Volume 35, No. 2 | Summer 2026

PIPELINE

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Michael Hard
Branch County Drain Commissioner



The May Legislative Day was a huge success. The time spent fostering relationships with legislatures is always a good thing. Countless hours were spent in the planning and the scheduling of this event. Thank you to all that were involved. Please take the time to watch the new MACDC video "From Swamp to State" that was created for this event. The video will be a great asset for educational outreach for years to come. Thank you to all who worked on the video. The other educational piece that was created for this event was the flip books, titled "County Drains Michigan's Essential Infrastructure." These will be a valuable asset for all Drain Commissions going forward. Thank you to all who contributed to the flip books. Copies of the flip books will be available to purchase from the MACDC website.

The Prairie River Watershed in Branch County has earned the distinction of being one of the first watersheds in Michigan to be considered out of water for additional large quantity withdrawals (irrigation). The Prairie River watershed is one of the heaviest irrigated areas in the state of Michigan for vegetable and seed corn production. EGLE is recommending that users in the watershed form a water users committee. This committee would decide amongst themselves who gets to use the water, thus transferring the arguments from the state level to individuals within the watershed. I see this as a huge liability transfer from the state to the individuals in a watershed. The fights over water begin.

Life in Michigan is always interesting. Summer of 2025 was the first time in my over 20 year career as Drain Commissioner that all lakes in Branch County were below their legal level for a significant time due to drought. Fast forward to April 2026 we had the third wettest April in history. April helped remind us of the importance of maintaining drains and dams in the state.

MACDC is trying to work with legislators to seek a state funding source for drains and dams. Our infrastructure is aging and must be maintained for the future.

Hope to see everyone at the 2026 Annual Summer Conference July 15th thru July 17th, 2026 at the Kewadin Casino in Sault Ste. Marie.

Sincerely,

Mike



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126TH SUMMER CONFERENCE

July 15-17, 2026

Kewadin Casino

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Tuesday, July 14

1:30 pm	Legislative Meeting
3:00 pm	Board of Directors Meeting

Wednesday, July 15

9:00 am	Registration Begins
12:00 pm	Lunch on your own
1:15 pm	More Splits, More Stormwater?
2:00 pm	In the Spotlight: A Playbook for Severe Storm Response
2:30 pm	Working with Legislators in Lansing
3:00 pm	Break
3:15 pm	YPC Interactive Presentation
4:00 pm	Spherical Imagery for Drains
4:30 pm	Legislative Update
6:00 pm	Reception
7:00 pm	Dinner
9:00 pm	Entertainment (on-site)

Thursday, July 16

7:30 am	Breakfast
9:00 am	Bats, Beavers, and Butterflies
9:30 am	You Have Not Because You Ask Not
10:00 am	Processing FOIA Requests
10:30 am	Break
10:45 am	What's Ahead at EGLE
11:30 am	Ask an Engineer
12:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm	Networking Activities (off-site)
6:00 pm	Reception
7:00 pm	Dinner

Friday, July 17

7:30 am	Breakfast
9:00 am	Associate Member Meeting
9:30 am	MACDC District Meetings
10:00 am	MACDC Business Meeting
10:30 am	Adjourn

CONFERENCE SESSIONS

Wednesday, July 15

1:15—2:00 pm

More Splits, More Stormwater? Land Division Act Revisions and Municipal Drainage Coordination

Cole Hedrick, Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes

Recent revisions to the Land Division Act significantly increase the number of parcels that can be created from a parent parcel, meaning more development and more stormwater runoff impacting county drains and property in general. This presentation covers the key changes and offers practical strategies for coordinating with municipalities to help account for drainage during the land division review process.

2:00—2:30 pm

In the Spotlight: A Playbook for Severe Storm Response

Emily Grasch, Ottawa County Water Resources

Andrew Stoffel, Land & Resource Engineering (LRE)

Drawing on lessons from spring flooding, this panel covers emergency coordination, public response, field verification, and documentation—building a consistent SOP that balances transparency and clear communication with PA 222 and FOIA realities.

2:30—3:00 pm

Working with Legislators in Lansing

Del Chenault, Clark Hill PLC

This presentation will discuss best strategies on effectively working with state leaders in Lansing. This session will address working with legislators both in an out of your county, providing information about your office and duties to legislators in meaningful and impactful ways, tips on working with and through staff, effectively building political coalitions, and strategies to foresee and manage political threats.

3:15—4:00 pm

YPC Interactive Presentation

MACDC Young Professionals Committee

Join our Young Professionals Committee for an interactive presentation featuring audience participation and test your MACDC knowledge. Tune in for this session and be rewarded for participation.

4:00—4:30 pm

Spherical Imagery for Drains

James Ensign, Wade Trim

Ryan Abrahamsen, Terrain360

This new technology involves traversing a watercourse via kayak, wading, or drone and capturing 360 degree photographs of the length. The photographs are then stitched together resulting in an image similar to "Google Street View" where a Drain Commissioner, staff or consultant can virtually walk the centerline of a drain from their computer. The data is housed in a GIS format and you can click on any section of the drain to quickly move to locations of interest. The presentation will highlight the benefits to Drain Offices showing example sections from work completed in the Cleveland area for the NEORSD.

4:30—5:00 pm

Legislative Update

Deena Bosworth, Michigan Association of Counties

MACDC lobbyist Deena Bosworth will discuss the bills that have been introduced this legislative session that affect the work of county drain offices.

Thursday, July 16

9:00—9:30 am

Bats, Beavers, and Butterflies

Bill Becker, Spicer Group

Explore local Bats, Bees, and beaver regulations, restrictions, or laws that may affect drain projects.

9:30—10:00 am

You Have Not Because You Ask Not: How to leverage private projects for public county drain improvement

Joel Morgan, Kent County Drain Office

Paul Forton, Spicer Group

Private development doesn't have to be a headache to you. Sometimes, it can solve the headache. We'd like to discuss how we've coordinated with private development projects to find improvements on county drains.

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CONFERENCE SESSIONS *cont.*

Thursday, July 16

10:00—10:30 am

Processing FOIA Requests: Common Mistakes, Misconceptions, and Best Practices

Trent Cunningham, Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes

In this session, we will discuss common mistakes or misconceptions that we often see related to processing FOIA requests and appeals. We will also discuss the best practices to ensure FOIA requests are being processed according to law and that FOIA requests are being processed in the most cost-efficient manner possible.

