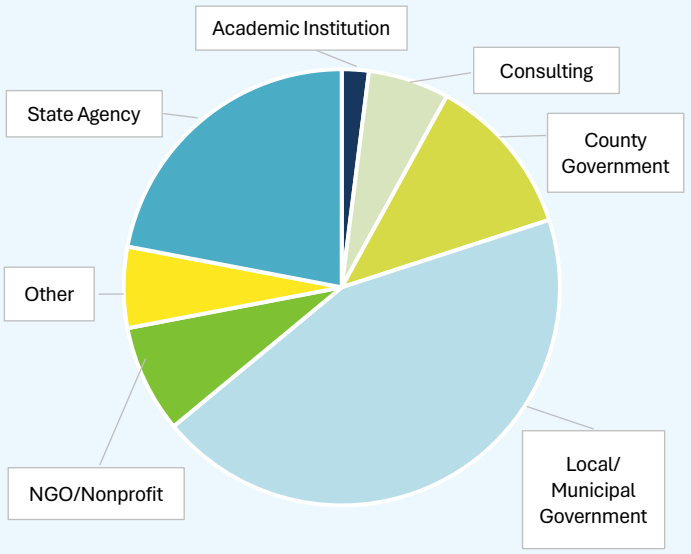
Insights from the 2026 Great Lakes Stormwater Summit

The **Great Lakes Stormwater Collaborative** is a network of regional stakeholders facilitated by the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) to support the implementation of best practices for stormwater management under changing climate conditions through information sharing and research. In partnership with the **Green Infrastructure Leadership Exchange**, the Collaborative hosted the inaugural Great Lakes Stormwater Summit in Buffalo, New York, from October 14-15, 2026. The summit aimed to support candid discussion of opportunities for innovation and progress to improve stormwater management in response to more frequent and intense precipitation events. Invited attendees include state agency staff administering the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permitting program for municipal separate storm sewers (MS4s) and stormwater permittees.

Summit Attendees by Affiliation



Funding for the Collaborative is provided by a direct appropriation from the New York State legislature administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The work of the Collaborative is guided by a Leadership Team comprised of stormwater professionals representing the eight Great Lakes states and provinces of Ontario and Québec and local leaders in stormwater management, including but not limited to Indigenous Nations, stormwater utilities, and research institutions. The Leadership Team, Green Infrastructure Exchange, and local hosts Buffalo Sewer Authority were instrumental in planning and facilitating the summit.

Participant feedback

"It was interesting to learn about how other states manage stormwater. Additionally, I learned a lot...about how different partners creatively work together."

"[The summit provided] extremely valuable information and ideas that give you something to strive for in your own jurisdiction."

"This was a great opportunity to learn from other Great Lakes states and communities."

"You all did a great job putting together this summit. I hope my agency can continue to contribute and learn from both organizations, and all the agencies that are involved."

"[The best part of the summit was] the regional roundtable discussions. I made many connections and am excited to get some initiatives started!"

Welcome Remarks from Local Leaders

- Buffalo Sewer Authority Principal Sanitary Engineer Rosaleen (Rosie) Nogle recounted the history of the City of Buffalo's sewer and stormwater infrastructure from the early 20th century to the present and emphasized the importance of collaboration with other cities across the basin.
- Buffalo Mayor Sean Ryan welcomed participants to Buffalo and noted that the city has focused on connecting people to the waterfront, continuing to improve water quality, and ensuring the future economic success of Great Lakes cities and the "blue economy."
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Great Lakes Program Director Shannon Dougherty highlighted New York's Great Lakes Action Agenda, and celebrated the New York State funding for the Collaborative, sharing that the GLC is furthering this work and will help facilitate continued basin-wide information sharing.



Mayor Ryan welcomes participants to Buffalo.

Remarks from U.S. Congressman Tim Kennedy (NY-26)

- Congressmen Kennedy serves the Buffalo area in the U.S. House of Representatives. His priorities include protecting the Great Lakes and the communities that rely on them by investing in stormwater technology and infrastructure that addresses increasingly unpredictable precipitation patterns in the region.
- Rep. Kennedy outlined the key provisions in the bipartisan STORMWATER Act that he introduced in the U.S. House. The bill would provide $10 million annually for competitive grants, $5 million annually for stormwater centers of excellence, and create a fifth center focused specifically on the Great Lakes basin.



Congressman Kennedy addresses participants.

Current U.S. Federal Landscape of Stormwater Management & Results of the 2024 MS4 Needs Assessment Survey

- Seth Brown, Executive Director of the National Municipal Stormwater Alliance (NMSA), provided an overview of NMSA's history, operation, programs and initiatives – including the STEPP program which verifies the performance of stormwater technologies – partnerships and collaborations, and advocacy efforts.
- He shared an update regarding the status of national funding programs and policies. He noted that while the federal Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grant (OSG) was appropriated at $40 million per year, about 95% of funding for stormwater management comes from local sources, including stormwater utilities.
- He closed with an overview of the 2024 MS4 Needs Assessment Survey results. Findings show a significant funding gap and an urgent need for improved resilience planning. Seth stressed the importance of quantifying progress and articulating the value of stormwater management to secure future investments.

