On May 2 & 3 approximately two dozen NOWRA members from all over the country travelled to Washington DC for the association’s 4th Annual Legislative Fly-In. The purpose of the Fly-In is to meet with lawmakers on Capitol Hill and at Federal Agencies to educate them on the benefits and advantages of onsite and decentralized wastewater treatment and to encourage them to enact laws and policies which will benefit the onsite wastewater industry.

Face-to-face meetings with our elected officials at any level is invaluable, and NOWRA’s national lobbying firm (which is located in DC) ensured that the attendees representing our industry had ample opportunity to make their concerns and hopes known to lawmakers in their own state as well as officials at federal agencies.

Following a morning briefing held in a hearing room in the Rayburn House Office Building, NOWRA representatives held roughly 50 meetings. Most of them were with members of the House and Senate, including many with members of the four committees which regulate and provide funding for water and wastewater: the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. Several Fly-in attendees also participated in meetings with EPA’s Office of Wastewater, USDA’s Rural Utilities Service(RUS), and the President’s Council on Environmental Quality (they coordinate Administration environmental policy across all federal agencies). Following the meetings, participants attended a dinner at a local restaurant for a de-briefing discussion of their visits.
NOWRA had several goals for its congressional visits:

1. Get Congress to preserve funding for Section 319
   funding from EPA’s Clean Water State Revolving Fund
   and for USDA’s Rural Utilities Service water and sewer
   funding (both have been zeroed out in President
   Trump’s budget.)
2. Ask US House Members to join the Decentralized
   Wastewater Recycling Caucus
3. Support NOWRA’s proposed legislation -- the National
   Onsite Wastewater Recycling Act -- which requires EPA
   to report to Congress on the successes and obstacles it
   faces funding decentralized wastewater treatment, and
   requires small communities to self-certify that they have
   considered all wastewater treatment options before
   making a decision about treatment.

NOWRA wishes to thank all of the NOWRA members
who participated in this year’s Fly-In. The Fly-In
participants who provided feedback to NOWRA’s
leadership all agreed that the effort to come to DC
was worthwhile and actually enjoyable. They learned
that as constituents of the Congressional offices they
visited, their comments were
taken seriously and remembered. Mark Shepard of Quality
Septic (near Kansas City) noted that the staffer from Rep.
Yoder’s office remembered him from the year before and even
quoted some of the things Mark had shared with him during
his visit to the office during last year’s Fly-In!

Do you know that over the last 30 years Congress and the EPA
have given states more than 100 billion dollars in grants and
loans to address wastewater treatment issues, and that 99.7%
of this money has been directed to centralized (big pipe)
sewage collection and treatment systems? Although
Onsite/decentralized wastewater treatment systems serve 85
millions Americans ~25% of the country and 30% of new
construction – they are virtually ignored when it comes to
helping to fix the infrastructure issues faced by our industry.
Attendees at the Fly-In were focused on this subject when
speaking with the legislators that participated. NOWRA is

Figure 3: NOWRA President Jim Bell (right) and
Executive Director Eric Casey (left) with Rep.
Sam Graves (R-MO) at a fundraiser/barbecue
for the Congressman. Rep. Graves is a co-
sponsor of the Decentralized Wastewater
Recycling Congressional Caucus.

Figure 4: Mark Shepard of Quality Septic meets with
a key aid to Rep. Kevin Yoder (R-KS)

Figure 5:: NOWRA Board Member Joyce
Hudson (center) with Tim Perrin (left)
and Alan Wheat (right) of NOWRA’s
advocacy firm Polsinelli, LLC, Alan
Wheat is a former congressman who
leads NOWRA’s lobbying team.
focused on promoting the importance and viability of onsite and decentralized wastewater treatment systems, and the need for a more equitable share of federal funding.

NOWRA members who are unable to attend our Legislative Fly-In can still support our efforts by reaching out to your elected Representatives and Senators to encourage them to support increased federal funding and for policies which favor increased use of onsite/decentralized technologies. If you are interested in this, you are welcome to reach out to NOWRA's Executive Director Eric Casey by following this link.

Figure 3: Lobbying Board of Governors Chairman Tom Fritts of Residential Sewage Treatment Co. in Missouri addresses Fly-In participants during a dinner and de-briefing after the May 2 lobbying visits.