

Esto Awarded Grants to Replace Damaged Water System

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ESTO-- The town of Esto has been using the same water system for more than 50 years, and recently they found a number of problems. Now the town is working to replace the current system to prevent any health hazards. Residents says the fixes are long overdue. John Luke and his wife Donnetta are one of the 300 plus residents using the town of Esto's water system, and John says he's noticed a constant problem.

"Every once in a while they shut it off to do water main repairs. They don't give us any notice when they're shutting it off and all that. And then we have to deal with not doing our clothes and not doing our dishes and stuff," said Luke.

But that's just one of many issues with the system.

"It's been in place, probably for over 50 years. Plus or minus. And it has a great number of leaks and they have a lot of water loss," said Bob Mearns, financial and management circuit rider with Florida Rural Water Association.

With the help of Mearns, the Northwest Florida Water Management District recently awarded Esto nearly \$800,000 to replace the current system.

"The essence of the problem the economic condition of the people of Esto is such that they never would have been able to fix the system. They never would have been able to charge enough money to fix the system," said Mearns.

Recognizing that, the town's also in the process of receiving an additional grant from the USDA Rural Development Agency for more than \$400,000. Town officials expect construction to begin this summer.

"I just hope that the brownness goes away and it's all safe. We have two kids of our own and they drink the water and I just hope that they don't end up with any long term affects from it," Luke explained.

The town has until 2017 to build the new system. No plans have been made yet for its layout, but town officials say it should last 50 years.