

**Local
stimulus
still up in
air**

*The
county
youth
corps
could
double
and*



Bill Mahoney of CREC cuts down a tree in a thinning project south of Williams on Thursday. CREC is one local organization that should see benefits from the stimulus package. (Josh Biggs/Arizona Daily Sun)

weatherization projects might triple, but other agencies are uncertain how much in federal funds they will receive.

By CYNDY COLE
Sun Staff Reporter
Sunday, March 22, 2009

Arizona's roughly \$4 billion share of the \$787 billion federal stimulus package eventually will be shared with northern Arizona.

But most local government officials were highly uncertain last week how much funding they would be receiving, and what the rules on using it would be.

Those who did know something said the amounts they are supposed to receive were still changing day by day.

Here are a few ways the federal stimulus money is headed here:

Weatherization

Among other things, the Northern Arizona Council of Governments uses grants to help make 20 to 30 homes in Coconino County more weather-tight each year.

The homes get an energy audit, then are sealed up with moderately inexpensive fixes, like caulking, windows and insulation.

Thanks to the stimulus, the number of homes treated is expected to double or triple in the months to come, executive director Ken Sweet said, along with the amount the agency can spend per home.

It's estimated his four-county agency will receive \$5.5 million, he said.

This also means some more funds for Head Start, roads, and meals programs.

As it is, the agency has a two-year waiting list for those requesting help insulating their homes, and the phone calls have rolled in more heavily with news of the stimulus bill.

"We're getting a flood of applicants, that's for sure, because everybody's eyeing this," said Bob Baca, who directs the weatherization program.

The agency relies on construction contractors and subcontractors, meaning more work there.

The average Flagstaff resident spends \$1,118 annually just in natural gas bills, calculated Eric Souders, a local financial adviser, as he crunched numbers to present to the Coconino County Sustainable Economic Development Initiative. The group supports a massive increase in weatherization work.

If, for example, 5,000 homes were sealed up better at a cost of \$3,000 apiece, that would save the average homeowner \$277 in natural gas per year, create 105 full-time jobs, and save about 50,000 tons of carbon-dioxide emitted, Souders said.

He is one of more than a dozen locals hoping this stimulus package leads to legions of green-industry construction jobs.

Jobs programs

Money flowing into the Coconino County Rural Environment Corps from various sources could be used to build more trails, upgrade campgrounds, thin more acres of forest and eventually start training a young work force to insulate more homes, said program manager Dustin Woodman.

He's hoping to go from employing 150 people ages 16 to 25, to at least 300.

"What we're really looking at," he said, "is how fast can we grow, how much can we grow, and how can we make that happen?"

It's been difficult, he and others said, to keep on top of every potential avenue of stimulus funding as quickly as they've been announced.

Jobs programs both for young workers and experienced employees who have been laid off and need retraining are expected to get stimulus funding.

But, in part, it could backfill what they're already spending as unemployment countywide heads upward of 7 percent, said Coconino County Career Center Director Carol Curtis.

"Until the stimulus comes, we have spent most of our money, and most of our partners will tell you that, too," she said.

There are more job loss announcements expected at the end of this month and the beginning of next, she said.

Her agency is expecting more than \$600,000 in stimulus money, in addition to various grants, and is hoping to send new and retrained workers to jobs building roads or insulating homes.

Still, Curtis' budget is less than it was in 2001, when workers were requesting less help.

Roads

The Arizona Department of Transportation will be spending about \$8 million to re-pave Highway 89 north of Doney Park, near Fernwood, and another \$4.1 million to re-pave U.S. 160 from 89 to near Tuba City, said spokesman Rod Wigman.

Further, another \$12 million will be spent to largely reconstruct Interstate 40 westbound from Walnut Canyon to between Cosnino Road and the Winona interchange, lessening the grade there.

The plan is to have the projects out to bid by next month.

Additionally, Coconino County plans to have a few miles of repaving in the areas of West Route 66 near Woody Mountain Road, and along Lake Mary near the community of Mormon Lake.

The Flagstaff Metropolitan Planning Organization is expecting close to \$1 million, at last estimate.

Water, research

The U.S. Geological Survey campus in Flagstaff is expecting some new money for demolishing and replacing old buildings with new lab space, and possibly some funding to buy new water-monitoring research equipment for surveys of watersheds, said Andrea Alpine, who head the Southwest Biological Science Center at USGS.

"Research dollars may go more quickly to universities who we partner with," she said.

Additionally, the city of Flagstaff is expecting to receive \$542,500 for a new well.

Another big water/sewer project Coconino County has long proposed at Fort Tuthill did not apparently receive funding, according to draft documents.

Northern Arizona University is hoping to receive both more state-allocated money and more competitive research grants, said the university's lobbyist, Christy Farley.

The difficulty is, as professors take on heavier teaching loads due to hiring freezes and cuts in temporary instructors, they have less time to seek out grants, Farley said.

Flagstaff police

Flagstaff police plan to compete for a grant that would offset possible layoffs, keep undercover drug investigations going and fund more patrols on busier weekend days.

Other police departments in the state will be competing for the funds as well, said Deputy Chief Kevin Treadway.

The department employs 112 officers, formerly 118, and other agencies have pulled out of a regional drug-busting task force.

Cuts to the department could mean less investigative work to bust drug dealers, or less police presence.

Cyndy Cole can be reached at 913-8607 or at ccole@azdailysun.com.

Anticipated local uses of stimulus money

- more job training for the unemployed
- weatherization for poorly insulated homes
- buildings, hydrologic research equipment at USGS
- a new city of Flagstaff water well
- more meals for the poor, elderly
- possibly more Flagstaff police, or backfill layoffs
- more jobs for 16-25 year-olds, construction workers
- some re-paving on Highway 89, Lake Mary Road, West Route 66