



Stormwater Infrastructure Funding Needed to Support Sustainability and Clean Water Goals

The Southeast Stormwater Association supports local governments and utilities in managing their Stormwater Programs throughout USEPA Region 4. These eight states have a variety of stormwater needs and regulatory environments. However, one thing in common for all communities is the need for a sustainable source of funding for critical stormwater infrastructure. The American Society of Civil Engineers gives stormwater infrastructure a grade of “D” noting that the performance of stormwater systems across the country is declining. Many older stormwater systems are struggling with aging and deteriorating pipelines and the high cost of retrofits needed to address urban flooding and changing weather patterns. Stormwater funding is mostly local but a federal investment of up to \$8 billion per year is needed according to a recent USEPA Task Force Report, *Evaluating Stormwater Infrastructure Funding and Finance*. In fact, the Task Force states: “...stormwater programs would benefit from a separate, additive, recurring financial commitment from EPA.”

Stormwater infrastructure is the first line of defense for flood control, safety for roads, water quality and protection of natural resources like rivers, lakes, and wetlands. We see the threats to our society caused by inadequate stormwater infrastructure and system planning exemplified in the impacts to communities from several recent storm events: in South Carolina hundreds of people were forced to evacuate homes; in Ellicott City, Maryland, drinking water supplies were tainted, and businesses destroyed; and in Metro Atlanta, roads and transportation systems were damaged. These are just a few recent examples of flooding and illustrate the need for our local communities to prepare for more frequent and intense storms. Communities **need to prepare now** to meet critical infrastructure needs in support of resiliency and water quality goals.



Figure 1. Columbia, SC. Image credit The Weather Channel. Hundreds of residents were evacuated during historic floods in 2015.

The USEPA Task Force concluded: “...stormwater management investment directly benefits the health, safety and economic opportunity for citizens and residents through the overall improvement of water quality and resiliency of communities.”

SESWA recommends implementing several of the major recommendations from the report including:

- ✓ Develop a new and enhanced construction grant program specifically designed to support stormwater projects.
 - Similar to the successful federal Municipal Construction Grants Program that helped build the nation’s water treatment infrastructure.



Figure 2. Ellicott City, MD. Image credit CBS News. Devastating floods both in 2016 and 2018 destroyed downtown businesses.

- ✓ Modify and increase annual funding allocations to the CWA Section 319(h) grant program to:
 - allow funds to be used to enhance local community’s capacity to understand financial and organizational capacity
 - allow funds to be used for the study and implementation of stormwater utilities and the development of asset management systems.
 - remove restrictions on use of grant funds for MS4 permit compliance.

- ✓ Provide additional funds for the existing Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) programs specifically for stormwater. Options include:
 - Create a “One Water” State Revolving Fund with amounts allocated to drinking water, clean wastewater, and stormwater.
 - Expand the existing WIFIA program to provide additional funding for stormwater projects.

- ✓ Provide technical assistance and funding to help communities create and maintain sustainable and legally defensible local funding sources and increase operational efficiency. This Technical Assistance and funding should support:
 - need assessments
 - organizational analysis
 - grant applications
 - affordability assessments
 - integrated planning
 - the development of revenue instruments such as stormwater utilities

- ✓ In support of the implementation of the above enhancements, the federal government should work towards the development of a common application for federal funding similar to what is used by hundreds of universities nationwide.



Figure 3. Douglas County, GA. Image credit National Weather Service. Travel and commerce interrupted because of damage to road near Metro Atlanta in 2009.

Flooding and water quality protection are critical issues, and our communities need to be prepared. Building and maintaining stormwater infrastructure is a proactive local effort that helps ensure the resiliency of those communities, and by extension, our nation.

SESWA encourages the adoption of the funding and technical assistance recommendations found in the USEPA Stormwater Funding and Finance Task Force so communities can begin this process now.

The USEPA Task Force Report can be found at this link - <https://www.epa.gov/waterfinancecenter/efab-report-evaluating-stormwater-infrastructure-funding-and-financing>

The American Society of Civil Engineers Infrastructure Report Card can be found at this link - <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/>