



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, AND ENERGY
FINANCE DIVISION



PHILLIP D. ROOS
DIRECTOR

March 17, 2026

TO: All Interested Citizens, Organizations, and Government Agencies

SUBJECT: FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
**Benton Harbor – St. Joseph Joint Wastewater Treatment Plant, Berrien
County
Sewer Lining and WWTP Improvements
Clean Water State Revolving Fund Project Number 5916-01**

The purpose of this notice is to seek public input and comment on a preliminary decision by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to implement recommendations discussed in the attached Environmental Assessment of a wastewater project planning document submitted by the applicant mentioned above.

HOW WERE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES CONSIDERED?

Part 53, Clean Water Assistance, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, as amended, being Sections 324.5301 to 324.5316 of the Michigan Compiled Laws Annotated, requires EGLE to evaluate all environmental implications of a proposed wastewater project. EGLE has done this by incorporating a detailed analysis of the environmental effects of the proposed alternatives in its review and approval process. A project planning document containing information on environmental impacts was prepared by the municipality and reviewed by the State. EGLE has prepared the attached Environmental Assessment and found that the proposed project does not require the preparation of an EIS.

WHY IS AN EIS NOT REQUIRED?

Our environmental review concluded that no significant environmental impacts would result from the proposed action. Any adverse impacts have either been eliminated by changes in the project planning document or will be reduced by the implementation of the mitigative measures discussed in the attached Environmental Assessment.

HOW DO I GET MORE INFORMATION?

A map depicting the location of the proposed project is attached. This information is also available on our website at Michigan.gov/SRF under “Environmental Project Reviews.” The Environmental Assessment presents additional information on the project, alternatives that were considered, impacts of the proposed action, and the basis for our decision. Further information can be obtained by calling or writing one of the contact people listed below.

HOW DO I SUBMIT COMMENTS?

Any comments supporting or disagreeing with this preliminary decision should be submitted via email to EGLE-WIFFS@Michigan.gov or to me at EGLE, Finance Division, Stabenow Building, P.O. Box 30457, Lansing, Michigan 48909-7957. We will not take any action on this project planning document for 30 calendar days from the date of this notice in order to receive and consider all comments.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

In the absence of substantive comments during this period, our preliminary decision will become final. The applicant will then be eligible to receive loan assistance from this Agency to construct the proposed project.

Any information you feel should be considered by EGLE should be brought to our attention. If you have any questions, please contact Lance Wood, the project manager, at 517-388-5780; WoodL8@Michigan.gov; or you may contact me. Your interest in this process and the environment is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Dan Beauchamp

Dan Beauchamp, Section Manager
Water Infrastructure Funding and Financing Section
Finance Division
517-388-3380

Attachment

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, AND ENERGY
Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)
Benton Harbor – St. Joseph Joint Wastewater Treatment Plant, Berrien County
Environmental Assessment
March 2026

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

Applicant: Benton Harbor – St. Joseph Joint Wastewater Treatment Plant

Address: 269 Anchors Way
St. Joseph, Michigan 49085

Authorized Representative: Kevin Pockrandt, Plant Manager

Project Number: 5916-01

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Benton Harbor – St. Joseph Joint Wastewater Treatment Plant Board (BHSJ WWTP) is applying for a low-interest CWSRF loan administered by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) to finance sanitary sewer rehabilitation, primary sludge valve replacement, returned activated sludge (RAS) pump replacement, channel air piping and equipment replacement, and final settling tanks mechanism replacement. The BHSJ WWTP is located in Berrien County in southwest Michigan. As of the 2020 United States Census, BHSJ WWTP’s service area population was 63,341 and is projected to remain nearly steady over the next 20 years. Potential growth is expected in the total population served through additional service coverage and possible future service areas in nearby communities.

The total estimated project cost is \$15,000,000. BHSJ WWTP will finance the project costs with a 20-year low interest CWSRF loan. As a qualified financially overburdened system determined by EGLE criteria, BHSJ WWTP is eligible to receive up to 13 percent in loan principal forgiveness, not to exceed \$1,950,000. As a result of a project at this cost, a user rate increase of approximately \$0.61 per month is anticipated for the average residential bill. A user rate increase of 2.5 percent is proposed in 2026 to cover the cost of the project.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Joint Board of the city of Benton Harbor (Benton Harbor) and the city of St. Joseph (St. Joseph) own and operate the sanitary sewer conveyance system and wastewater treatment plant (WWTP). The WWTP serves Benton Harbor, St. Joseph, Benton Charter Township, Lincoln Charter Township, St. Joseph Charter Township, Royalton Township, Village of Shoreham, and Village of Stevensville. The BHSJ WWTP is located on Marina Island surrounded by the St. Joseph River and Morrison Channel, as seen in Figure 1. While the BHSJ WWTP owns and operates the WWTP, each community served by the WWTP owns and operates their own sanitary sewer collection system and sends wastewater flows to the WWTP conveyance system. The conveyance system is comprised of an 18-inch and 20-inch diameter siphon from Benton Harbor and a 36-inch diameter gravity sewer from St. Joseph that send wastewater flows to Marina Island. On Marina Island, the conveyance system is comprised of a 36-inch diameter gravity sewer that conveys wastewater flows to the WWTP headworks.