10:45—11:30 am

What's Ahead at EGLE

Luke Trumble and Kate Kirkpatrick, EGLE

EGLE will provide updates on dam safety, recent flooding, stream project best management practices, and other programmatic priorities for the dam safety, wetlands, and streams programs in the Water Resource Division.

11:30 am—12:00 pm

Ask an Engineer: Drainage Engineering Questions, Answers & Practical Insights

After the popularity of our previous Ask a Lawyer session we are back with another round – this time from the engineering side.





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NEW FACES

Welcoming our newly appointed drain commissioners

JENNA MORSE
Monroe County



Morse

Jenna Morse was appointed Monroe County Drain Commissioner on March 11, 2026, by unanimous decision, making her the county's first woman Drain Commissioner. Prior to being appointed, she served the community as the Soil Erosion & Sedimentation Control Agent for nearly nine years. Morse started her career at the Drain Commissioner's office in 2015 as the Assessment Clerk, after transferring to the department from Michigan Works.

Throughout her career, she has had the opportunity to see various drain projects from start to finish, while being involved in the process in different capacities. In addition, her experience working with local municipalities, developers, consultants, and landowners has prepared her for the new role. Morse is passionate about serving the community through infrastructure improvements and maintenance, while keeping a responsibility to the drainage district funds.

In her free time, she enjoys exploring the beautiful state of Michigan while camping with her family. She also enjoys playing euchre. One of her favorite activities is playing pool in the loft of the barn with her husband and nine-year-old son, while watching her toddler daughter dance to music.

CHET JANIK
Leelanau County



Janik

Chet Janik was appointed Leelanau Drain Commissioner in March 2026 and will serve until a new DC is elected in November. He previously served as Leelanau County Administrator for 10 years from 2012 to 2022. Currently, Chet works with the Michigan Leadership Institute, a non-profit leadership consulting organization committed to serving K-12 school districts, local units of government, and public institutions throughout Michigan in leadership searches, strategic planning, and governance workshops.

Chet holds a master's degree in Administrative Leadership. He is originally from Poland and holds dual citizenship. Chet is married with three children, and four grandchildren.



STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AT THE CAPITOL

MACDC Legislative Day 2026 Brings Drain Commissioners and Lawmakers Together

On May 19, MACDC members and consultants met in Lansing for a highly productive Legislative Day, bringing county drain offices and state policymakers together for a full day of education, engagement, and collaboration.

Through individual meetings with dozens of legislators, the event underscored MACDC's commitment to strengthening relationships at the Capitol and ensuring lawmakers understand the critical role drain commissioners play in protecting communities, infrastructure, agriculture, and natural resources across Michigan.

A DAY FOCUSED ON EDUCATION AND CONNECTION

The day kicked off with a morning gathering that brought together drain commissioners, staff, and state leaders for shared discussion and preparation before heading into meetings. Participants reviewed key issues impacting county drain offices, with an emphasis on stormwater management, climate resilience, asset maintenance, and the increasing demands placed on local drainage systems.

Using materials developed by MACDC — including the association's legislative flipbook — members were equipped with consistent messaging, visual resources, and talking points to help communicate:

- The statutory responsibilities of drain commissioners
- The scale and complexity of Michigan's drainage infrastructure
- The growing challenges from extreme weather and flooding
- The importance of long term investment and sound policy

These tools helped ensure that every conversation with legislators consistently illustrated how local drainage work directly supports public safety, economic stability, and environmental stewardship.

ONE UNIFIED MESSAGE

Throughout the day, MACDC members participated in meetings with legislators and their staff representing communities across the state, from rural to urban.



MACDC's new flipbook is a helpful tool for communicating with lawmakers.

The meetings provided an opportunity to:

- Share local examples of stormwater and drainage challenges
- Explain how state policy decisions impact county operations
- Highlight successful projects already delivering results
- Build rapport and open lines of communication for the future

This personal engagement allowed commissioners to move beyond abstract policy discussions and tell the story of how drainage infrastructure affects roads, homes, farmland, businesses, and waterways in real, measurable ways.

Just as importantly, members listened; the day was as much about understanding lawmakers' priorities and concerns as it was about advocating for MACDC's mission — laying the groundwork for ongoing collaboration.

A STRONG STEP FORWARD

MACDC's Legislative Day was a clear success thanks to the collective effort to educate, engage, and build trust with lawmakers in Lansing.

By showing up in strong numbers, speaking with a unified voice, and clearly demonstrating the importance of county drain offices, MACDC members reinforced a simple message:

Effective stormwater management is essential to Michigan's future — and Drain Commissioners are on the front lines of that work every day.

LOOKING AHEAD

MACDC extends its appreciation to all members who participated, as well as to the legislators and staff who took time to meet, listen, and engage. The association looks forward to building on this momentum and continuing the conversation throughout the year.



Morning briefing with MACDC General Counsel, Stacy HIssong and MACDC Lobbyist, Deena Bosworth



Senator Lana Theis presenting Livingston County Drain Commissioner, Brian Jonckheere with a framed copy of a Pipeline article about their new septic receiving station.

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DUE DILIGENCE IN PROPERTY ACQUISITIONS

An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure

By: Dan Bock, Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes

Most professionals are aware of the risks associated with acquiring contaminated property and the importance of taking steps to shield themselves, their employer, or their office from liability. Hazardous waste laws have been around for 50 years but, even today in 2026, knowledgeable people overlook basic precautions that should be taken to ensure that they can acquire property rights without also acquiring liability. Knowing the basics of how to protect yourself is particularly important for Drain Commissioners and other public officials whose offices may acquire property by purchase, condemnation, gift, or a number of other ways. The purpose of this article is to make sure you are aware of the fundamentals of environmental due diligence, and that you know what to do if you are uncertain about a property acquisition.

KNOWING THE RISKS

The first step is knowing the risks. In Michigan, the most important law governing cleanup of hazardous substances is Part 201, Environmental Remediation, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. Part 201 applies to any property that is classified as a "facility," meaning it contains hazardous substances in excess of the concentrations that satisfy legal cleanup criteria for residential use. Part 201 provides that there are multiple parties who might be liable for the cost of cleaning up hazardous substances. Of course this includes owners and operators of the property who are responsible for the release of hazardous substances as well as those responsible for transporting or disposing of hazardous substances on the property, but it can also include those who acquire the property ***after the fact, even if they had nothing to do with the release.***

Part 201 provides that a person who becomes an owner or operator of a facility on or after June 5, 1995 will be liable for the hazardous substances unless they take certain steps to acquire the property without also acquiring the liability. The most common step is conducting a Baseline Environmental Assessment ("BEA") and providing it to the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) within certain time frames. A second possible step is that, if a new owner fails to conduct a BEA and provide it to EGLE within the required timeframe, they may do so after the fact and request a determination from EGLE that the failure to comply with Part 201's deadlines was inconsequential.

