

The BFE*

* BASE FLOOD ELEVATION

2026 Spring Technical Update

by Brandon Claborn WSB, Conference Co-chair

The Oklahoma Floodplain Managers Association (OFMA) Spring Technical Conference was held at the River Spirit Casino Resort on April 7th, 2026. The theme was something we all are thinking about more and more as artificial intelligence becomes increasingly enmeshed in our daily lives- from work to personal use: Trusting Your Data.

The day kicked off with a warm welcome, invocation, and the National Anthem, followed by updates from key figures: Kenneth Schwab, PE, SE, CFM, OFMA Chair; Jon Phillips, CFM, State NFIP Coordinator, OWRB; and Annie Vest, CFM OEM Executive director.

The morning plenary session continued with presentations from consultants at WSB. Audrey Fincannon and Janet Meshek shared lessons learned from the Tulsa County Flood Buyout; reflecting on the good, the bad and the ugly. This was followed by a CRS 101 presentation from Allison Whitsitt and Chris Hill covering the Community Rating System program basics, GIS tools for program management, and program updates.

The afternoon featured breakout sessions across three tracks: Floodplain Management, Stormwater Management, and Disaster. The following presentations were delivered:

Floodplain Management Topics

- Grant Moore from Moore Stormwater Engineering presented “AI & Trust: Opposites or Allies?”
- Kyle King from CEC presented “Changing Survey Datum”
- Carloine Jones and Chad Bunger from Freese & Nicholes presented “Addressing Flood Risk Uncertainty Through Future Conditions Flood Modeling & Regulation”

Stormwater Management Topics

- Alan Dennis and Jordan Angot from Garver presented “Facing the Underminer: Scour & Erosion due to Flooding”

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Words from the Chair

Kenny Schwab PE, SE, CFM | Chair
Assistant City Manager | City of Broken Arrow

In a word, I think leadership is what so many organizations, private or public, and certainly our profession and industry need more than ever. In fact, the Dean of my Civil Engineering College spoke to the seniors back in my day and told us that he received more calls from prospective employers asking for leaders. Repeatedly, they would ask for him to send them anyone that possesses leadership skills with critical thinking abilities. That was 35 years ago. I now understand that statement. It has not changed over three and a half decades. We need leaders who can think critically!

Leadership is not just a busy word. It requires action. Everyone talks about it, but do we really know what it means. I suspect if we asked ten different people to define leadership, we would get eleven different answers. Many definitions may be similar but certainly different. In truth, the textbook definition of leadership is straight forward. It is simply "influencing others." That's it. Influencing others is leadership. But how you influence others is an art and a skill. It is an art and a skill that we truthfully develop over time. It starts in childhood and continues through our adulthood. Your influence can be positive or negative.

With respect to our industry, we need positive leaders. Leaders who understand the technical aspects of our profession, but they can communicate them to the public and elected officials in an understandable and non-threatening manner. We need leaders who can make decisions based upon critical thinking skills, yet they can build consensus with their team and their administration in the midst of so many different opposing voices. We need leaders who can rally the troops during challenging times by inspiring people to work together as a team to solve the problems at hand. Above all, we need leaders who will hold themselves accountable and take ownership of their actions and responsibility for those of their team's.

Sounds great, but how do we find these leaders? Well, if I knew that answer, I would be wealthy today. But I do think it starts with us. Period. We must grow our leaders within our organizations. We must set the standard of expectation we want in our leaders. We must promote that standard among our people. We must strive to meet that standard. And celebrate it when we achieve it.

As a member of an Administration, it's my job to identify those individuals who possess a lot of the talents and skills that embodies our concept of leadership. We must identify those individuals who work well with all people. They respect and value others' positions, ideas, and input whether they agree with it or not. They can stay focused on the task at hand while at the same time they can easily assist the other members of their team. These are the members who are having a positive impact on the organization. This positive impact is the leadership that all organizations desperately need. These are the future leaders in your organization.

Honestly, I cannot think of any better organization than OFMA where leadership is both needed and fostered. OFMA recognizes that growing its leadership today for the future is crucial. You can see it behind the scenes with those individuals who participate in the Boards and the Committees. You can see their ability to influence others. You can see it growing and impacting the people within our organization, as well as people outside of our organization. This is why an active and involved membership is so critical. It is critical for the individuals and for the organization.

