Pembroke True Value Hardware, various corporate and local restaurants, and a multitude of professional and health care related facilities are now constructed and operating because of this infrastructure development. The majority of these investments were from USDA. All of this growth has contributed to the creation of thousands of jobs.

The Lumbee Tribe has built new homes in this area and at the end of this construction phase, 101 homes will have reached completion with plans to build 400 more in the future. This activity will improve the living conditions of this impoverished community. The Lumbee's continue to grow with the development of a new Tribal Complex and Boys and Girls Club, which debuted in December of 2009. Next to the Tribal Complex is a 32 acre recreational park that was erected in 2008. The Town embarked on a program that will promote healthy activities for kids, teens, and parents, in an effort to improve the quality of life and health for our community.

As of December 2009, a new hotel was constructed allowing for the first time the ability to accommodate overnight visits for athletic events, visitors, and business activities. This same infrastructure supports COMtech, a 600 acre commerce and technology center, currently housing and supporting various business and industry. It is a managed professional complex that promotes economic development through instructional, industrial, and private growth. The goal of Robeson, Hoke, Scotland, and Columbus Counties is to attract pharmaceutical industries with an educated and trained work force, while putting our displaced textile laborers and construction contractors back to work. All of these opportunities are available only because adequate water and wastewater infrastructure exists due to USDA funding.

While USDA has provided funding for rural communities, the North Carolina Rural Water Association has provided the training, energy audits, certification, financial management, environmental compliance, governance and on-site technical assistance necessary to ensure that facilities operate at the highest level possible. This assistance actually saves money and protects the community and government's investments by ensuring efficient and sustainable practices are followed. This is truly a great combination. I can't say enough about these experienced professionals that empower operators, board members, elected officials and communities with the support and knowledge they need to understand every aspect of their systems and facilities. Because of the important services provided to systems by Rural Water, millions of dollars meant for infrastructure and equipment are actually used for their intended purpose instead of paying for expensive consultants.

All communities have leaders. Some are elected; others are just concerned citizens that want to improve the quality of life in their community. These elected officials and citizens have a vital partner. The USDA-Rural Development staff is always there to help-- whether it's by providing critical infrastructure, securing affordable

housing, providing broadband, securing business assistance or helping obtain essential community facilities. Their field structure and experienced staff are unique. The staff and offices are located throughout these rural communities across the nation which allows them to serve communities that are both small and remote. In many cases communities that lack the capacity and resources to address many of their large issues would go without assistance if it were not for these USDA programs and the employees that make them work. Federal and state agencies would have it much easier if they just served larger and more affluent communities, but the Rural Development mission is different--- they are there to ensure rural America is not left behind and that these communities prosper. Robeson County is a perfect example. This county, unfortunately, is listed as a county with persistent poverty. With USDA as our partner and the continued local leadership and vision, we will soon leave that designation behind. We are on track. I would like to thank this Committee and my friends in the Rural Development offices across the State of North Carolina for your continued support.

In summary, the face of Pembroke has significantly improved due to USDA's involvement. Our citizens have a better quality of life because of USDA's investment in our town. Men and women can acquire jobs in retail, construction, health fields, and industry to support their families. UNCP is offering even more educational opportunities to prepare us for tomorrow. We exemplify the fact that no community can grow and improve without the sustaining resources of water and wastewater services.

Thank you Chairman McIntyre and Ranking Member Conaway for allowing me to testify and I would be happy to answers any questions that you may have at this time.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Information Required From Non-governmental Witnesses

House rules require non-governmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Rhonda Locklear
2. BusinessAddress: Town of Pembroke Wastewater Treatment Plant
8257 Deep Branch Road
Pembroke, NC 28372
3. Business Phone Number: (910) 521-2989
4. Organization you represent: Town of Pembroke
5. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:
Town of Pembroke Water and Wastewater Director
Operator In Responsible Charge
2007 Operator of Year
6. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:
NC Grade 4 Biological Water Pollution Control Operator
NC Certified DWO Laboratory
NC C Well Operator
7. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:
Chairman of Eastern NC Professional Wastewater Operators
Committee

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2007.

Name: Town of Pembroke
Address: 100 South Union Chapel St Pembroke NC 28372
Telephone: 910-521-9758
Organization you represent (if any): Town of Pembroke

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2007, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do **NOT** require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: EPA Amount: 178,000.00
Source: DOT / Fed Amount: 15,940.00
Community Development Block Grant 467,300.00

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2007, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: _____ Amount: _____
Source: _____ Amount: _____

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: _____

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.