



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

## 2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

**Deadline for Nominations: March 3, 2015**

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

### SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Using Offsets to Improve Water Quality

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: City of Twin Falls, Idaho

Jurisdiction population(s): 45,158

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: September Year: 2012

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Jason Brown

Title: Staff Engineer Jurisdiction: City of Twin Falls

Name: Brian Ohlmstead

Title: General Manager Jurisdiction: Twin Falls Canal Company

Name: Sonny Buhidar

Title: Water Quality Manager Jurisdiction: Idaho Department of Environmental Quality

## **SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact**

Name of contact: Travis Rothweiler  
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## Using Offsets to Improve Water Quality

### **Mandate**

In 2009, the City of Twin Falls learned that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was planning to make the City's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit requirements more restrictive on Total Suspended Solids (TSS) in the City's treated effluent into the Snake River. These EPA restrictions were based on the Mid-Snake Upper Rock Sub-basin total maximum daily load (TMDL) allocation of 146.4 tons of TSS per year (23 mg/L) to the City. This change would have taken the City from its current permitted limit of 390 tons of TSS per year (30 mg/L) to 146.6 tons of TSS per year (23 mg/L). Such a dramatic change would have been so restrictive that the City's wastewater treatment plant would not have been able to comply without significant and costly upgrades to its facility. Ultimately, this new measurement would have decreased permitted tons of TSS from 390 tons per year to 146.6 tons per year. In order to comply with this mandate, the City would have been required to make between \$5 and \$8 million worth of upgrades at the wastewater treatment plant.

### **Innovation**

As an alternative to making these upgrades at the wastewater treatment plant, the City's Engineering Department developed a plan to use non-point source discharges as a way to offset the cost of compliance with the new permit requirements while helping to improve water quality in the Snake River. Utilizing the offsets concept required the City to implement projects that would reduce TSS discharges from non-point sources, such as



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the local canal system, that contribute TSS to the Snake River. If the City could find a way to accomplish this goal, the EPA would maintain the City's TSS allocation at the wastewater treatment plant at a level where it would be compliant under the new NPDES requirements.

In 2011, the City of Twin Falls, the State of Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the Twin Falls Canal Company, and EPA Region 10 entered into an unprecedented agreement after substantial collaboration. As part of this agreement, the City agreed to remove 733 tons of TSS annually from irrigation lateral 26 and lateral 30A of the Twin Falls Canal Company. This

correlated to an offset ratio of 3 to 1. As a result, the project created two wetland/pond systems on city property. One was located above the discharge point for lateral 26 into the Snake River by the police gun range and the other near Rock Creek in the Snake River Canyon. The plan required the removal of



City ground located next to the Twin Falls Police Department Gun Range was identified as a possible location for the offsets program.

733 tons per year of TSS before it entered the Snake River by January 2014. Compliance with the plan would allow the wastewater treatment plant to retain the previous TSS limits of 390 tons.

By September 2012, the offsets project was substantially completed and approximately 735 tons of TSS removal was recorded at the police gun range wetlands. Monitoring systems were still being installed at the Auger Falls wetlands, but it is

## Using Offsets to Improve Water Quality

estimated that a total of 452 tons of TSS was diverted from the Snake River at this location. The total tons of TSS diverted from the Snake River in 2012 as a result of these projects was roughly 1,185. These amounts far exceed the 733 tons of TSS annual threshold to which the City originally committed.

### Cost Savings

As previously stated, the wastewater treatment plant upgrades would have cost between \$5 and \$8 million. The innovative partnership between the City, the Twin Falls Canal Company and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality produced a solution that avoided these substantial costs. The

cost of the construction of the wetlands and ponds, as well as the monitoring equipment ended up being \$150,000, with an annual operating cost estimated at \$12,000, to be paid from the wastewater collection fund.

Not only did this project present a more affordable method of solids removal, it

resulted in a significantly higher removal of waste than previously used methods. It also removed three times more solids than the new requirement of the NPDES permit. The end solution has resulted in improved solids removal and better water quality in the Snake River.



City crews begin developing new settling ponds to divert TSS from the canal system.



## Using Offsets to Improve Water Quality

### Additional Benefits

The newly developed wetlands also create an attractive addition to the Snake River Canyon Centennial Trail System, attracting a wide variety of birds and other wildlife while enhancing previously unused and unappealing property.

### Recipe for Success

The City of Twin Falls is extremely proud of the innovation and team work that it took to accomplish this unprecedented project. The offsets system is believed to be the only one of its kind in the United States. Other cities could have the capacity to implement similar projects; however, it requires a strong grasp of environmental law, engineering, and best practices. It also requires a close collaborative relationship with other agencies, particularly the EPA and local government jurisdictions.

This project would not have come to fruition if the City of Twin Falls did not have a desire for cost savings and better protection of water quality. The City has learned that when faced with expensive mandates, it is imperative to explore all possible options. By doing so, the City is better able to protect precious natural resources, ensure a low cost of service, and do what is best for the community and the environment. Additionally, this project would not have been possible without an excellent working relationship with other jurisdictions and organizations. Brian Olmstead, General Manager of the Twin Falls Canal Company, and Sonny Buhidar, DEQ Water Quality Manager, were instrumental in making this project work.



## Using Offsets to Improve Water Quality

This project can be replicated in other areas throughout our region. Supporting other similar projects is something we look forward to doing as we seek to improve the water quality of the Snake River.

### For More Information

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An aerial view of the offsets project; located next to the scenic Shoshone Falls Park.