In closing, I encourage you to get involved within OFMA and become a part of the leadership. You need us, and we need you! I look forward to working with you.

Kenneth D. Schwab

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- Jacob Hagen from City of Tulsa presented "Watershed Wildflower Meadows"
- Mark Thibodeau from ODEQ presented "ODEQ Permit Renewals"

Disaster Topics

- Bill Smith with HISINC provided a Disaster Response Team (DRT) training workshop

After the breakout sessions the group gathered for the afternoon plenary session before announcements, closing remarks and door prizes.

In this session, Lars Ostervold with Black & Veatch and John Dean with OEM gave an update on the recovery efforts in Barnsdall, Marietta, and Sulphur, which were impacted by tornadoes in 2024. To close out the day's presentations, Yohannes from OWRB provided an overview of the Dam Safety Program which included upcoming training opportunities.

We would like to extend a special thank you to Vice Chair Zack Henson and everyone who contributed to making this year's workshop a success.

Call for Presenters



Abstracts Due by June 5, 2026

OFMA is inviting speakers to present at our 2026 Stormwater Technical Workshop. Topics of discussion at the basic or advanced level should focus on how we use data to help policymakers make informed decisions. Some possible topics:

- BMP Implementation: What's working, what isn't
- Public Education and Outreach Campaigns
- TMDL Lessons Learned
- Inspection and Enforcement Tips/Tricks (construction, post-construction, good housekeeping)

Speakers will be allocated up to 25 minutes, followed by a 5-minute question/answer period, but longer presentations may be accommodated. If you are interested in presenting or know someone who would, please submit an abstract to Morgan Lozoya at morgan.lozoya@wsbeng.com, 918.518.0358. [Register online](#)

May is Flood Awareness Month - OWRB

May is Flood Awareness Month- OWRB Governor Stitt has declared May as Flood Awareness Month in the State of Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY – During May, Oklahoma’s “Flood Awareness Month,” the Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB), the Oklahoma Floodplain Managers Association, and Governor Kevin Stitt are calling on all Oklahomans to be flood prepared.

Before a flood, Oklahomans should determine if they live in or near a floodplain, check their flood insurance status, learn the flood warning system in their community, and find the safest route from their home to higher ground. Other preparations include the following:

- Make a list of your possessions. You should itemize your personal property, such as clothing, furnishings, and other valuables. Photos of your property are also helpful. Make copies of important documents.
- Keep a battery-operated radio and flashlight ready and in good working order.
- Have emergency food, water, and medical supplies on hand.
- Keep valuables, legal documents, and insurance policies safe.

During a flood, water levels and flow can quickly change. Remain aware and monitor local radio and television outlets. Avoid flood waters on foot or by vehicle at all costs. Evacuate immediately when water starts to rise. Other factors to be considered during a flood include the following:

- Don’t walk through flood waters. It only takes 6 inches of moving water to knock you off your feet. Floodwaters may hide submerged electric lines, waste/chemicals, or other harmful debris.
- If you are trapped by moving water, move to the highest possible point and call 911.
- Turn Around Don’t Drown! Do NOT drive into flooded roadways or around a barricade. 12 inches of water can float a car or small SUV, and 18 inches can carry away large vehicles.
- Know where flooding occurs in your community so that you can be aware of high water areas on roadways.
- Have a planned alternative route home in case your usual route home has a flooded road, and becomes unsafe to drive through.

After a flood, Oklahomans should stay tuned to local news for updated information on road conditions, water quality issues,



and other public directives regarding the flood disaster area. Here are some additional things to consider following a flood:

- Ensure water is safe to drink, cook, or clean with after a flood. Authorities may ask you to boil water for a while after a flood. If you have a domestic water use well that was flooded, a water quality test is strongly encouraged.
- Heed “Road Closed” signs and other traffic control measures and do not visit disaster areas. Your presence may hamper rescue and other emergency operations.
- Do not enter a flood damaged home or building until you are given the “all clear” by authorities. Before entering, make sure the electrical system has been turned off.

Have the power company or a qualified electrician fix wires. Contact your insurance agent to discuss property damage. If you have a generator, follow proper safety procedures.

For more information, visit: <http://www.oklahoma.gov/owrb> OR <https://www.floodsmart.gov/>.

