

Funds to help under-served communities

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is announcing the New Mexico Environment Department and its coalition partners, Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments, Gallup, Southwest New Mexico Council of Governments, and the city of Silver City are among 149 recipients of 151 grant awards totaling more than $64.6 million in EPA Brownfields funding through the Multipurpose, Assessment, and Cleanup Grant Programs. The coalition will partner to administer a $500,000 assessment grant to address contaminated properties in New Mexico.

These funds will aid under-served and economically disadvantaged communities in opportunity zones and other parts of the country in assessing and cleaning up abandoned industrial and commercial properties. Forty percent of the communities selected for funding will receive assistance for the first time.

EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler says, “We are targeting these funds to areas that need them the most. Approximately 40 percent of the selected recipients are receiving Brownfields grants for the first time, which means we are reaching areas that may previously [have] been neglected, and 108 of the selected communities have identified sites or targeted areas for redevelopment that fall within Opportunity Zones.”

“Brownfields funding from EPA can be vital for communities dealing with contaminated

properties," Acting Regional Administrator David Gray said. "In New Mexico, several cities will benefit from this funding and the economic boost it can contribute to."

The funding will be used to assess contamination from mining and other industrial activities in several communities. "Brownfields redevelopment projects have served as key components of economic growth for the cities, rural communities, and tribes of New Mexico," according to New Mexico Environment Department Secretary James Kenney. "We are grateful to our coalition partners for collaborating with us on this Brownfield Assessment Grant from the EPA, he added.

Grants awarded by EPA's Brownfields Program provide communities across the country with an opportunity to transform contaminated sites into community assets that attract jobs and achieve broader economic development outcomes, while taking advantage of existing infrastructure.

For example, Brownfields grants have been shown to:

· increase local tax revenue: A study of 48 brownfields sites found that an estimated $29 million to $97 million in additional local tax revenue was generated in a single year after cleanup. This is 2 to 7 times more than the $12.4 million EPA contributed to the cleanup of these sites.

· increase residential property values: Another study found that property values of homes near revitalized brownfields sites increased between 5 and 15 per cent following cleanup.

One hundred and eight communities selected for grants this year have identified sites or targeted areas in census tracts designated as federal Opportunity Zones.

An Opportunity Zone is an economically-distressed community where new investment, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment.

"I am truly excited to join as EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler announces over $64 million in Brownfield funding," Executive Director of the White House Opportunity and Revitalization

Council Scott Turner said. “The Brownfields grant program is a tremendous vehicle for bringing real revitalization and transformation to the distressed communities of America.”

“Of the 149 communities selected for these grants, 108 will benefit communities with Opportunity Zones. I look forward to seeing the impact that these grants will have on neighborhoods and citizens across the country,” he continued.

Background

A brownfield is a property for which the expansion, redevelopment or reuse may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. There are estimated to be more than 450,000 brownfields in the U.S. As of May 2019, under the EPA Brownfields Program 30,153 properties have been assessed, and 86,131 acres of idle land have been made ready for productive use.

In addition, communities have been able to use Brownfields grants to leverage 150,120 jobs and more than $28 billion of public and private funding.

In 2018 Congress reauthorized the statutory authority for the Brownfields Program. The reauthorization includes changes to the program to expand the list of entities eligible for Brownfields grants, increase the limit of individual Brownfields cleanup grants to $500,000, and add grant authority for multipurpose grants. These important changes will help communities address and clean up more complex brownfield sites.

The 2019 National Brownfields Training Conference will be held on December 11-13 in Los Angeles, California. Offered every two years, this conference is the largest gathering of stakeholders focused on cleaning up and reusing formerly utilized commercial and industrial properties. EPA cosponsors this event with the International City/County Management Association.

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