March 5, 2026

Preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact
To All Interested Citizens, Organizations, and Government Agencies

City of Wellston – Jackson County
Water Treatment Plant Phase 2
Loan Number: FS390969-0023

The attached Environmental Assessment (EA) is for the second phase of a new water treatment plant project in Wellston which the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency intends to finance through its Water Supply Revolving Loan Account (WSRLA) below-market interest rate revolving loan program. The EA describes the project, its costs, and expected environmental benefits. We would appreciate receiving any comments you may have on the project. Making available this EA and seeking your comments fulfills Ohio EPA's environmental review and public notice requirements for this loan program.

Ohio EPA analyzes environmental effects of proposed projects as part of its program review and approval process. We have concluded that the proposed project should not result in significant adverse environmental impacts. More information can be obtained by contacting the person named at the end of the attached EA.

Any comments on our preliminary determination should be sent to the email address of the contact named at the end of the EA. We will not act on this project for 30 calendar days from the date of this notice. In the absence of substantive comments during this period, our preliminary decision will become final. After that, the City of Wellston can then proceed with its application for the WSRLA loan.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Courtright

Kathleen Courtright, Assistant Chief
Division of Environmental & Financial Assistance

Attachment

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Identification

Project: Water Treatment Plant Phase 2

Applicant: City of Wellston
203 East Broadway Street
Wellston, Ohio 45692

Loan Number: FS390969-0023

Figure 1. Jackson County

Project Summary

The City of Wellston, in Jackson County (Figure 1), has requested approximately $10.6 million from the Ohio Water Supply Revolving Loan Account (WSRLA) to fund the Water Treatment Plant Phase 2 project. This project is the second phase of a two-phase project that entails replacing Wellston's two aging water treatment plants (WTPs) with a new single WTP. Due to the nature and location of construction, as well as proposed protection measures to be implemented, no significant adverse impacts are anticipated, as discussed in the conclusion. The project is eligible for $4 million in principal forgiveness, which will not need to be repaid.

History & Existing Conditions

The Wellston public water system (PWS) provides water service to approximately 7,000 people via 2,275 service connections. The system includes two aging treatment plants. Both WTPs are antiquated but have limited available space for expansion. The water distribution system, which includes two water storage tanks and two booster pump stations, is estimated to be over 70 years old.

The North WTP pulls water from Raccoon Creek, Lake Alma reservoir and Lake Rupert reservoir, and is estimated to have been constructed in 1927 and expanded in 1967. The South WTP draws raw water from three wells that are supplied by an abandoned coal mine and is estimated to have been constructed in 1967. The original south well field was installed in 1962, and several wells have been added over the years to provide adequate water to supply the city's population and the General Mills food processing plant.

The South WTP requires manually fed, high-chemical dosing operations due to undersized clarifier. The North WTP also has no means to isolate tanks and equipment for maintenance, and when maintenance is required, the whole plant is shut down. The sludge equipment is also not reliable. The city needs to increase storage capacity and install distribution loops within their system. The aged treatment plants are not structured to take on necessary distribution upgrades. Additionally, the existing storage tank currently has 41% water loss and needs to be replaced.

Phase 1 of this project entailed improvements to the existing south well field to ensure sufficient raw water supply to be provided to a new WTP. The existing surface water source for the North WTP was connected in Phase 1 via raw water lines to recharge the lagoons in the south wellfield, which will supply the source water for a new WTP.

Population and Flow Projections

The North WTP has an approved capacity of 2.2 million gallons per day (MGD) and over the past five years experienced an average daily demand of 0.591 MGD. The South WTP has an approved capacity of 2.0 MGD and over the past five years experienced an average demand of 0.719 MGD.

Population trends for the city were projected using census data obtained from the Ohio Development Services Agency Office of Strategic Research. Census data confirms that Wellston has been decreasing in population since the 1990s. The population decreased from 5,663 in 2010 to 5,507 in 2019, which represents a 2.75% decrease. Table 1 below shows residential population trends compared to EPA per capita water usage rates. The rates below do not include commercial water use due to the General Mills food processing plant that uses up to 1.0 MGD. The new WTP will have a designed treatment capacity of 3.2 MGD and expects to produce 1.7 MGD on average.

Table 1. Population Trends

Year	2010	2019	2030	2040	2050
Population	5,663	5,507	5,326	5,165	5,010
EPA Demand (gal)	566,300	550,700	532,600	516,500	501,000

Alternatives

1. **Do Nothing**
   Both plants will continue to age and deteriorate over time.

