

October 2020

# Partners for Clean Water Annual Report, 2020



**SEMCOG**

SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

## ***SEMCOG . . . Developing Regional Solutions***

### **Mission**

SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, is the only organization in Southeast Michigan that brings together all governments to develop regional solutions for both now and in the future. SEMCOG:

- Promotes informed decision making to improve Southeast Michigan and its local governments by providing insightful data analysis and direct assistance to member governments;
- Promotes the efficient use of tax dollars for infrastructure investment and governmental effectiveness;
- Develops regional solutions that go beyond the boundaries of individual local governments; and
- Advocates on behalf of Southeast Michigan in Lansing and Washington.

# Partners for Clean Water Annual Report, 2020

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## Abstract

This report details regional water quality activities and projects conducted by SEMCOG over the past year, and supports ongoing NPDES Stormwater Phase II compliance activities. Information in this report helps communities and counties meet the reporting requirements associated with federal Phase II Stormwater Regulation. From stormwater and water resource management activities, to green infrastructure implementation, to climate resilience and flooding risk projects; SEMCOG is actively working with members and local communities to support water quality improvements throughout the region.

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## Acknowledgements

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### **Partners for Clean Water**

- Livingston County & Associated Communities
  - Macomb County & Associated Communities
  - Monroe County & Associated Communities
  - Oakland County & Associated Communities
  - St. Clair County & Associated Communities
  - Washtenaw County & Associated Communities
  - Wayne County & Associated Communities
- 
- Arch Environmental Clean Water group
  - Clinton River Watershed Council
  - Cranbrook Institute of Science
  - Environmental Consulting & Technology, Inc.
  - Fred A. & Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation
  - Friends of the Rouge River
  - Friends of the St. Clair River
  - Healing Our Waters Great Lakes Coalition
  - Hubbell, Roth & Clark
  - Huron River Watershed Council
  - Johnson & Anderson Inc.
  - Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy
  - Michigan Department of Transportation
  - Michigan Sea Grant
  - Michigan State University Extension
  - Spicer group
  - Stantec
  - Tetra Tech
  - The Nature Conservancy of Michigan
  - US Army Corps of Engineers
  - US Environmental Protection Agency

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# Table of Contents

|  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Acknowledgements .....</b>                              | <b>ii</b>                           |
| Partners for Clean Water.....                              | ii                                  |
| <b>Table of Contents.....</b>                              | <b>iii</b>                          |
| <b>List of Data Displays .....</b>                         | <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b> |
| <b>Southeast Michigan Partners for Clean Water .....</b>   | <b>1</b>                            |
| <b>Communication, Public Education, and Outreach.....</b>  | <b>2</b>                            |
| SEMCOG’s Environment Webpage.....                          | 3                                   |
| Website Analytics .....                                    | 3                                   |
| One Water Campaign .....                                   | 6                                   |
| Media .....  | 7                                   |
| Regional Update.....                                       | 7                                   |
| Environmental Exchange .....                               | 8                                   |
| Semscope.....  | 8                                   |
| Blogs .....  | 9                                   |
| Podcasts.....  | 9                                   |
| Social Media .....   | 9                                   |
| <b>Municipal Training and Government Outreach .....</b>    | <b>10</b>                           |
| SEMCOG Universities .....                                  | 10                                  |
| Illicit Discharge and Elimination Program (IDEP) .....     | 10                                  |
| Member Requests, Technical Assistance, and Engagement..... | 10                                  |
| <b>SEMCOG Committees.....</b>                              | <b>12</b>                           |
| Executive Committee.....                                   | 12                                  |
| General Assembly .....                                     | 12                                  |
| Lake St. Clair Cisma .....                                 | 12                                  |
| Lake St. Clair Partnership .....                           | 12                                  |
| <b>SEMCOG Current Projects .....</b>                       | <b>14</b>                           |
| Infrastructure Asset Management Program.....               | 14                                  |
| Climate Resiliency .....                                   | 14                                  |
| SEMCOG Green Infrastructure Grant .....                    | 15                                  |
| National Wetland Inventory Update Project .....            | 15                                  |
| Parks and Recreation .....                                 | 15                                  |