The liability under Part 201 can be significant. It can involve the cost of cleaning up the hazardous substances to the standard required for residential use as well as civil fines of $1,000-$25,000 per day. Perhaps most importantly, even if there are multiple parties who are potentially liable under Part 201, the state government (or the federal government under the analogous federal statute) does not need to sue all of them. Rather, the government can seek to recover the entire cleanup cost from all, some, or as few as one liable person, and it is up to that person to then seek reimbursement from the others. It is easy to imagine a scenario where a person acquires land long after it has been contaminated, they fail to do a BEA, and the responsible parties who actually released or disposed of hazardous substances on the

property are all dead, bankrupt, or otherwise cannot be located. The new owner could find themselves on the hook for millions of dollars in cleanup costs simply for failing to do their due diligence prior to acquiring the property. And this liability is not limited to those who purchase the property outright – it can apply to those who lease, or acquire easements, or institutions that acquire property by foreclosure, as well as other acquisitions, if they do not do their due diligence.

AVOIDING THE RISKS

There are a few steps that can be taken to protect against the liability described in the previous section. As an initial matter, a buyer should always ask the seller whether there are any conditions on the property that might make it a "facility" under Part 201. Sellers are legally required to disclose any such conditions that they are aware of. But sellers might not be aware of the history of the property. Or, even worse, dishonest sellers might conceal or intentionally fail to disclose such conditions. In fact, government officials should always beware of gifts of land – there is a long and sordid history of unscrupulous sellers purporting to offer gifts of land to a local unit of government or even a state government out of the goodness of their hearts when what they are actually doing is off-loading a contaminated property onto the public.

The next and most obvious step is to perform an appropriate due diligence inquiry. This usually involves starting with a Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment ("ESA"). A Phase 1 ESA is a review by a consultant or engineer to determine whether there are any Recognized Environmental Conditions on the property. This usually involves a review of historical records and other available documents as well as a site visit, but typically does not involve sampling for hazardous substances. If the Phase 1 ESA identifies one or more Recognized Environmental Conditions on the property, then the next step is to have the consultant perform a Phase 2 ESA, which involves sampling to identify and delineate the presence of hazardous substances.

If the Phase 1 and Phase 2 ESAs do not reveal the presence of hazardous substances above residential cleanup criteria, then there is likely no need to conduct a BEA. However, if the ESAs do reveal that the property is a facility, then the consultant should prepare a BEA. The BEA is a written report that describes the results of the sampling and analysis (usually conducted as part of the ESA process) that confirms the property is contaminated. Once the BEA is provided to EGLE, the owner/operator can acquire the property without acquiring liability for the hazardous substances.

PROPERTY ACQUISITION CHECKLIST

- ☑ Determine "facility" status under Part 201
- ☑ Perform Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment
- ☑ Based on Phase 1 findings, perform Phase 2 and BEA
- ☑ Consult legal counsel on whether acquisition is a "utility" easement

Aside from conducting an appropriate due diligence inquiry and filing a BEA with EGLE, there are also exemptions that one can rely on to avoid liability under Part 201. Importantly, state and local governments who acquire easements in facilities transportation or ***utility*** corridors, including ***sewers, pipes, pipelines***, or public rights of way will avoid liability without a BEA. But it bears mentioning that the term "utility" is not defined in Part 201. It is highly recommended that you consult legal counsel to determine whether an exemption applies in any given situation, and not merely assume that it does.

DUE CARE OBLIGATIONS

Even if a new owner acquires a facility without acquiring liability, either by performing a BEA or by fitting within one of the exemptions, that is not the end of the story. The owner must still exercise "due care" to prevent "exacerbation." This means they must take steps to avoid migration of contamination or any change in conditions that increases response/cleanup costs. These due care obligations also require the owner to take steps to mitigate unacceptable exposure to hazardous substances, take reasonable precautions against the acts of third parties, and cooperate with state or federal regulators who need to conduct response activities, among other things. The failure to exercise due care can make the new owner liable under Part 201, even after they did all that work to avoid liability for someone else's mess!

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU ARE NOT SURE?

It is often not easy to know whether there might be a liability risk associated with a property acquisition. Even though this legal regime has been around in various forms for 50 years, well-intentioned people still fail to perform due diligence and wind up buying themselves problems. This can result from not being aware of the risks, or assuming that property is not contaminated, receiving bad advice, or any number of other reasons. The bottom line is that, if there is any doubt or concern, you should contact legal counsel for advice. When it comes to hazardous waste contamination, an ounce of prevention truly is worth a pound of cure.



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From Polluted to Pristine

How the Montgomery Drain Reimagined Urban Stormwater

By: Kara Jueckstock, ICDC Website Storymap Contributor, Spicer Group, Inc.

Most stormwater projects move water. The Montgomery Drain manages it.

The Montgomery Drain was once the dirtiest drain in Ingham County. Now it stands as an example of stormwater infrastructure designed with purpose. Through coordination, expertise, and vision, the Montgomery Drain project improved water quality, maintained the existing level of service in the district, and expanded understanding of what stormwater infrastructure can accomplish.

AGING PIPES AND UNTREATED POLLUTION

Before this project was completed, the Montgomery Drain conveyed stormwater directly to the Red Cedar River with no treatment. A plume of turbid water mixing with cleaner river water was often visible. When the water was tested, many contaminants exceeded the Ingham County Drain Office's acceptable limits. Aging infrastructure, illicit connections, and the landscape of the district itself all contributed to ongoing pollution.

The district is mostly impervious. As the water runs off, it carries the pollution, solid and dissolved, into the drain. The original pipes in the ground served undeveloped farmland, and although the land became heavily developed over time, the pipes were never updated to accommodate these changes.

Improving water quality was the goal. Solving pollution at its source is ideal, but in this case that involved many parties. Several commercial landowners were asked to integrate low impact design on their land, yet only a few were interested. Land values were too high for the private property.

THE CREATIVE ALTERNATIVE

With budget and landowner resistance, the team considered new options. Traditional approaches would suggest building a multimillion-dollar treatment plant to remove the pollution. The design life of pipes themselves also needed to be extended. Many alternatives were analyzed—replacement of all pipes, upsize pipes, and building a treatment plant—all caused higher than acceptable projected costs.