Panel Presentations

State Agency Perspectives Panel

- Panelists representing regulatory agencies from the states of Indiana, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin shared information regarding the unique aspects of their stormwater permitting programs
- Some examples include: only individual MS4 permits are given in Michigan; New York state runs an online forum for NYSDEC staff to answer questions and allow MS4 permittees to share information, discuss challenges, and better understand permit requirements; Wisconsin's water quality trading program allows stormwater credit trading between municipalities and upstream farmers; Ohio offers chloride reduction grants that help local governments adopt BMPs to

cut down on road salt and deicer runoff; and Indiana employs a system consisting of five tiers in the same general permit to reflect growth in counties and DOT permittees.

- Panelists described what from the other panelists' presentations resonated with their own state's experience and how they can continue to collaborate across departments, sectors, and states throughout the Great Lakes region.



State agency representatives describe unique aspects of their respective states' stormwater management programs.

"Shark Tank" – Freshwater Edition: Local Stormwater Practitioner Innovations

- Lynne Seymour, Oakland County (MI) Water Resources Commissioner's Office, shared how Oakland County created a predictable, standardized, and enforceable framework incorporated into stormwater standards. The county defined "maximum extent practicable" and created a "credit menu" of pre-approved practices such as native plantings and retention strategies to comply with state MS4 channel protection volume control standard. This effort has resulted in faster reviews, fewer negotiations, and more GI on non-infiltrating sites.
- Anna Niedzinski, Lake County (IL) Stormwater Management Commission (SMC), described the SMC's efforts to coordinate stormwater activities across 80 local jurisdictions, including by offering technical assistance, engineering services, a planning program, a stream/rain gage, and a GIS-based INFLOW centralized digital framework for complaints and illicit discharges.
- Regina Harris, Buffalo Sewer Authority (BSA), presented on BSA's plans to address aging infrastructure over the next 15 years with over 50 projects and $2 billion in construction planned through its Queen City Clean Waters Initiative. With a focus on green stormwater infrastructure (GSI), Regina described how BSA is adapting to aging infrastructure and working toward reducing CSOs with a goal of only nine per year.
- Jason Kauffman, City of Goshen, Indiana, described the city's participation in GLISA's FloodWise Communities pilot program, which provided an evaluation, access to tools, and a custom report for completing a nine-step "stormwater vulnerability assessment." The program also developed a sensitivity and adaptive capacity matrix to better inform elected officials, city staff, and the general public of Goshen's flooding vulnerability.

Table Conversations

Each table discussed challenges and opportunities related to the following topics that were addressed during the state agency and local practitioner panel presentations: stormwater utilities; funding; capacity; and regulatory/permitting changes and responses. Participants were sorted into four tables generally by geographic region. An overview of these conversations and their takeaways is provided below:

- The federal OSG program and American Rescue Plan Act provided flexibility but are either limited in scope or no longer funded. Several ideas emerged to address the lack of available funding for stormwater at the state and federal level, including instituting statewide clean water bonds, creating a new construction-focused State Revolving Fund (SRF) program, and increasing planning funding to address requirements for shovel-ready projects.
- Establishing and administering stormwater fees presents some challenges, such as overlapping jurisdictions that complicate which organizations can assess stormwater fees and a lack of political will to create stormwater utilities. Ensuring success when implementing stormwater fees involves leveraging grants for additional funding, reaching out to ratepayers early in the process, and providing credit incentives.
- Straightforward permit requirements can help assuage staff capacity concerns. Potential entities that could better align needs and capacities to alleviate some aspects of permitting from MS4 communities include watershed partnerships and counties.

- Working in collaboration with schools and universities could provide an avenue for recruiting new staff and offer mutually beneficial opportunities such as PhD research projects, masters practicums, and undergraduate internships.
- Inconsistencies in state-level administration of federal requirements might be impacting the consistency of compliance across the Great Lakes region. Permitting systems could be improved through regulatory flexibility, streamlined standards, and the potential to harmonize standards between the U.S. and Canada to facilitate cross-border compliance.

Table Conversations Considering Stormwater Solutions Through the Lens of a Changing Climate

Additional table conversations focused on facets of local and state stormwater management programs that aim to ensure resilience to a changing climate throughout the Great Lakes region. Table makeup was the same as the prior table conversation. An overview of these conversations and their takeaways is provided below:

- Siloes within city departments can complicate resilience planning; city staff should consider the possibility of integrating themes of hazard mitigation, sustainability, and stormwater management into one city plan.
- Participants considered how to determine when to shift away from improving existing stormwater management practices or techniques toward the installation of new GSI; this could be especially difficult for large cities with greater infrastructure needs.
- Adopting GSI practices can help make cities more resilient; however, GSI requires operations and maintenance which necessitates dedicated funding for staff and upkeep.
- Atlas 15 will need to be released before many jurisdictions can update design standards; U.S. states currently rely on Atlas 14 – a database of precipitation frequency estimates – for their plans and standards.



Jordan Roose of the Buffalo Sewer Authority describes the history of the City of Buffalo's rain gardens to summit participants.

Disclaimers

This material is based upon work supported by a direct appropriation from the New York State legislature administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Any opinions, findings, conclusion, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of NYSDEC or contributing organizations. This publication was created by Great Lakes Commission staff, transcribing ideas shared by 2026 Great Lakes Stormwater Summit speakers and participants.

The Great Lakes Commission is a binational government agency established in 1955 to protect the Great Lakes and the economies and ecosystems they support. Its membership includes leaders from the eight U.S. states and two Canadian provinces in the Great Lakes basin. The GLC recommends policies and practices to balance the use, development, and conservation of the water resources of the Great Lakes and brings the region together to work on issues that no single community, state, province, or nation can tackle alone.

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