## Southeast Michigan Partners for Clean Water

With an abundance of water flowing throughout Southeast Michigan, it's important that communities throughout the region work together to actively support water quality management. As the designated water quality management agency for Southeast Michigan, SEMCOG has been actively involved with water resource planning since the 1970s. SEMCOG focuses on an integrative approach to water resource management, including advancing the blue economy, natural resource protection and enhancement, and water infrastructure systems. As part of this integrative management approach, SEMCOG formed the Southeast Michigan Partners for Clean Water, to help meet stormwater permitting compliance and to support regional water quality management.

The [Southeast Michigan Partners for Clean Water](#) is comprised of [SEMCOG members](#), including representatives from local communities and counties, in addition to representatives from watershed councils, not-for-profit agencies, the private sector, and water resource professionals. The purpose of the group is to facilitate information sharing, coordinate public education, and leverage resources on water quality, stormwater management, and green infrastructure implementation.

Southeast Michigan Partners for Clean Water meetings were held twice over the 2019-2020 year:

- September 17, 2019
- January 21, 2020
- June 4, 2020

The *Southeast Michigan Partners for Clean Water Annual Report, 2020* details regional water quality activities and projects conducted by SEMCOG over the past year, and supports ongoing Phase II compliance activities. Information in this report helps communities and counties meet the reporting requirements associated with federal Phase II Stormwater Regulation. From stormwater and water resource management activities, to green infrastructure implementation, to climate resilience and flooding risk projects; SEMCOG is actively working with members and local communities to support water quality improvements throughout the region.

## Communication, Public Education, and Outreach

### What You Can Do...To Protect Our Waterways

In April 2004, SEMCOG launched the “Our Water. Our Future. Ours to Protect” water quality public education campaign to provide Southeast Michigan residents with simple actions they can take to help protect water resources.

In 2015, the public education campaign was revitalized and reintroduced as the [“What You Can Do...To Protect Our Waterways,”](#) campaign. It continues to be used by local communities to educate their residents and send one consistent message on water quality protection throughout Southeast Michigan. Tip cards containing information on “What You Can Do” about Storm Drains, Landscaping, Household Hazardous Waste, Pet Care, Lawn Care, and Car Care, can be found on SEMCOG’s website.



The [Protect Our Waterways](#) webpage, which lists actions the public can take to protect water resources and includes the link to download the tip card, received 902 tip card downloads from September 2019-August 2020. The number of times each tip card was viewed is listed below.

Table 1

#### Tip Card Web Analytics

| Webpage  | Sept-Dec 2019 | Jan-Sep 2020 | Total Sep 2019-Sep 2020 |
|--|---------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| <a href="#"><u>To Protect our Waterways</u></a>  |               |              |                         |
| <a href="#"><u>Household Hazardous Waste</u></a> | 54            | 64           | 118                     |
| <a href="#"><u>Storm Drains</u></a>              | 131           | 217          | 348                     |
| <a href="#"><u>Landscaping</u></a>               | 45            | 93           | 138                     |
| <a href="#"><u>Pet Care</u></a>                  | 54            | 53           | 107                     |
| <a href="#"><u>Lawn Care</u></a>                 | 44            | 61           | 105                     |
| <a href="#"><u>Car Care</u></a>                  | 41            | 45           | 86                      |

## SEMCOG's Environment Webpage

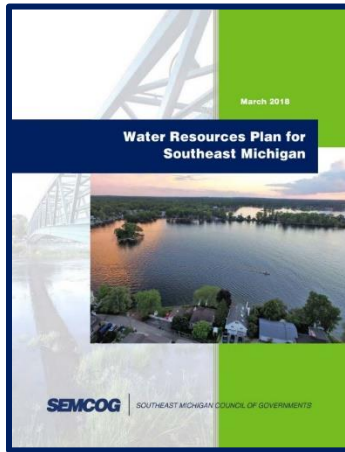
If you're looking for additional environmental information for Southeast Michigan, be sure to check out the [SEMCOG Environment Webpage](#). This page contains updated information about SEMCOG's latest projects, and easy access to all environmental news. You can also learn more about water infrastructure by checking out SEMCOG's [water infrastructure](#) page, which contains information about SEMCOG's latest Infrastructure Asset Management project. Be sure to access the [latest Environmental Exchange newsletter](#) to stay up-to-date with all of SEMCOG's work. We will continue to regularly update these environmental pages.

