

Study: Calif. needs the most water infrastructure upgrades

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

California could use \$44.5 billion to fix aging water systems over the next two decades, according to a federal survey that placed the state at the top of a national list of water infrastructure needs.

Texas, at nearly \$34 billion, and New York, with about \$22 billion, were next in line.

The assessment, conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2011 and released Tuesday, is used to document the capital investment needs of public drinking water systems across the country. The EPA relies on the results to allocate grants through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund.

All told, the survey revealed a \$384-billion wish list of infrastructure projects through 2030 – \$4.5 billion more than in the 2007 assessment.

In California and elsewhere, the biggest need was for repairing and upgrading water transmission and distribution lines. That will come as no surprise to residents of Los Angeles, where old mains routinely break, sending gushers of water flooding city streets. Treatment projects were next on the list.

“The nation’s water systems have entered a rehabilitation and replacement era in which much of the existing infrastructure has reached, or is approaching, the end of its useful life,” EPA acting Administrator Robert Perciasepe said in a statement. “This is a major issue that must be addressed so that American families continue to have the access they need to clean and healthy water sources.”

In April, the regional EPA administrator sent a letter of noncompliance to the California Department of Public Health, complaining that the state had failed to spend \$455 million of federal money in another state revolving fund used to improve drinking-water quality in small rural communities with contaminated wells or other problems.

The EPA said the state had set much of the funding aside for projects that were not shovel ready, while other, ready-to-go projects languished.