The WWTP was originally built in 1951 and has been upgraded and expanded various times throughout the years. The WWTP has a design average daily flow treatment capacity of 15.3 million gallons per day. Wastewater treatment processes include screening, grit settling, a grit washer/classifier, primary settling, aeration, re-aeration, final settling, and disinfection. The WWTP has an existing headworks facility along with a new headworks facility that was built in 2019. The older headworks facility processes flows that are more than the new headworks capacity. Wastewater flows through the 36-inch diameter influent sewer through the headworks mechanical coarse bar screen then through the WWTP. Treated effluent is discharged to the St. Joseph River and the WWTP has consistently met all National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit requirements and limits.

PROPOSED PROJECT

A. Project Need

The existing 36-inch diameter sewers on Marina Island were constructed with reinforced concrete pipes and were installed in 1953. The sewers were televised in 2019 and reviewed using the National Association of Sewer Service Companies Pipeline Assessment Certification Program and were found to have multiple structural grade 4 and 5 defects, which are categorized as the most severe structural defects. The existing sewers have multiple segments of pipe with defects categorized in the surface damage category, indicating significant corrosion of the existing sewer. These sewers have high criticality as they carry significant amounts of flow to the WWTP and have a high risk of failure which could cause raw sewage discharge to nearby surface water.

The existing air piping and gates within the aeration and final tank influent channels were installed in the 1970s. The piping, gates, diffusers, and equipment are past their useful life and have had issues during operation. The piping has leaks and inefficiencies that could lead to potential buildup of solids within the system. Wall penetrations for the piping are leaking which causes partially treated wastewater to leak into the lower gallery which poses a safety hazard. Final settling tanks No.4 and No.5 were built in the 1970s and final settling tank No. 3 was built in the 1980s. The tanks' concrete is in good condition, but the mechanisms, bridges, and associated equipment are past their useful life and in critical condition. Replacement of the mechanisms and equipment is needed for treatment to ensure compliance with NPDES permit requirements.

The WWTP has three RAS pumps, with two in use and one on standby. The pumps were last replaced 24 years ago and are past their useful life. The pumps require significant maintenance to ensure they remain operational for treatment. The existing pumps do not have variable frequency drives (VFDs) or functioning flow meters that could allow for more efficient operation and controls. The primary settling tanks have three sludge valves that are aging and becoming inoperable. These valves are important to the WWTP's primary sludge system and failure of the valves would impact the ability to meet NPDES permit requirements.

B. Alternatives Considered

No-action Alternative

The no-action alternative is not a viable option as continued operation of WWTP equipment without improvements would result in reduced treatment capability and could cause violations of permit requirements. Existing equipment would continue to age and experience further failures. If sanitary sewer structural deficiencies are not addressed, failure of the sewers could lead to discharge of raw sewage to nearby surface waters.

Regional Alternative

The BHSJ WWTP is already the regional WWTP, and further regionalization would not address the needs of the WWTP. Since this alternative does not address the needs identified, this alternative was not evaluated further.

Optimization of Existing System

Optimization does not address structural sewer deficiencies and WWTP needs. Since the existing equipment is past its useful life and requires replacement, this alternative was not evaluated further. The WWTP has met NPDES permit requirements with existing treatment processes and cannot address project needs through optimization.

Construction Alternatives

To address the structural sewer deficiencies, various methods of construction were considered. Both full sewer replacement and cured-in-place pipe (CIPP) lining were reviewed to determine if the existing sewers could be lined to address the project needs or if replacement was necessary. Lining the sewers is lower cost compared to full replacement of the sewer and has less environmental impacts. Depending on factors such as pipe age and condition lining is not practical and full replacement is needed. Since various components at the WWTP are past their useful life, the only viable alternative is replacement. WWTP construction alternatives compared replacements of existing equipment with full replacement of treatment processes.

C. Selected Alternative

The selected alternative for the project is sewer lining with CIPP technology and replacement of WWTP equipment. The CIPP liner will seal existing leaks, mitigate pipe corrosion, and provide structural integrity to the sewer. The proposed project includes approximately 1,700 linear feet of CIPP lining and bypass pumping during construction. The location of the CIPP lining is identified in Figure 1 and consists of the gravity sewer on Marina Island.

The only feasible alternative for the WWTP improvements is replacement of the existing equipment. Locations of the proposed projects are all within the existing WWTP, shown in Figure 1. The project consists of replacement of the channel air piping system, diffusers, channel gates, and associated equipment. A new efficient air diffuser system will be installed within the existing WWTP. The new system will be similarly sized but will have a different configuration to maximize efficiency. The existing settling tank mechanisms will be replaced with similar sized mechanisms and include associated components such as bridges, effluent troughs, effluent trough covers, and sludge level indicators.