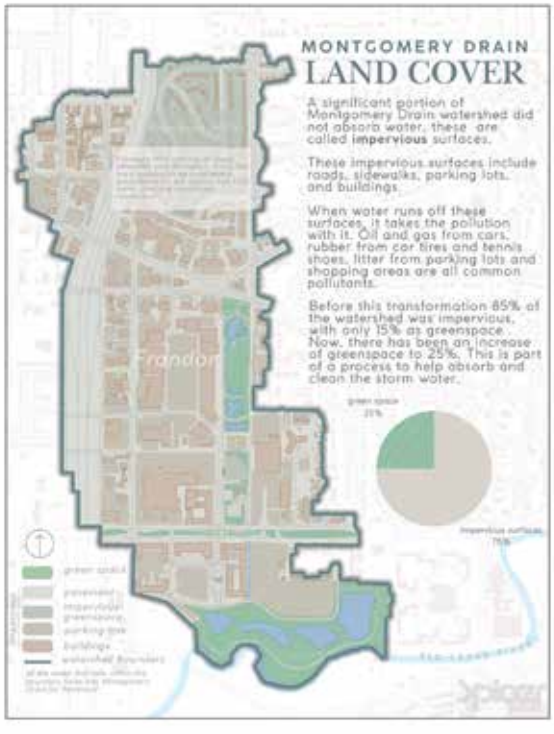
2026 Innovation & Excellence Winning Project

These challenges led to a creative alternative, one that diverged from traditional stormwater management: rehab existing pipes in poor condition, maintaining the existing level of service for landowners in the district, while creating a circulation system that cleans the water when it isn't raining while minimizing the amount of new pipes needed, all without a treatment plant.

The experts saw a chance to try something different: low impact design and biomimicry in a drainage district that was largely roads and parking lots. It was ambitious, and it was also the best solution for this challenging watershed. Rehabilitating this drain, and improving the river by doing so, became possible through a series of complex and creative solutions.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

This kind of work does not happen in a vacuum. It takes engineers who are willing to try new things, designers who can see a parking lot and imagine a rain garden, environmental specialists who understand what the water needs and how to give it that. It takes firms that show up



An overview of the extensive land cover and impermeable surfaces within the drainage district

to solve hard problems with creative solutions, and contractors who execute complex work in challenging conditions. The people behind this project brought something beyond technical skill. They brought commitment to an idea that clean water is worth the effort, and that infrastructure can do more than move water from one place to another.

As the project began, separate sub-projects were established to divide and conquer. These divisions provided opportunity for specialized work to be done, connected in relation to other pieces, yet separate enough to maintain their own rhythm. Behind every division was a team of engineers, designers, environmental specialists, and contractors bringing deep expertise to their piece of the work. The need to synchronize that diversity of skill across similar spaces and similar timelines was itself complex, and divisions made it possible.

Other challenges needed management, such as the geographic location of the project. Divisions were useful for timing construction around ongoing events, such as football season at Michigan State University, which brings huge increases in traffic through the area. As challenges arose, divisions isolated aspects that might traditionally cause hold ups, and the overall project was able to continue in its various other capacities.

INSIDE THE DESIGN: THE "SUNNY DAY" SYSTEM

To lower costs, the existing pipes in the system were rehabbed rather than replaced, incorporating a "sunny day" treatment system. On dry days the pipes circulate water through the system, maintaining the original level of service for landowners in the district. During rain events, the pipes convey the first 2.5 inches of water to an "unconventional wet well", a series of ponds located in the southern portion of the district, and the only piece of the system that touches the flood way.

That first flush travels through a series of processes. Waterfalls with limestone rocks help aerate the water, encouraging evaporation and buffering pH. Rain gardens filled with native plants allow water to soak into the roots of plants, which gladly accept contaminants such as nitrogen and phosphorous as nutrients. Water

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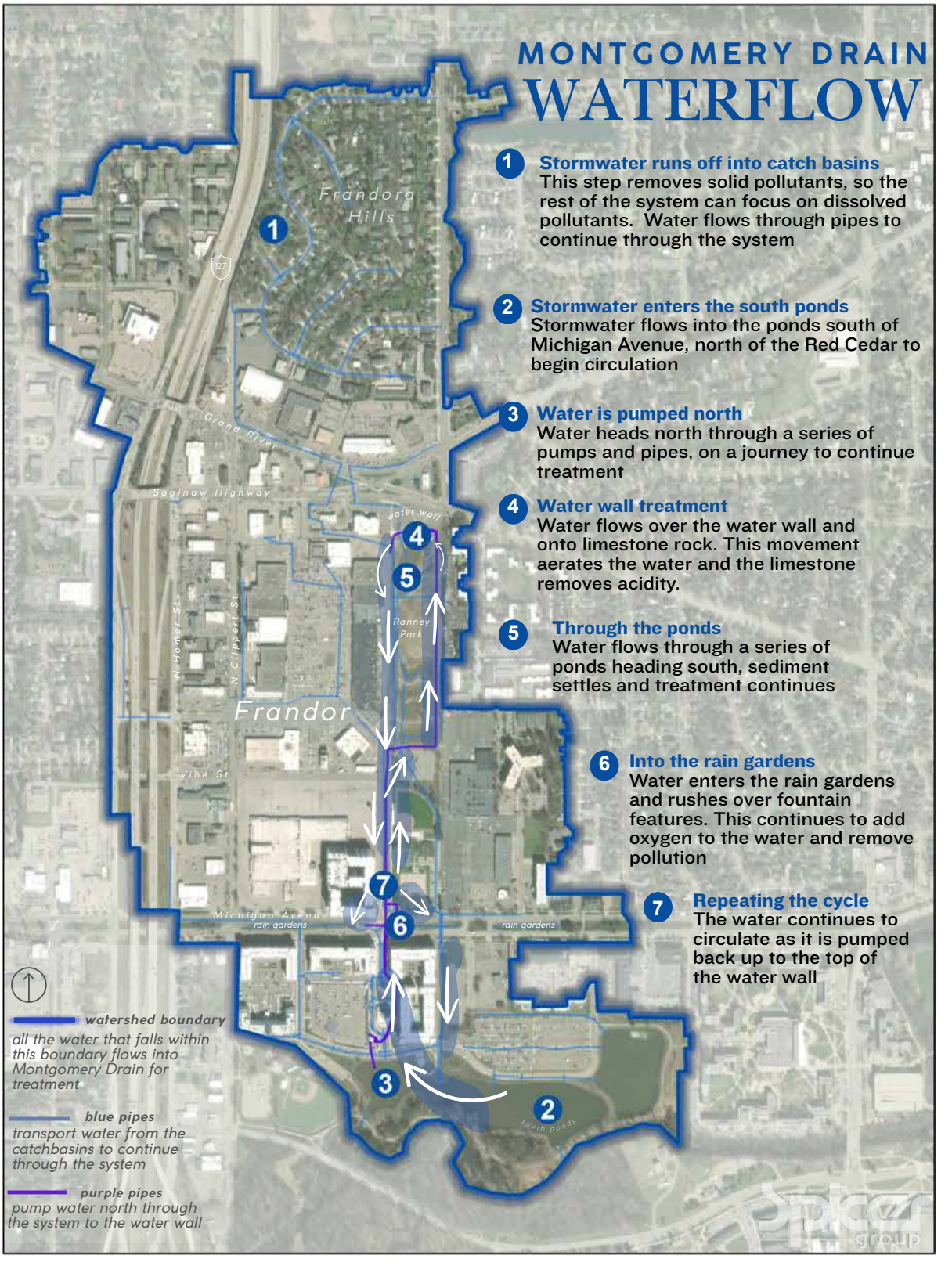