2. **Regionalization**
   Regionalization was considered but was ruled out as a feasible alternative due to the lack of potential regional providers in the area capable of providing necessary flows without significant water line improvements. Additionally, construction of a new transmission main to the nearest provider potentially capable of supplying water would cost over $9 million.

3. **Consolidate the two WTPs into one new WTP with one of the following softening alternatives:**

   a. **Ion Exchange Softening**
      Ion filter and softener backwash wastewater will be diluted and directed to the city's wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) for treatment. This technology is easy to operate but uses sodium chloride, which will increase the chloride loading to the receiving stream: Meadow Run.

b. Reverse Osmosis Membrane Softening

This alternative offers a reduced discharge of wastewater to the WWTP compared to ion exchange softening and does not result in the generation of waste sludge as the lime softening option does. The membrane concentrate will be discharged to Meadow Run and will require a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. Due to the membrane process having a recovery of only 80-90%, this option will require more raw water and more water will be discharged to Meadow Run. This alternative had the most expensive capital costs and operation and maintenance (O&M) costs.

c. Traditional Lime Softening

This alternative offers a reduced discharge of wastewater to the WWTP compared to ion exchange softening. However, this alternative requires disposal of waste sludge; it can land applied to farm fields or discharged into abandoned mines and can be used to counter the effects of acid mine drainage, which may be present in the area.

d. Non-Traditional Filtration with Membrane Softening

This alternative offers a reduced discharge of wastewater to the WWTP compared to ion exchange softening and does not result in the generation of waste sludge as the lime softening option does. The membrane concentrate is expected to be discharged to Meadow Run, which will require an NPDES permit. Due to the membrane process having a recovery of only 80-90%, this option will require more raw water and more water will be discharged to Meadow Run.

Selected Alternative

The proposed project will consolidate the aging north and south WTPs into a single new WTP, with the south well field as raw water source. The WTP building will be built off the corner of South Ohio Avenue and East 15th Street. See Figure 2 for the proposed WTP location.

Phase 2 includes constructing the treatment units to be located at the new WTP. This will include an aerator, units to work as combined clarifiers and filters, chemical feed systems, low-service and high-service pumping, backwash pumps, and chlorine disinfection. The WTP will have a designed treatment capacity of 3.2 MGD and expects to produce 1.7 MGD on average. See Figure 3 for the proposed new WTP.

As the raw water source is groundwater, there will need to be a softening process. The non-traditional filtration with membrane softening was the recommended softening alternative due to its cost savings with improved future flexibility and lower chemical needs. This alternative addresses deficiencies in the system and will allow for the most protection against future regulatory changes.

Implementation

The City of Wellston is eligible for $4 million in principal forgiveness (loan amount that does not need to be repaid) from the Ohio WSRLA. Wellston will borrow the remaining $6,648,611 from the Ohio WSRLA at the 0% disadvantaged community rate. With this favorable financing, Wellston will save

$13,507,507 compared to financing the entire loan amount at the market rate, 4.78%, for a 30-year loan period. Wellston has also received grants from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) programs for this project.

The debt associated with this project will be recovered from user charges. Under the current ordinance, the fixed monthly rate per customer increased in 2025 and is planned to increase annually by 2.5% until amended. The 2028 average monthly residential water rate in Wellston will be $80.02 ($960.24 annually). This is 1.9% of the median household income for Wellston (MHI; 51,597) and is higher than the Ohio average annual water bill of $528.

Loan award is anticipated in May 2026, and construction is expected to be completed by February 2028.

Public Participation

Public participation has included presenting the project at the Wellston city council meetings. Meetings are open to the public and occur every first and third Thursday of the month. Council meetings are also recorded livestream and archived on Facebook. Additionally, council meeting minutes and legislation can be found on the city's Facebook page. Discussions were also held at the Water and Sewer Committee meetings, which are open to the public and often covered by the local newspaper reporters. Interviews with city officials and representatives are frequently aired on the local radio station, and it is anticipated that the new WTP will be a topic of discussion in upcoming broadcasts. A separate public meeting about the proposed project was also held.

Ohio EPA is unaware of any controversy about or opposition to this project. This Environmental Assessment (EA) and preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) will be posted on the Ohio EPA Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance website. Additionally, the EA and FNSI have been provided to the City of Wellston to be made available according to their public notification procedures.

Environmental Impacts

The project has the potential to affect the following features, but the effects will be reduced or mitigated to acceptable levels as explained below.