The existing RAS pumps flow meters will be removed and replaced with new pumps and flow meters. The new RAS pumps will be similar models with closely matching the existing pump capacity. The new pumps, flow meters, and VFDs will be coordinated to communicate with the existing electrical and control systems. The existing 8-inch primary spiral sludge valves will be replaced with 8-inch telescopic valves to allow better functionality. The new valves will be the same size as the existing valves and located in the same area. It will be further explored during design if any pipe modifications are needed to complete the valve replacement.

D. Project Cost and Implementation

The total estimated project cost is \$15,000,000. BHSJ WWTP will finance the project with a CWSRF loan for 20 years at 2.00 percent interest. As a qualified financially overburdened system determined by EGLE criteria, BHSJ WWTP is eligible to receive a half-percent interest rate deduction from the standard rate of 2.50 percent. BHSJ WWTP is also eligible to receive up to 13 percent in loan principal forgiveness, not to exceed \$1,950,000. As a result of a project at this cost, a user rate increase of approximately \$0.61 per month is anticipated for the average residential bill. A user rate increase of 2.5 percent is proposed in 2026 to cover the cost of the project. User rate impacts may be reduced as this project is receiving principal loan forgiveness.

Construction is planned to be sequenced to avoid impacts to WWTP operations with coordination between projects to ensure all treatment processes remain uninterrupted. Construction is anticipated to begin in Summer 2026 with all phases completed within a year and a half.

PROJECT IMPACTS

A. Water Quality Impacts

The proposed project is not anticipated to have any adverse impact on water quality. Soil erosion and sedimentation control measures will be implemented to mitigate any impacts on streams and wetlands. The proposed project does not take place within regulated wetlands or surface waters, therefore no adverse impacts to water resources are anticipated. The proposed project will have beneficial impacts to water quality by reducing the potential of sewage discharges to the St. Joseph River and nearby Lake Michigan. Some dewatering is anticipated for sewer rehabilitation. All water withdrawals will be registered with EGLE as necessary, and all applicable requirements will be followed.

B. Construction Impacts

The main impacts expected as a result of the proposed project are associated with construction activities. This includes impacts related to noise, dust, and traffic. Standard construction best practices will be utilized to mitigate any adverse construction impacts. This includes the use of water or brine to control dust, construction equipment will be kept in good condition to minimize noise and exhaust emissions, and the use of traffic control devices when roads are impacted by construction. Since the WWTP is confined to Marina Island, traffic impacts are expected to be minimal. There are no long-term adverse impacts expected as a result of the proposed project. Most of the construction will take place in existing easements and WWTP structures. Any disturbed sites will be restored to pre-project conditions.

The CIPP lining will be completed using trenchless technology to minimize impacts. Installation of a manhole along with four locations of sawcutting is needed for bypass pumping. These areas were reviewed to determine if a Part 31 Floodplain permit is needed. Since the project does not include any filling or grade changes within the 100-year floodplain, a permit is likely not needed. If any cultural or historic artifacts are discovered during construction, the proper authorities will be contacted so they can be immediately investigated prior to continuing construction. No tree removals are proposed as part of the project. There are no impacts expected to any threatened or endangered flora and fauna species.

C. Secondary Impacts

No significant secondary impacts are anticipated as a result of this project. Improvements The project is designed to replace aging equipment and restore the sewer system structural integrity. Much of the work includes in-kind replacement and will not increase capacity.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A formal public meeting for the proposed project was held at 10:00am on April 18, 2024, at the BHSJ WWTP Engineering Building. The notice was posted on April 3, 2024, in the *Herald Palladium*, as well as on sewer system municipal websites. The draft project planning document was made publicly available for viewing at the BHSJ WWTP and online. During the public meeting, a presentation on the proposed project was given including the project need, alternatives, project costs, and environmental impacts. No written comments were provided during the public comment period. During the public meeting there were various comments regarding project scope, engineering services, and overburdened status. All public comments were addressed during the hearing. A resolution to adopt the project planning document and selected alternatives was adopted by the BHSJ WWTP Board on April 18, 2024, after the conclusion of the public meeting.

REASONS FOR CONCLUDING NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

The proposed project will address aging wastewater infrastructure and will have no significant adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts on socioeconomic, cultural, or environmental resources. Minor construction impacts will be temporary and mitigated with sound construction practices. The water quality benefits and improved system reliability anticipated from the project are expected to outweigh the short-term adverse construction impacts.

Questions regarding this Environmental Assessment should be directed to:

Lance Wood, Project Manager
Water Infrastructure Funding and Financing Section
Finance Division
Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy
P.O. Box 30457
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7957
Telephone: 517-388-5780
Email: WoodL8@Michigan.gov

Figure 1
Benton Harbor - St. Joseph Joint
Wastewater Treatment Plant
CWSRF Project - Proposed
Improvements