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MONTGOMERY DRAIN
WATERFLOW
1 Stormwater runs off into catch basins
This step removes solid pollutants, so the rest of the system can focus on dissolved pollutants. Water flows through pipes to continue through the system
2 Stormwater enters the south ponds
Stormwater flows into the ponds south of Michigan Avenue, north of the Red Cedar to begin circulation
3 Water is pumped north
Water heads north through a series of pumps and pipes, on a journey to continue treatment
4 Water wall treatment
Water flows over the water wall and onto limestone rock. This movement aerates the water and the limestone removes acidity.
5 Through the ponds
Water flows through a series of ponds heading south, sediment settles and treatment continues
6 Into the rain gardens
Water enters the rain gardens and rushes over fountain features. This continues to add oxygen to the water and remove pollution
7 Repeating the cycle
The water continues to circulate as it is pumped back up to the top of the water wall
Frandora Hills
Grand River
Saginaw Highway
water wall
Ranney Park
N Homer St
N Clippert St
Frandor
Vine St
Michigan Avenue rain gardens
rain gardens
south ponds
watershed boundary
all the water that falls within this boundary flows into Montgomery Drain for treatment
blue pipes
transport water from the catchbasins to continue through the system
purple pipes
pump water north through the system to the water wall

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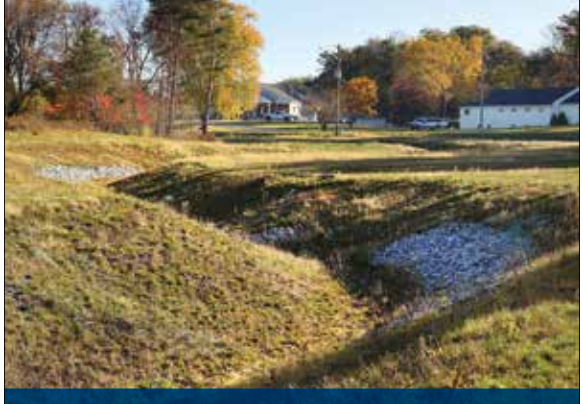


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travels through layers of sand and sediment for filtration. On the northern end, after the water cascades over the water wall onto limestone rock, it enters numerous ponds in Ranney Park. Micro-organisms move suspended pollution out of the water column. What was designed and built here required a level of technical creativity and interdisciplinary collaboration that is rare.

The original storm system was also rehabilitated to extend its life. Because there are no capacity improvements, the treatment system runs even when there is no storm runoff. This ensures that landowners in the district receive the same level of service during storm events.

BEYOND THE DRAIN

This project solved the water quality issue and seized the opportunity to do much more. The project improved public parks in collaboration with local municipalities; stormwater treatment now happens visibly through parks and rain gardens, cascading through fountains, visible from the drain right-of-ways that double as walking paths throughout the project footprint.

Outlet improvements for the communities in the district were an important aspect. This drain now provides additional outlets for the City of East Lansing's stormwater, providing relief to their combined sewer system. The City of Lansing and the district coordinated many efforts to provide better outlets, disconnect illicit connections, and provide landowners better service. The rain gardens feature native plants which improve the ecosystem as a whole and are treating the watershed runoff onsite.

Public plans to transform the stormwater infrastructure were coordinated with private developments along Michigan Avenue, allowing the drainage project and economic development to happen concurrently. Private developers agreed to construct portions of the drain on their land, and with their budget, then turn it over to the district. These collaborations converted vacant municipal-owned land into assessable, developed land which absorbed significant project costs.



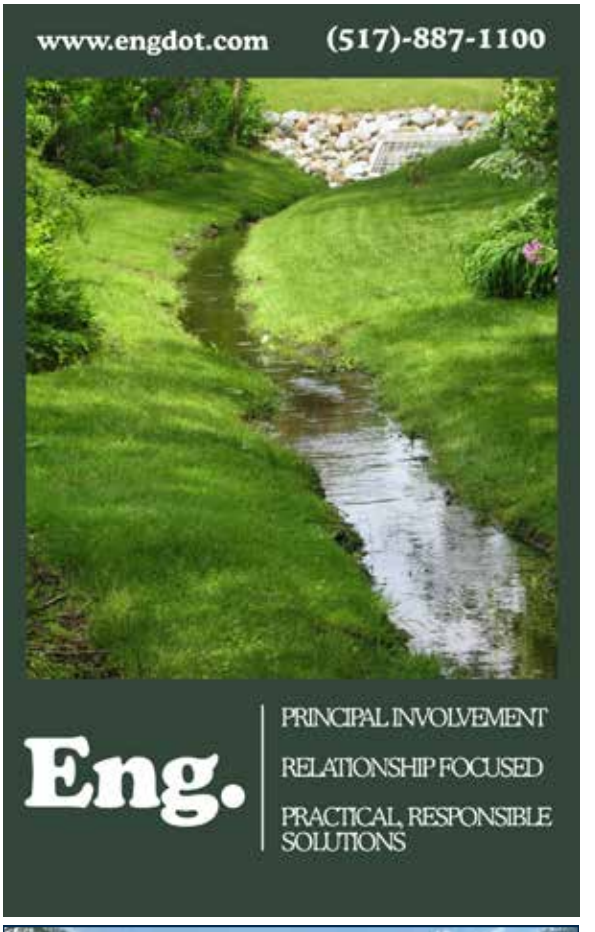
One of the rain gardens along Michigan Ave. planted with natives to absorb pollutants.