## Website Analytics

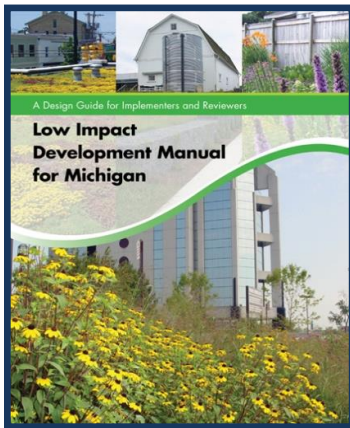
Table 2

### Website Analytics

| Webpage  | Sept-Dec<br>2019 | Jan-Sep<br>2020 | Total Sep 2019-<br>Sep 2020 |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| <b><a href="#">Water</a></b>                         | 526              | 789             | 1,315                       |
| <a href="#">Stormwater</a>                           | 511              | 783             | 1,294                       |
| <a href="#">Wastewater</a>                           | 203              | 437             | 640                         |
| <a href="#">Drinking Water</a>                       | 292              | 198             | 490                         |
| <a href="#">Partnerships</a>                         | 133              | 308             | 441                         |
| <b><a href="#">Land</a></b>                          | 638              | 1,553           | 2,191                       |
| <a href="#">Green Infrastructure Vision</a>          | 62               | 169             | 231                         |
| <a href="#">Low Impact Development Manual</a>        | 37               | 222             | 259                         |
| <a href="#">Great Lakes, Green Streets Guidebook</a> | 16               | 58              | 74                          |
| <b><a href="#">Parks and Recreation</a></b>          | 497              | 1,179           | 1,679                       |
| <a href="#">Southeast Michigan Park Finder</a>       | 866              | 6,066           | 6,932                       |
| Southeast Michigan Park Finder App                   | 542              | 2,542           | 3,084                       |
| <a href="#">Southeast Michigan Trail Explorer</a>    | 1,358            | 17,796          | 19,154                      |
| <b><a href="#">One Water</a></b>                     | 619              | 19,830          | 20,449                      |



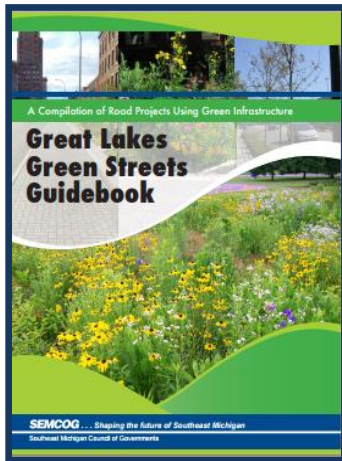
In March 2018, SEMCOG's General Assembly adopted the [Water Resources Plan for Southeast Michigan](#). This plan emphasizes the importance of integrated water resources management across the major areas of advancing the blue economy, natural resources protection and enhancement, and water infrastructure systems. Learn more about the Water Resource Plan by viewing this short video [By the Numbers](#), highlighting our region's water resources. The *Water Resource Plan for Southeast Michigan* was viewed 140 times between September 2019 and August 2020 on SEMCOG's website.



The *Low Impact Development Manual for Michigan (LID)* provides communities, agencies, builders, developers, and the public with guidance on how to apply LID to new, existing, and redeveloped sites. This guide provides community level to site level support, and can be helpful to a variety of stakeholder groups. The [Low Impact Development Manual for Michigan](#) was accessed 259 times from September 2019-August 2020.