Local Economy

Wellston investigated several alternatives for addressing their aged WTPs. After considering monetary and non-monetary factors, Wellston determined it was most cost effective to eliminate two aged WTPs and consolidate in one new WTP. By using favorable financing, Wellston has minimized the project cost and economic impact on residents. Growth within the service area is not a driver for the project, though completion of the improvements may spur growth at the General Mills food plant.

Noise, Air Quality, Traffic, Safety, and Aesthetics

Heavy machinery that can emit temporary daytime noise may be involved and some traffic interruptions may occur by the construction entrance; however, all work will occur within city-owned property. Temporary, insignificant increases in fugitive dust and local air pollution from construction

vehicle exhaust, like that of vehicles regularly transiting the area, are expected. It will be the contractor's responsibility to implement construction best management practices to limit erosion, sediment, noise, dust, traffic disruptions, and like factors throughout the duration of the project. Disturbed surfaces will be restored upon construction completion.

Archaeological and Historical Resources

No previously recorded cultural resources were found within or immediately adjacent to the project area. However, a Phase 1 archaeological survey was completed within the proposed WTP project area, and two previously unrecorded sites were identified in the project area during the survey. The site encountered in the northwestern corner was not considered a significant archaeological resource and it is unlikely that additional work at this location would yield information significant to understanding Ohio's history or prehistory. The site encountered in the southeastern corner of the project area identified two cut stones that have the potential to resemble headstones, but more likely were placed there to serve as a decorative purpose or to mark the location of something. Without conclusive evidence, it is still considered possible that intact graves are present in the immediate vicinity of these stones; therefore, a 7- by 10-meter area of avoidance around the cut stones is recommended for all groundbreaking activities, to avoid the potential of encountering any interments associated with the standing stones.

In the event that archaeological discoveries are made during construction, contractors and subcontractors are required under Ohio Revised Code Section 149.53 to notify the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office of any archaeological discoveries in the project area and to cooperate with archaeological and historic survey and salvage work when appropriate.

Terrestrial Habitat, Fish and Wildlife, and Endangered Species

One acre of approximately 70 trees was previously cleared for placement of the WTP. Wellston has agreed to follow the standard tree clearing dates of October 1st to March 31st to protect listed endangered and threatened bat species if additional tree clearing is necessary. Otherwise, there is no suitable habitat for other state and federally listed species at the site of the new WTP.

Surface Water Resources and Wetlands

A wetland delineation was completed within the proposed WTP project area. One wetland and stream crossing are located south, outside of the proposed WTP project limits. Bid documents will specify that this wetland and stream must not be disturbed; a silt fence would be erected as perimeter control if needed.

Source Water Assessment and Protection Areas

Construction will take place within the source water assessment and protection area for Wellston's PWS. The contractor will be required to implement all applicable best management practices for the protection of Wellston's drinking water source throughout the duration of construction and have a contingency plan prepared in the event of a spill or other emergency that could impact the drinking water source.

Unaffected Resources:

The following resources are not present and therefore will not be impacted by this project:

Aquatic Habitat, Coastal Zones, Floodplains, Prime Farmland, Groundwater Resources, Sole Source Aquifers, Recreational Land, and Wild and Scenic Rivers. Additionally, there will be no change in current Energy Use as it pertains to public space.

Conclusion

Based upon Ohio EPA's review of the planning information and the materials presented in this EA, we have concluded that there will be no significant adverse impacts from the proposed project as it relates to the environmental features discussed previously. This is because these features do not exist in the project area, the features exist but will not be adversely affected, or the impacts will be temporary and mitigated. The completion of Phase 2 will aid in having long-term benefits associated with the provision of a safe and adequate water supply to support the needs of Wellston's water customers.

