

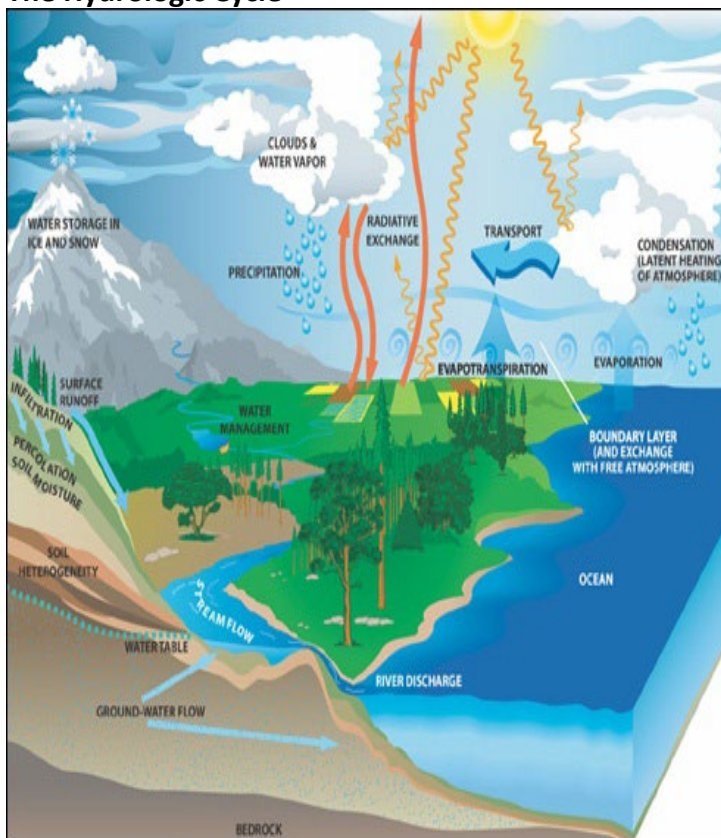
WATER IS WORTH IT!

Boyd Smith, PCEO NH Water Works Association

This is our final *Town & City* article for 2022. We hope this and the bi-weekly *Newslink* series about public water services in your community has been interesting and informative. We greatly appreciate our water partnerships with the NH Water Pollution Control Association and NH Department of Environmental Services and are grateful to the Municipal Association for sharing our stories with you, New Hampshire's community leaders.

Nearly all NH towns and cities rely on public drinking water and wastewater treatment and distribution to survive and thrive. From human consumption, to firefighting, manufacturing, and agriculture, drinking water is second only to air in importance for our survival. Treating water after we use it allows us to clean contaminated water and return it to rivers, lakes, and the ground to rejoin the hydrologic cycle.

The Hydrologic Cycle



Most water users know little about where their water comes from or goes to, as treatment systems are located at the edge of town and distribution systems are buried. More than half of New Hampshire residents depend on public water services, yet only a handful know what it takes to deliver safe, dependable, and affordable water services. It is hard to care about something you take for granted and don't understand.

Water Infrastructure is Hidden



In February 2020 when I started this job, lack of infrastructure funding and new workers were two of the biggest challenges facing public water. Practically overnight, with the influx of federal funding, we are addressing nearly four decades of deferred maintenance on many of our water systems. Everyone in the water sector, including municipalities, is struggling to make the most of these substantial funds. Assessing priorities, designing upgrades, preparing grant and loan applications, gaining citizen approval for bonds and match funding, finding and hiring qualified contractors, and dealing with supply chain and inflationary challenges, are making us all work even harder than before. But water is worth it!

As we stretch our resources to rebuild and repair systems as old as the late 1800s and last expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, we also need to prepare for the future. Future challenges include recruiting and retaining highly skilled workers; treating emerging contaminants such as PFAS and other man-made chemicals; building resilience to the floods, droughts and possible population shifts brought by climate change; and raising customer awareness and engagement to create a more symbiotic connection between water managers and consumers.

We hope the following points will provide some insights to the hidden world of water:

- Water is vital. Clean drinking water is a public health necessity and clean wastewater protects the environment. Combined, these services save lives, create trillions of dollars in global economic value, and make possible multiple uses of our finite water supply.
- Water is local. Most town supplies are within or close to their boundaries, treatment facilities are within the town, and miles of distribution pipes connect local homes, schools, hospitals, and businesses. Water workers are often your friends and neighbors, on duty 24 / 7 to keep the water running. Your actions to protect your watershed, capture and reuse stormwater, and set rates that maintain system operability and generously compensate staff, make all residents a part of the system that supports them.
- Water workers are critical. Workers include licensed facility operators, laboratory technicians, professional engineers, regulators and policy analysts, contractors, material and equipment suppliers, administrators, managers and more. They are often your friends and neighbors, on

duty 24 / 7 to keep the water flowing. Being a water worker is an interesting, dependable, and noble profession.

We hope this article will inspire you to work closely with your drinking and wastewater leaders and staff to maintain the high quality of water services on which your town's public health and economy depend. Please contact the NH Water Works Association at Info@NHWWA.org if you want to learn more about how to help your local water systems thrive.