The *Green Infrastructure Vision for Southeast Michigan* benchmarks where green infrastructure currently stands in Southeast Michigan, and sets a vision for the future of green infrastructure for the region. The [Green Infrastructure Vision for Southeast Michigan](#) was accessed 231 times from September 2019-August 2020.



The [Great Lakes Green Streets Guidebook](#) was accessed 74 times from September 2019-August 2020.

## One Water Campaign

SEMCOG has a long history of public education related to water resources. In 2019, SEMCOG, in partnership with Great Lakes Water Authority and the Cranbrook Institute of Science, launched the One Water Campaign for Southeast Michigan. The goal of this campaign is to attain a greater awareness and mutual shared responsibility for water resources and to create public support for investments in water resources and infrastructure asset management.



The One Water Campaign is a unique public education campaign, running as a one-week media blitz, in conjunction with Michigan's Great Lakes and Fresh Water Week. Campaign messaging largely focuses on the connection between stormwater, drinking water, and wastewater. In the first year of the campaign's run, there were 13.7 million impressions via outdoor advertising, 1.3 million impressions via TV broadcast spots, and 491,000 video views. With the help of local partners, including municipalities and watershed organizations, we received 114 orders for campaign materials throughout the region. A post-campaign survey indicated that impressions from this campaign resulted in people finding water quality in Southeast Michigan getting better, and motivated many individuals to take water-related actions in their own life.

For the 2020 campaign, the One Water advisory team met to reevaluate One Water campaign messages and promotional materials. This guidance, in combination with focus group feedback, helped the One Water team redevelop several education videos and social media items. Due to COVID-19, the One Water campaign was delayed until August 2020, but had a very successful run, with 10 million impressions from social media posts and TV broadcast spots, as well as many member social media shares. The One Water campaign will continue to grow in 2021; we hope to increase local partnership and campaign distribution. By continuing this public education campaign throughout the region, the goal is to build an understanding of the connections in our water system and how we can keep it fresh and flowing.

To view One Water materials and find other helpful information on wastewater, stormwater, and drinking water, visit [mionewater.com](https://mionewater.com). This website contains educational videos, social media posts, tip cards, an interesting blog series on all three topics, and more.

## Media

SEMCOG has multiple publications, including the *Regional Update* and *Environmental Exchange* newsletters, *Semscope* magazine, blogs, and social media. Media activities conducted by SEMCOG are described in the following section.

## Regional Update

SEMCOG continues to communicate with its members and partners to provide information on its programs, projects, services, and data about Southeast Michigan. To enable information sharing, SEMCOG publishes a bi-weekly [Regional Update](#) newsletter, which often includes information on water quality, green infrastructure, and stormwater management. SEMCOG also circulates information on impending environmental policy that can affect Southeast Michigan and also helps publicize important environmental meetings in the region.

## SEMCOG | Regional Update

A Biweekly Publication of SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments

- [September 21, 2020](#)
- [September 7, 2020](#)
- [August 24, 2020](#)
- [August 10, 2020](#)
- [July 20, 2020](#)
- [July 6, 2020](#)
- [June 22, 2020](#)
- [June 8, 2020](#)
- [May 25, 2020](#)
- [May 11, 2020](#)
- [April 27, 2020](#)
- [April 13, 2020](#)
- [March 30, 2020](#)
- [March 16, 2020](#)
- [March 2, 2020](#)
- [February 17, 2020](#)
- [February 3, 2020](#)
- [January 20, 2020](#)
- [January 6, 2020](#)
- [December 16, 2019](#)
- [December 2, 2019](#)
- [November 18, 2019](#)
- [November 4, 2019](#)
- [October 21, 2019](#)
- [October 7, 2019](#)
- [September 23, 2019](#)
- [September 9, 2019](#)

## Environmental Exchange

SEMCOG publishes information on relevant environmental opportunities in Southeast Michigan through the *Environmental Exchange* newsletter. The following *Environmental Exchanges* were published from September 2019 to August 2020.