Contact information

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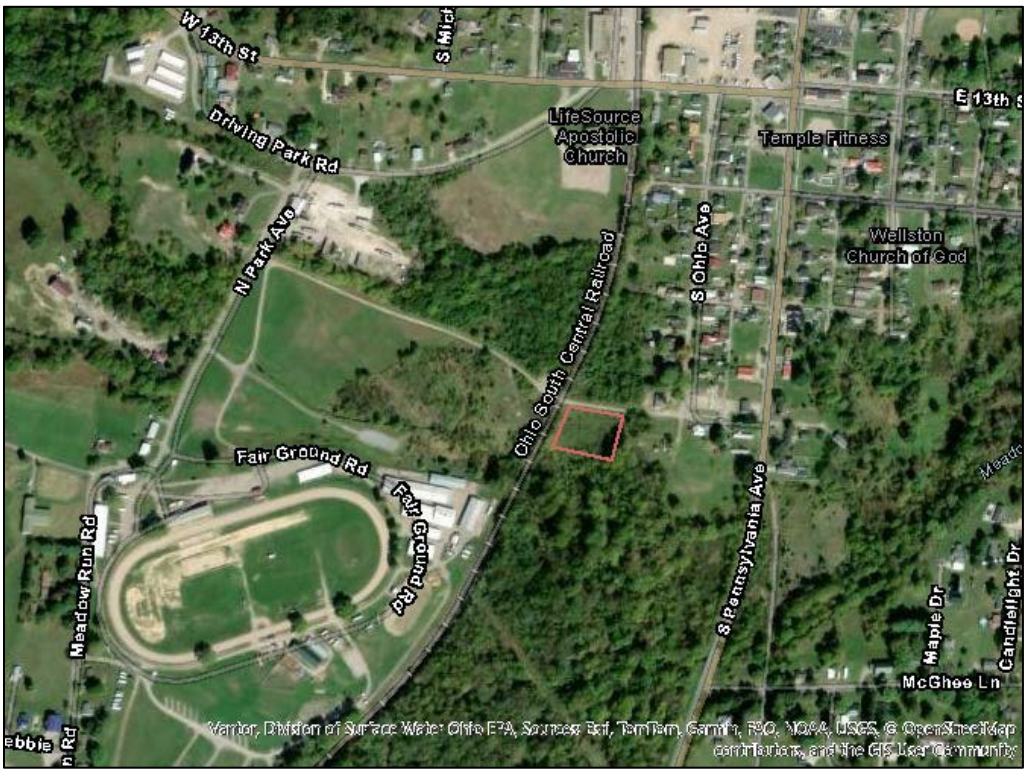

Figure 2. Proposed WTP location

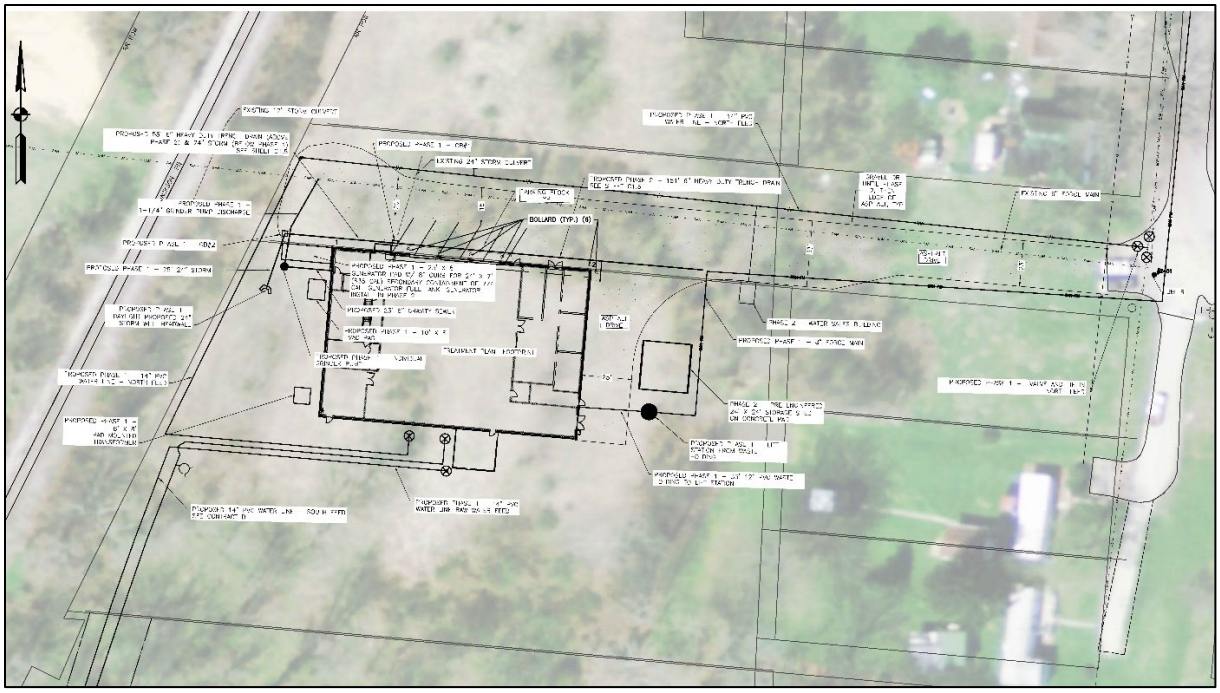

Figure 3. Proposed WTP Improvements