



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**3 RIVERS
PROUD**

Contact: Joey Vallarian
ALCOSAN Director of Communications
(412) 734-6274 (O)
(412) 552-0246 (C)

ALCOSAN ANNOUNCES MODIFIED CONSENT DECREE, CLEAN WATER PLAN ***Plan Lays Out Path for Reduction of Overflows Into Rivers and Streams***

September 19, 2019 – The Allegheny County Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN) today announced that its amended consent decree with the United States Department of Justice, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and the Allegheny County Health Department was filed this morning with the United States District Court. The decree will not become final until it is approved by the United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania, a process that could take several months, but sets forth a path for ALCOSAN to reduce sewer overflows into the region’s rivers and streams.

“I am very pleased with the plan that we have negotiated,” said ALCOSAN Executive Director Arletta Scott Williams. “We heard the public’s input on the first plan, especially when it came to the price tag associated with making these required changes to our system. Being able to reduce the cost to ratepayers, extending the timetable to 2036, and having the ability to adapt the plan to include new advances in stormwater management are all key to reaching our goal of reducing overflows.”

Currently, it is estimated that nine (9) billion gallons of overflow enter our rivers and streams during heavy rain and snow melt events. ALCOSAN’s Clean Water Plan will reduce the overflow by approximately seven (7) billion gallons using four key components, many of which were started before the negotiations were final. They include:

- **Preventing excess water from entering the sewer system**

This involves use of the latest technology including green infrastructure such as bioswales and rain gardens; lining and repairing pipes to prevent groundwater from seeping into the system; diverting clean streams so they don’t flow directly into sewers; and sewer separation projects. To advance this effort, ALCOSAN established Green Revitalization of Our Waterways (GROW), a multi-year, multi-million-dollar grant program that funds projects that municipalities and sewer authorities might not be able to afford otherwise.

- **Increasing adaptive management and conveyance capacity**

ALCOSAN will use adaptive management and base long-term planning on data from green infrastructure, flow-reduction projects, and the latest technology. This is a deviation from typical consent decrees in that the parties to the order are willing to consider additional stages with more green infrastructure provided that it can be shown to be impactful in reducing overflows. In return for that, ALCOSAN will also expand its conveyance system by adding pipes, diversion structures and tunnels.

-more-

- **Regionalizing multi-municipal sewers**

ALCOSAN will make a good faith effort to assume ownership of existing multi-municipal trunk sewers and related facilities. ALCOSAN has conducted closed-circuit television inspections of these sewers, determined what repairs and improvements are necessary, and is now in the process of working with the municipalities to transfer ownership and make the necessary repairs. With the anticipated addition of more than 200 miles of sewer infrastructure as ALCOSAN's responsibility, the system will be more efficient and seamless and it will reduce some of the burden on municipalities.

- **Expanding the wastewater treatment plant**

The current capacity of 250 million gallons per day (mgd) makes ALCOSAN the largest wastewater treatment system in the region, but greater capacity is needed. The main pump station already has been upgraded and a new vehicle maintenance garage has been built outside the plant gates, making room to expand the treatment operation. ALCOSAN will expand wet weather treatment capacity of the plant from 250 mgd to 480 mgd and wet weather headworks and disinfection capacity to 600 mgd.

ALCOSAN first entered into a consent decree in 2008 and completed the required plan in 2012. Although comprehensive, the public challenged the authority to make the plan more affordable for ratepayers yet flexible enough to take advantage of advances in the field of green stormwater and wastewater management. In order to meet that question, further negotiations were necessary.

Based on existing technologies and science, we know that green stormwater infrastructure and source control does not solve the overflow problem that our region faces. Because of that, ALCOSAN instituted the Green Revitalization of Our Waterways (GROW) Program with a mission to reduce water entering the system. Our consent decree allows us to adapt, and the parties to the order are willing to consider additional stages with more green infrastructure, provided that it can be shown to be impactful on reducing overflows. So that we can meet that requirement, ALCOSAN will soon be releasing the Controlling the Source Program, a science-based evaluation of all methods of source control. This evaluation provides data to municipalities on where they can build projects that are cost-effective and are most beneficial to control overflows.

In order to offset the cost of the required improvements, rates will be increased. Keeping the cost of the Clean Water Plan as affordable as possible for the majority of our system users is important. Because of the changes contained in this amended consent decree, the cost has been spread out over a longer period of time. Additionally, the authority has been more proactive with its own finances to keep the costs down. As a result, rates are expected to increase 7 percent each year for 2019, 2020, and 2021 rather than the 10 percent which had been projected. This means that the average customer will pay \$513 per year, or \$42.75 per month by 2021.

We know that the new rates may still be out of reach for some. In 2016, the ALCOSAN Board of Directors created the Clean Water Assistance Fund, administered by the Dollar Energy Fund, to help homeowners with their wastewater treatment bills. One million dollars (\$1,000,000) is set-aside each year by ALCOSAN for the program.

“This work is going to be one of the largest infrastructure projects in the region and will help continue to ensure our rivers and streams remain the community asset they are today,” said Williams. “We take our stewardship responsibility to the region's rivers and streams seriously, and know that the work that we will be doing in the coming years is vital to our community.”

###

ALCOSAN is one of the region's premier environmental and public health organizations, treating wastewater for 83 Allegheny County communities, including the City of Pittsburgh. The authority enhances the community's quality of life and safety by working to protect drinking water, rivers and streams, and making the Pittsburgh region a great place to live, work and play. ALCOSAN's 59-acre treatment plant processes up to 250 million gallons of wastewater daily and is one of the largest such facilities in the Ohio River Valley.