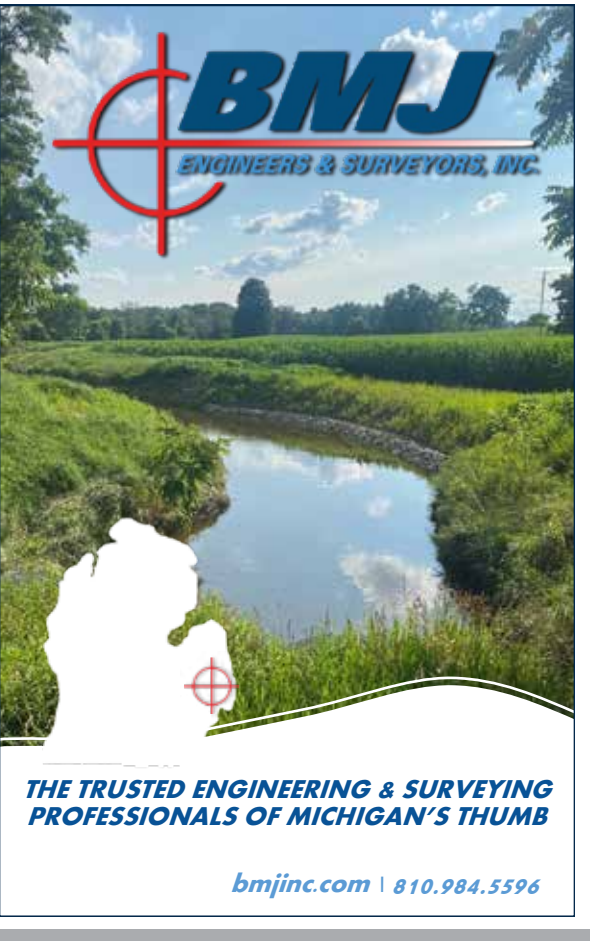


As stormwater moves through the system it is slowed down and loses turbidity.



The "wet well" on the southern end of the district.





FROM COUNTY EYESORE TO LIVING LABORATORY

The Montgomery Drain has evolved far beyond the scope of a typical infrastructure project. But why does one drain matter so much? What is 2.5 inches of water compared to an entire river? It is the portion we can actually control. While the rest of the Red Cedar watershed isn't yet equipped to capture its "first flush" of runoff, this project marks a vital first step. Rain falls from the sky, runs off the pavement, and journeys from the drain to the river, eventually reaching the Great Lakes. A drainage district that once funneled the dirtiest water in the county now sends it on its way remarkably cleaner.

Montgomery Drain's goal was to improve water quality, and it did. It was geographically challenged due to commercial land value. It leveraged open public property to address these issues. It respected the nature of the River, its floodway and floodplain. It partnered with public/private partner efforts that provided more housing capacity for student, market rate and retirement populations.

The dirtiest drain in Ingham County became an incredible opportunity, not just to clean the water, but to reimagine what the infrastructure beneath our feet is capable of. Montgomery Drain is not just a water quality success. It is proof that when drainage projects work in concert with other interests for the common good, they create synergy and transform communities.

Moving forward, the drain will operate according to its goals and will be studied over the next three years for treatment efficacy. It will also be the living laboratory and classroom for educating the coming generations interested in sustainable green infrastructure, the crown jewel of the county's projects demonstrating well planned systems.

Many non-drain, independent efforts are now beginning because of the project's synergy. Artists are installing art in the watershed. Resident are now recreating along the drain's components, in the parks and along the maintenance ways. Students are being brought to tour the project and learn the techniques used. The project is being published internationally as a demonstration project.

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The question Ingham County Drain Commissioner Patrick Lindemann has always asked is: “What is clean water worth to you?”

For more information on the project see the web link at https://montgomerydrain.org

PROJECT TEAM

While the number of people involved is too numerous to list, The following were instrumental in the project over its longer than normal project life:

Patrick E. Lindemann and Paul Pratt, Ingham County Drain Commission

Tim Inman and Team, Spicer Group, Inc.