- [September 2019](#)
- [October 2019](#)
- [December 2019](#)
- [January 2020](#)
- [February 2020](#)
- [April 2020 – COVID-19 Edition](#)
- [April 2020](#)
- [May 2020](#)
- [June 2020](#)
- [July 2020](#)
- [August 2020](#)
- [September 2020](#)

## Semscope



*Semscope* is a quarterly magazine, published by SEMCOG, highlighting SEMCOG plans, events, best practices, and examples of innovative projects and programs from member communities and institutions. *Semscopes* published from September 2019 to August 2020 are below.

- [Fall 2019](#)
- [Winter 2020](#)

## Blogs

SEMCOG released multiple blogs during the year on environmental topics related to water resources, green infrastructure, and parks and recreation. Blog posts are often featured in the biweekly *Regional Update* and monthly *Environmental Exchange* newsletters, and are posted on social media, SEMCOG's website, and [blog site](#). Environmental blogs from September 2019 to August 2020 are listed below.

- [Collaborative Partnerships to Lead to Park Improvements](#)
- [Asset Management for Water Infrastructure](#)
- [Infrastructure Asset Management Update](#)
- [Public Works and Services during COVID-19](#)
- [One Water Partners remind Southeast Michigan residents to properly use sewer and septic systems](#)
- [50 Years of Celebrating Earth Day](#)
- [Infrastructure Stewardship: A Glove Story](#)
- [Arbor Day Reflections](#)

## Podcasts

In 2019, SEMCOG began a podcast – Region Ahead – to discuss a range of topics important to Southeast Michigan. This new form of media is helping to engage a wider audience with current issues and topics in Southeast Michigan. Podcasts are posted on SEMCOG's website as well as on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcast, Stitcher, Spotify, and Castbox. Check out the [podcast](#) today.

## Social Media

SEMCOG maintains a presence on social media through both [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). Social media platforms are ways to spread messages to the public. They are used to circulate blog posts and information from both the *Regional Update* and the *Environmental Exchange*. SEMCOG also uses social media to highlight the Green Infrastructure Education series and bring attention to the “What You Can Do...To Protect Our Waterways,” public education campaign. SEMCOG makes an effort to post weekly messages from the water quality Tip Cards to keep our followers informed on what they can do to help protect water quality. In addition to keeping followers up-to-date on everything SEMCOG is doing, SEMCOG also uses social media to highlight events and projects happening throughout the region and to share best practices for protecting environmental quality.

In September 2020, SEMCOG had:

- 3,520 followers on Twitter
- 37,600 average monthly impressions on Twitter
- 2,204 followers on Facebook

## Municipal Training and Government Outreach

### SEMCOG Universities

SEMCOG Universities are series of workshops for SEMCOG member local elected leaders and staff. Environmentally oriented SEMCOG Universities are described in this section. In addition to SEMCOG Universities, SEMCOG also provides technical assistance and hosts multiple committees, which provide additional educational and outreach opportunities.

This year, due to COVID-19, SEMCOG moved many SEMCOG Universities to a webinar format. This has given us the chance to record these webinars, and make them available for everyone. Visit the SEMCOG Membership Services page to view the [On-Demand Webinar Library](#), and be sure to check out the list of upcoming webinars to stay up-to-date on regional environmental news.

### Illicit Discharge and Elimination Program (IDEP)

SEMCOG, in partnership with ECT Consulting, hosted the IDEP 2019 training. This training helps support MS4 Phase II Stormwater permit compliance for SEMCOG members and local communities. The first half of the training covers IDEP topics, while the second half of the training focuses on Pollution Prevention and Good Housekeeping. These trainings help to educate public works staff on how to identify potential pollutants while out in the field, and how to properly report and treat these pollutants. Two training sessions on two separate days were held in October 2019. SEMCOG also provides training certificates to participants.

