



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FLOOD & STORMWATER MANAGEMENT AGENCIES

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NAFSMA Announces 2026 Award Winners for Innovation and Communications Excellence

Nine honors recognize public agencies delivering multi-benefit water projects and public outreach that changes behavior

Washington D.C., August 21, 2026 — The National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies (NAFSMA) has announced the winners of its 2026 Innovative Water Projects and Excellence in Communications awards, presented at the association's Annual Meeting in Annapolis, Maryland, in July.

The awards recognized nine projects and campaigns from public agencies across the country, spanning wetland restoration in Portland, a public flood risk platform in Denver, smart stormwater technology in Maryland, and public education campaigns reaching hundreds of thousands of residents. Together, the winning entries demonstrate how flood and stormwater agencies are stretching limited public dollars while delivering benefits well beyond drainage.

“Water doesn't care about jurisdiction lines, and neither should good ideas.” Said Sunny Simpkins, NAFSMA Executive Director “Every year, NAFSMA's Awards Program shines a light on the people and agencies protecting our communities, keeping floodwaters out of homes and pollutants out of our rivers and streams. This isn't just about trophies. It's about making sure the agency solving a problem in one town doesn't do it alone, when a dozen others are wrestling with the same thing.”

Innovative Water Projects Award

The Innovative Water Projects Award recognizes projects that pair flood risk management or water quality improvement with additional community benefits, including habitat restoration, recreation, and public access.

LARGE POPULATION CATEGORY

First Place: City of Portland, Oregon for the **Springwater Wetlands Restoration Project**. Portland restored approximately 18 acres of urban wetland along Johnson Creek, a stream that has flooded more than 40 times in the last 60 years. The \$10 million project planted more than 44,000 native shrubs, trees, and herbaceous plants, reused clean soil and historic Works Progress Administration stone from other restoration sites, and added a long-planned bike and pedestrian trail connection through a partnership with the city's transportation bureau. Improved hydraulic modeling indicates roughly 360 structures may be removed from the federally regulated 100-year floodplain.

Second Place: City and County of Denver, Colorado for the **2025 Storm Drainage Master Plan**. Rather than producing a static report to satisfy a five-year code requirement, Denver built a continuously updated public platform where residents can examine flood risk by street address, neighborhood, or council district in plain language and multiple translations. High-resolution modeling resolves flooding down to individual curb inlets, and planning study turnaround has fallen from years to months. Funded at approximately \$1.4 million through the city's stormwater utility fee, the plan was formally adopted by City Council in November 2025.

SMALL POPULATION CATEGORY

First Place: City of Cedar Rapids, Iowa for the **12th Avenue Pump Station and Riverside Park Improvements**. Faced with an early concept for a pump station approaching \$30 million on a highly constrained site, Cedar Rapids used interior drainage modeling to show that a 4.5-acre detention basin could reduce peak flows by 37 percent, allowing a significantly smaller facility. The change lowered pump station costs by roughly \$6 million, and the project finished about \$2 million below the original concept even after approximately \$4 million in park improvements. Rather than removing park amenities for storage, the city rebuilt Riverside Park with a new skate park designed with input from local users, along with a playground, trails, improved lighting, and native plantings.

Second Place: Opti and Howard County, Maryland for the **Troy Hill Smart Stormwater Project**. Unable to expand three aging dry ponds in a fully built-out business park, Howard County instead linked on-site sensors to National Weather Service forecasts so motorized valves draw ponds down before storms arrive. Traditional pond retrofits in Maryland typically cost \$50,000 to \$100,000 per acre treated; this project achieved \$10,000 per acre, a 90 percent reduction that generated 58 acres of water quality credits and captures 42 tons of sediment, 216 pounds of nitrogen, and 33 pounds of phosphorus annually. The county funded the work through its Watershed Protection and Restoration Fund, with private partners buying in through stormwater fees and earning full fee credits once performance was verified, currently saving participants more than \$150,000 per year.

Excellence in Communications Award

The Excellence in Communications Award honors outreach that advances public understanding of flood risk, emergency preparedness, or water quality.

IMPROVING WATER QUALITY CATEGORY

First Place: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services, North Carolina for the **Stormwater Sidewalk Mural Project**. Working from more than 300 resident survey responses, local artist Jamil Dyair Steele painted the path pollution travels from city streets to local creeks on a sidewalk beside one of Charlotte's busiest transit centers. A single \$10,000 fund covered the artwork while city staff contributed more than 450 hours of in-house photography, video, and media relations. The mural uses visual storytelling to reach residents across languages and reading levels, and earned coverage on four television stations.

Second Place: Clark County Regional Flood Control District, Nevada for the **No-No Ball Campaign**. Competing for attention in a market with separate agencies for drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater, the district built a campaign around flying red dodgeballs that pelt would-be polluters as a stand-in for conscience, reinforcing that only rain goes in our drains. Distributed as free public service announcements and shared through the region's municipal stormwater partnership, the spots earned millions of broadcast impressions across four network affiliates, including significant reach on the market's leading Spanish-language station, and the campaign reached 4,150 students across 52 school presentations.

PUBLIC AWARENESS OF FLOODING AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CATEGORY

First Place, tie: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services, North Carolina for the **2026 Severe Weather Preparedness Week Campaign**. The agency reached an estimated 650,294 residents, roughly 60 percent of Charlotte's population, during a single week in March at a total campaign cost of \$1,046. The team reallocated existing media funds, translated and designed materials in house, used a county-owned electronic billboard at no cost, and repurposed on-hand outreach items. GIS floodplain and economic vulnerability models identified two priority zip codes where staff hand-delivered 100 flood preparedness kits at county Community Resource Centers.

First Place, tie: King County Flood Control District, Washington for the **Be Flood Ready Campaign**. The district's 2025 refresh doubled its flood preparedness brochure to eight pages, translated it into 24 languages, produced its first flood preparedness video, and launched a Community Navigators program placing trusted local leaders at more than 50 community events. Direct mail reached nearly 23,000 properties in or near floodplains, and the brochure's role in the National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System helps residents qualify for flood insurance discounts of up to 45 percent.

Second Place: Miami Conservancy District, Ohio for the **Dam Good Tours**. For more than a century, the district's dry dams have protected southwest Ohio while operating passively, leaving most residents unaware the system exists. The campaign installed five permanent interpretive kiosks and hosted guided tours led by district staff including the Chief Engineer, with collectible patches designed in house that could only be earned by visiting each dam. Three events drew more than 600 attendees, website traffic rose 231 percent, social media following grew 257 percent, and the kiosks sit along parks and trails that see nearly three million visits annually.

Applications Open for 2027 Awards

NAFSMA presents both awards annually at its Annual Meeting. Winning entries are shared across the association's membership as replicable models for other agencies.

Applications for the 2027 awards are now open, with a submission deadline of March 12, 2027. Award categories, eligibility requirements, and application forms are available at www.nafsma.org/awards. The 2027 NAFSMA Annual Meeting will be held June 29 to July 1, 2027, at Mills House, Curio Collection by Hilton, in Charleston, South Carolina.

About NAFSMA

The National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies (NAFSMA) is a nonprofit organization that represents the interests of public agencies responsible for flood control and stormwater management at the federal level. Founded in 1978, NAFSMA serves as the primary liaison between its member agencies and federal entities including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). For more information, visit www.nafsma.org.