Brian Cenci and Team, GEI Consultants

Alexis Vahakis Cole and Team, Vlahakis Cole Law Firm

Roger Swets, Dickinson Wright PLLC

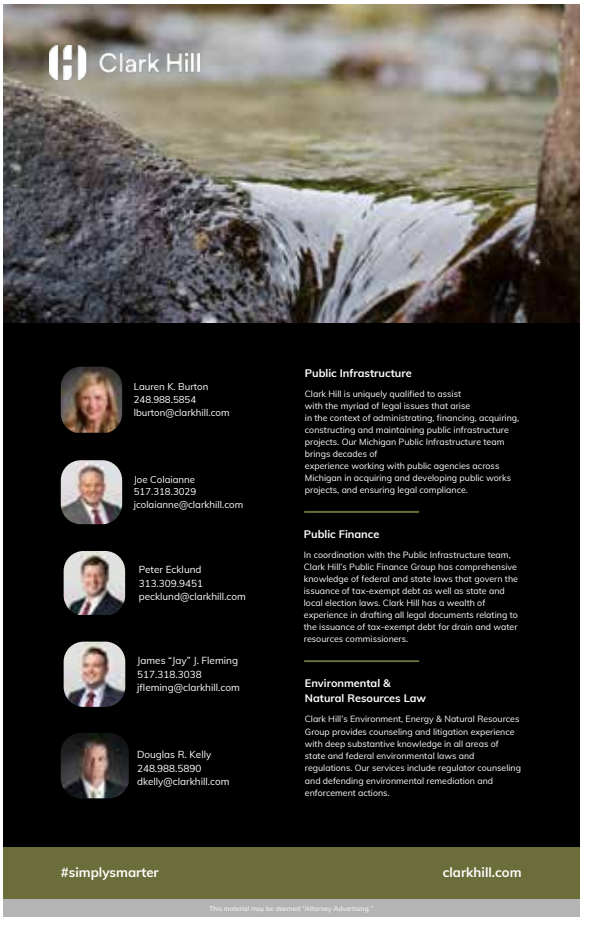
Alan Boyer and Team, PEA Group

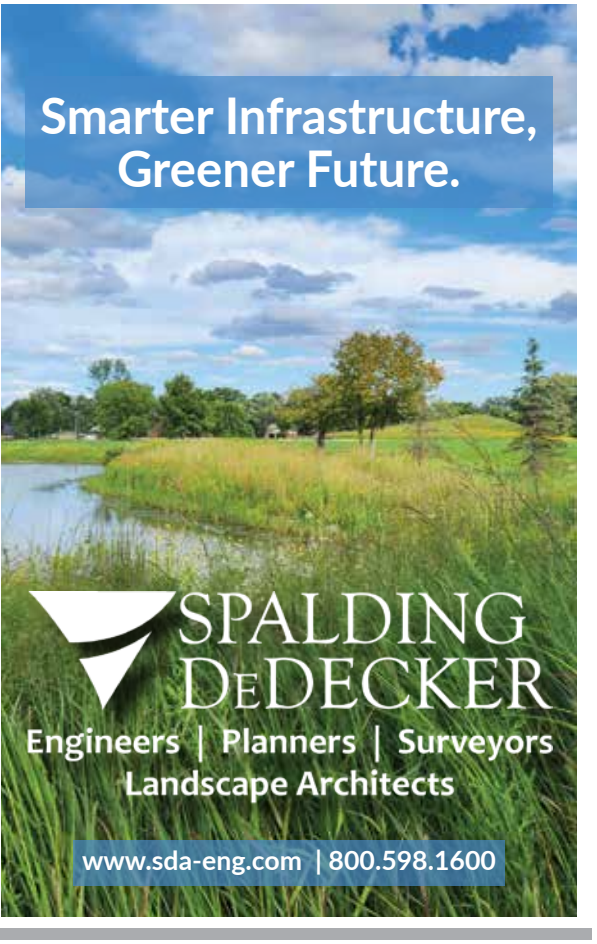
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FORGOTTEN INFRASTRUCTURE

MACDC Video Warns of Public Costs and Consequences of Deferred Drainage Maintenance

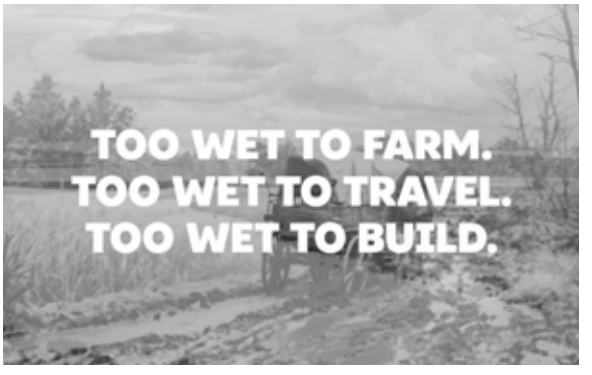
MACDC's new video, "2026 From Swamp to State," aims at bringing critical attention to Michigan's heavily relied-upon—but often forgotten—local water drainage infrastructure. The message highlights a growing challenge across the state: aging, undersized drainage systems that receive zero federal or state funding for routine upkeep, leaving local property owners to shoulder the burden of deferred maintenance.

Historically dominated by swamps, Michigan's development and agricultural success have depended on managed drainage since early statehood. Today, these systems protect communities, public health, agriculture, roads, and natural water resources. However, as infrastructure ages and development increases, many systems are now severely undersized.

"Drainage is forgotten infrastructure, but it is not optional infrastructure," the video notes, emphasizing that postponing critical upkeep does not eliminate the expense—it simply shifts it. "When maintenance is delayed, the cost does not disappear. The cost moves. Deferred maintenance becomes emergency repair and ultimately necessary drainage improvements."

Unlike other public utilities or roadways, Michigan's county drainage systems do not receive a general stream of state or federal tax dollars. Instead, the costs to maintain and improve them are funded almost entirely through special assessments levied locally on the properties and public units that directly benefit from the drainage district.

The video warns that ignoring these local infrastructure needs triggers a costly domino effect: small blockages escalate into flooded roads, undersized stream crossings turn into washouts, and minor local disruptions inevitably snowball into immense public costs.



The video highlights the drainage difficulties of early statehood.

Despite funding hurdles and physical challenges, Michigan's county drain commissioners remain ready to respond on behalf of residents to protect the state's vital water resources and public safety.

The full video can be viewed online via the MACDC website at macdc.us or via the QR code below.

Special Thanks to Livingston County Drain Commissioner, Brian Jonckheere for his leadership on the video project.

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A LASTING LEGACY

Honoring the Life, Impact, and Career of Marya Colpaert

There are professionals who simply do their jobs, and then there are those who leave an lasting mark on the communities they serve and the people they work alongside. Marya Colpaert was unmistakably the latter.

Through decades of dedicated service in public works and engineering, Marya combined technical expertise with genuine kindness and an ever-present smile. Her passing on February 18, 2026, left a profound void in the Michigan public works community, but the legacy she built remains firmly rooted in the communities she protected.

A CAREER BUILT ON SERVICE AND EXPERTISE

Marya's impressive career spanned over a quarter of a century, marked by a steadfast commitment to managing Michigan's water resources and infrastructure. A proud graduate of Michigan Technological University, she embraced complex engineering challenges with optimism.

Her journey included early foundational work at Spicer Group, followed by a significant 13-year tenure at Fishbeck from August 2000 through June 2013. During her time in the private sector, Marya became a trusted partner to drain offices across the state, managing projects for Allegan, Clinton, Ionia, Kalamazoo, Kent, Mecosta, Montcalm, Newaygo, Oceana, Ottawa, and Van Buren counties.

In July 2013, Marya transitioned to the public sector, bringing her experience to the Saginaw County Public Works Commissioner's Office, where she served faithfully as a dedicated Deputy Drain Commissioner and Engineer until February 2026. For nearly 13 years, Marya was a cornerstone of the department. She diligently oversaw the Soil Erosion program, conducted meticulous site plan reviews, and managed complex construction and maintenance projects.

Beyond her daily responsibilities, Marya was deeply passionate about her work within MACDC, where she developed close, lasting friendships with colleagues from across the state over the years.

AN UNFORGETTABLE IMPACT

While Marya was widely respected for her technical acuity, it was her approach to collaboration and her distinct ability to connect with people that truly set her apart. In a field that can often be defined by rigid regulations and competing interests, Marya brought grace, fairness, and a collaborative spirit to every project.

Nowhere is that impact more evident than in a touching tribute that followed her passing.

One of Marya's final major projects in Saginaw County involved a detailed site plan review for a local private development that required the inclusion of two new county drains. In the wake of her passing, the developer reached out to the Public Works office with a heartfelt proposal. Deeply moved by her professionalism, helpfulness, and the positive experience of working with her, the developer requested that the two new systems be officially named the "Marya Drain" and the "Colpaert Drain."