### Member Requests, Technical Assistance, and Engagement

SEMCOG offers member communities and institutions technical assistance and resources related to water-resource management. “What You Can Do...To Protect Our Waterways” materials are a great way to publicly disseminate information on the importance of protecting water quality in Southeast Michigan. SEMCOG’s other environmental publications are also a great resource for SEMCOG members. More than 100 organizations and communities from the seven-county region formally requested One Water and other environmental materials from SEMCOG in 2019-2020. These are a few representative examples:

Table 3

#### Member Requests

| City/Organization/Agency            | Material                                     |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| City of River Rouge                 | Guide to Southeast Michigan Parks and Trails |
| City of Flat Rock                   | Guide to Southeast Michigan Parks and Trails |
| Mystic River Watershed Association  | Stormwater Education Materials               |
| City of Alexandria                  | Stormwater Education Materials               |
| Michigan State University Extension | One Water Materials                          |

|                                 |                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Alliance of Rouge Communities   | One Water Materials |
| Clinton River Watershed Council | One Water Materials |

## SEMCOG Committees

### Executive Committee

SEMCOG's Executive Committee conducts the main policy work and is the financial control body of the organization, providing final approval of regional studies and plans, as well as taking action on policies and legislative positions. This year, SEMCOG's Executive Committee meetings discussed the impacts of COVID-19, viewed One Water public education videos, and learned more about SEMCOG's Infrastructure Asset Management project.

### General Assembly

SEMCOG's General Assembly consists of all delegates and alternates from SEMCOG member communities and educational institutions. During the 2019 October General Assembly, several educational breakout sessions were held, including sessions on Infrastructure Coordination to Drive Strategic Investment and Leveraging SEMCOG's Data, Maps, and Apps.

### Lake St. Clair Cisma

The Cisma is a partnership-based management structure comprised of representatives of local, regional, state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, property owners, and the public. The goal of the Cisma is to stop the spread of invasive species and build a resilient landscape through habitat restoration. SEMCOG led development of the Lake St. Clair Cisma along with its 33 local government members and stakeholders. This past year, SEMCOG helped provide assistance to the Lake St. Clair Cisma through mapping and technical data. SEMCOG produced Early Detection and Response and Threat Ranking maps. SEMCOG also helped provide the Cisma with letters of support for funding opportunities.

### Lake St. Clair Partnership

Efforts to protect and restore Lake St. Clair are led by the Lake St. Clair Partnership, a group made up of local, county, regional, state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations and universities that are working to implement the priorities of the St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair Comprehensive Management Plan.

SEMCOG facilitates meetings of the partnership of the partnership assisting members in identifying and implementing the priorities of the management plan. SEMCOG works for alignment of priorities among the members and state and federal agencies. The partnership operates within the Lake St. Clair watershed, within the counties of Macomb, Oakland, and St. Clair.

In June 2020, SEMCOG, in conjunction with the Lake St. Clair Partnership released the [\*Lake St. Clair Watershed Implementation Priorities Plan\*](#) (WIPP). The WIPP is a strategy that includes 60 active projects with approximately \$70 million in investments. The report describes ecological and environmental benefits in both the coastal and watershed areas of Lake St. Clair that can be realized through implementation of the projects. WIPP projects address ecological restoration through implementation of stormwater management, green infrastructure, nonpoint source pollution and fish passage improvements.

In addition to the development of the WIPP, SEMCOG released the [Lake St. Clair Restoration Story Map](#). This visually tells the story of Lake St. Clair, the development of the partnership, and features a map of the completed projects in the Lake St. Clair Watershed. Take a look at the map to find out more about the amazing restoration projects happening in and around Lake St. Clair.