A LEGACY BEYOND THE PROFESSION

Marya's dedication to service extended far past her career. She was a devoted wife to her husband, Michael, and a proud mother to her three sons, Lucas, Joshua, and Jaime. She threw her full support into their activities—from high school soccer to bowling and trap shooting—and served faithfully as a Freeland Cub Scout Den Leader and Cub Master, guiding her sons on their journeys toward becoming Eagle Scouts. Whether she was volunteering with the Commission on Aging, spending hours with her scrapbooking community, or hiking with her

"Marya's dedication to protecting our water resources was matched only by her passion for the people she served alongside. She was a trusted colleague and a dear friend to so many across the state."

Brian Wendling, Saginaw County Public Works Commissioner



Marya (l) with Brian Wendling, Saginaw County and Nick Czerwinski, Spicer Group accepting the MACDC Innovation & Excellence Award for the Gage Drain in 2025.



Marya (r) presenting at the 2016 summer conference with Eric Deibel (l) and Steve Roznowski (c).

beloved dogs, Marya brought a radiant, positive energy to everything she did.

A TRIBUTE SET IN STONE

To have a developer request to name public infrastructure after the reviewer who guided them through the regulatory process is incredibly rare and goes to show the profound impact Marya had on everyone she touched.

The Marya and Colpaert Drains will stand as a permanent, living tribute to a remarkable woman. For decades to come, they will serve as a reminder of Marya's dedication, her character, and the wonderful example she set for us all.

Marya's presence will be deeply missed by her family, her colleagues, the contracting community, and the countless individuals who had the privilege of working alongside her. She may be gone, but her light will continue to shine through the infrastructure she built and the lives she touched.



Collaborative efforts improve long-standing drainage challenges

By: Fishbeck

"The public and private cooperation is what stands out in my mind. When you think about the permits, easements and funding required, it was a big effort that produced a great outcome."

BRIAN WHITE, ENGINEER, CITY OF HOLLAND

The Maplewood Intercounty Drain Project exemplifies collaboration and resilience in tackling long-standing drainage challenges in the City of Holland. The collaborative effort addressed recurrent flooding of US-31 at the CSX Railroad Bridge, a site notorious for becoming the first area in the city to flood and become impassable during heavy rains due to its low topography.

Despite decades of studies and attempts to mitigate flooding — including evaluations of regional detention sites in 1973, 1998, 2010, and 2018 — practical solutions remained elusive. Barriers included costly infrastructure improvements, railroad right-of-way limitations, and prohibitive land acquisition costs.

The turning point came through strategic timing and innovative collaboration with private sector partners. Hudsonville Ice Cream and Coastal Container expansions provided unique opportunities to redirect stormwater flows and leverage private investment for public benefit. Just when it seemed like the last viable site for regional stormwater detention was lost due to the expansion of Hudsonville Ice Cream headquarters and facilities, the city recognized an



Flood prone US-31 underpass at C&O Railroad; MDOT detention basin in foreground

opportunity to develop an alternative stormwater treatment and wetland complex with cooperation from MDOT and the Maplewood Intercounty Drainage Board.

Hudsonville Ice Cream constructed onsite detention for their stormwater runoff. They funded a reroute of the M-40 storm sewer outlet around their site to a new outlet directed to city-owned property. Coastal Container enlarged their detention basin to accommodate increased runoff from their site and funded the construction of the new conveyance route between Hudsonville Ice Cream and city property.

MDOT funded a portion of the stormwater treatment and wetland complex on city property, including a two-stage channel, stormwater wetland/ detention basin, and storm sewer. The city navigated through approval for use of existing conservation easements located on their property and negotiation of easements on adjoining properties to the north to construct a new outlet to 40th Street.



Stormwater Drainage Plan

MDOT also permitted the use of vacant land within the US-31 right-of-way to be excavated for the storage of excess stormwater and fully funded the design and construction.

In the end, the project effectively diverted 40 acres of drainage area from the flood-prone US-31 underpass and created an additional five-acre-feet of detention storage in the Maplewood Intercounty Drainage District, including improving

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natural resources through native plants used in the design, wetland expansion, and stormwater treatment.

MDOT was a major catalyst by proactively funding the initial feasibility studies, environmental permitting, and design through the Maplewood Intercounty Drain Drainage Board. The ultimate solution—a stormwater treatment and wetland complex planted with native pollinators—was constructed in 2023 as part of the City of Holland's 40th Street project.

The $700,000 investment, funded by MDOT, the City of Holland, and private contributions, achieved cost-effective flood mitigation without the need for land acquisition.

The results speak volumes. The new system increased the level of flood protection for US-31 at the CSX Railroad from less than a five-year to greater than a 10-year storm frequency for this critical transportation corridor. This project demonstrates the power of timing, innovative partnerships, and multi-agency collaboration to solve complex infrastructure challenges and protect vital community assets.



Two-stage channel at City of Holland Transportation Services Center

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STAFF SPOTLIGHTS

As a new feature of Pipeline, we will profile drain office staff and associate members. Do you have someone in your office who deserves recognition? Are you an associate member doing cool things?

Please reach out to Communications Committee Chair Joel Morgan at joel.morgan@kentcountymi.gov.

KEN RECKER II
Chief Deputy, Livingston County Drain Office



Recker

Where are you from?

Lansing, MI

How long have you been working in the drain world?

Since 1997

What are two or three things we should know about what you do?

I enjoy helping people, but many times I specialize in buyers remorse. Explaining the difference between private and public drainage is challenging.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

Helping people.

What is the most challenging?

Working with State agencies that don't view landowners interests as having value.

What is your favorite (pizza, book, album, circus ride)...

I enjoy Gordon Lightfoot music, and turkey hunting.

DALLAS GOLDBERG
Deputy, Muskegon County Water Resources



Goldberg

Where are you from?

Muskegon, MI

How long have you been working in the drain world?

Five years

What are two or three things we should know about what you do?

The Muskegon County Water Resources Commissioners Office is an army of two so we do it ALL. I'm responsible for fulfilling MS4 permitting requirements, assessing, inspections, accounting, bill payment etc....

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

Visiting with residents after completing a drain project when they can see that their concerns were addressed and in some cases their lives have changed for the better.

What is the most challenging?

Balancing the need for drain improvements and the cost and repercussions of assessments within the community.

What is your favorite (pizza, book, album, circus ride)...

My favorite pizza is California style BBQ Chicken. Although I'm not much of a reader, my favorite book is The Pig That Wants to Be Eaten by Julian Baggini. My favorite amusement park ride is definitely the roller coasters.



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