## SEMCOG Current Projects

### Infrastructure Asset Management Program

SEMCOG developed the regional Underground Water Infrastructure Asset Management Program, which focuses on drinking water distribution and sanitary and stormwater collection systems. It involves collecting asset data on these three systems in the region for the purposes of creating a needs assessment. SEMCOG convened a working group of experts – the Southeast Michigan Asset Management Work Team – and secured a consulting team to help develop this new regional program. SEMCOG represents the region by participating on the Michigan Infrastructure Council and attending both the Transportation and Water Asset Management Council meetings. SEMCOG provided input and comments on development of the state asset management template documents. Goals of this program are:

- Understanding the overall condition of infrastructure assets
- Strengthening coordination on infrastructure projects to improve cost efficiencies and reduce inconvenience to the public
- Sharing best practices for asset management programs
- Developing a clearinghouse to summarize regional infrastructure needs
- Communicating region-wide priorities at the state level

SEMCOG developed an application for water asset owners to apply for funding, reviewed the applications, and awarded funding to 58 asset owners. The recipients were asked to submit their water infrastructure data online. The data submission portal that was developed, as described above, is live on the [water infrastructure webpage](#). Communities are currently uploading data through this data portal. SEMCOG will analyze this data upon completion of the data collection phase to determine a regional infrastructure investment need.

### Climate Resiliency

SEMCOG and MDOT are conducting a study to understand and manage flood risks to transportation infrastructure in the seven-county SEMCOG region. The study includes a flooding risk assessment for roads, bridges, culverts, and pump stations and an implementation strategy for transportation planning efforts at SEMCOG and MDOT. Integration into key agency functions will enable both SEMCOG and MDOT to proactively manage flooding risks to these assets. The final flood risk tool will be run annually and results will be published on a dashboard for use by local planning agencies.

In addition to the flooding risk tool, a detailed analysis of existing and future precipitation estimates based on a range of rainfall intensities and durations was completed. This analysis will support future discussions with local and state agencies regarding infrastructure design and management. A working group of stormwater experts was formed and is currently meeting monthly to discuss strategies for adapting to changing rainfall in the region.

## **SEMCOG Green Infrastructure Grant**

SEMCOG awarded [\\$265,000 in funding](#), from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), to six Southeast Michigan communities for implementing green infrastructure projects. The goal of this grant program is to reduce nutrient loading into Lake Erie and reduce stormwater runoff through the use of best management practices and green infrastructure. As of Fall 2020, grantees are working on the implementation portion of the project, or wrapping up the planning phase. We look forward to the continued development of these projects, and we hope to be able to visit the sites next year.

## **National Wetland Inventory Update Project**

SEMCOG, in partnership the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and Ducks Unlimited, is currently working to update the National Wetland Inventory for Southeast Michigan. This update will be used to develop the Environmental Sensitivity Analysis, which helps support transportation planning. Data from the sensitivity analysis will be available for local partners in their respective planning, engineering, and water resource activities. The final inventory update, with functions and values, will be completed in December 2020. SEMCOG will continue to keep the partners group and its local members up-to-date as the project wraps up.

## **Parks and Recreation**

SEMCOG continues to implement the [Parks and Recreation Plan for Southeast Michigan](#), to ensure that the region's recreation system meets the quality of life, health, and accessibility needs of residents and visitors, along with regional economic development goals and environmental priorities. Data analysis and maps from the plan have been used to develop the [Access to Parks Analysis Tool](#), which provides an interactive format to understand where people live in relation to outdoor recreation opportunities. The tool models travel times for walking, biking, driving, and transit, and includes geographic, demographic, and park amenity data, and may be used to assist with collaboration across communities and planning improvements that serve more people. SEMCOG also continues to update and promote the [Southeast Michigan ParkFinder®](#) and [Trail Explorer](#) websites.

In addition, SEMCOG has maintained an active role in leading the Outdoor Recreation Committee of SEMI WILD (formerly the Metro Detroit Nature Network), and the Mapping and Planning Committee of the Southeast Michigan Trails Action Team. Both of these efforts engage regional stakeholders in developing coordinated approaches to enhancing and promoting our recreational assets. Other outreach and engagement have included a partnership with mParks to provide training sessions for elected officials at their annual conference, and SEMCOG University workshops and webinars on data resources, grant opportunities, and best practices for adapting programs and operations in response to COVID-19.

**SEMCOG Officers  
2020-2021**

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