Oklahoma Flood Safety Tips Turn around, don’t drown

Avoid getting on the road if local officials warn there may be flooding.

Don’t drive through flood waters

If you approach a flooded roadway, or if the road ahead is barricaded, DO NOT drive or walk through the closure. Local responders use barriers to safely direct traffic out of flooded areas. The water may be deeper than it appears. As little as six inches of flooding can cause you to lose control of your vehicle. Flood waters can also contain chemicals, bacteria, or debris – including electricity if power lines are down – so it’s important not to make contact.

Avoid bridges over fast-moving water

Stay off bridges over fast-moving water. Fast-moving water can wash bridges away without warning.

Stay in your car if it gets swept away

If your car is trapped in rapidly moving water, stay inside your vehicle. Get on the roof if water is rising inside the car.

Stay safe at home

Evacuate when local officials tell you to do so. If you’re unable to evacuate, here are some safety tips:

- Get to the highest level if trapped in a building.
- Only get on the roof if necessary, and once there, signal for help.
- Do not climb into a closed attic where you may be trapped by rising floodwater.

Water safety

Flood water may be contaminated. Do not drink flood water or use it to wash dishes, brush teeth, or wash and prepare food. Only use water from sources deemed safe by your local officials.

Listen for advisories to boil water. Your local officials will let you know when the water is safe for use.

When in doubt, throw it out. Throw away any food and bottled water that may have come into contact with floodwater.

Keep warm as temperatures fall

Stay indoors, when possible, to avoid exposure to cold and damp conditions. Wear layers of warm clothing if needed. If you need to stay in a shelter, visit [Emergency Shelter | disasterassistance.gov](https://www.oklahoma.gov/emergencyshelter) to find the one closest to you.

If you are using a generator for power to heat your home, ensure that it is at least 20 feet away from any point of entry, such as a window, door, or ventilation point.

Call your insurance agent

Recovering from a flood often includes dealing with property damage. Contacting your insurance agent or carrier can help jumpstart your recovery, including understanding the claims process.

Document your damage by taking pictures of your home and any items that were destroyed for your insurance claim. Keep all receipts for expenses related to repairs, temporary housing, or clean-up efforts – they may be reimbursable.

If you are a policyholder and have flood damage, but are not in a declared county, file a claim with [the National Flood Insurance Program](https://www.floodsmart.gov/).

Cleaning up after a flood

- Cleaning up after a flood can be dangerous if the proper precautions are not taken. [After you’ve started your claim](#) and [ensured it’s safe to enter your home](#), begin documenting damage and taking steps to stop the spread of mold.

According to the CDC, floodwater may contain dangerous bacteria, including human or animal waste, carcinogens, and contaminants from industrial waste. Protect yourself from these substances by wearing personal protective equipment like gloves, boots, eye protection, and an N95 mask if cleaning [mold or other debris](#). Wash work clothes that are possibly contaminated in hot water and detergent before reusing them. Throw out items that cannot be cleaned, such as pillows, mattresses, carpeting, or stuffed toys.

For insurance claims, save samples of carpeting, wallpaper, furniture upholstery, and other items that may impact your claim.

Experiencing a flood can be overwhelming, but taking the above steps can lessen the impacts and make recovery more manageable.

Save your family treasures

Floods can leave behind a trail of destruction. Sometimes, this includes items in your home that hold great sentimental, historic, or monetary value to you or a family member.

While it may not be possible to completely restore these items, it is often possible to save them. If you have water-damaged items, visit [Save Your Family Treasures | FEMA.gov](https://www.floodsmart.gov/).

Congratulations to the winners of our Turn Around Don't Drown® Flood Safety Poster Contest

OFMA appreciates all the hard work of teachers, parents, and many others who supported this year's poster contest.

The students who entered also deserve our thanks.

We hope that by working together to spread the Turn Around Don't Drown® message. Floodwaters will harm fewer people in Oklahoma.

This year, more than 375 participants submitted their beautiful artwork.



CONTEST WINNERS

- 1st Place - Laikyn Zimmerman, Rush Springs**
- 2nd Place - Jon Dela Cruz Hilldale, Muskogee**
- 3rd Place - Hadley Newlin, Skiatook Intermediate**
- Honorable Mention - Cydney Posey, Owasso Northeast Elementary**

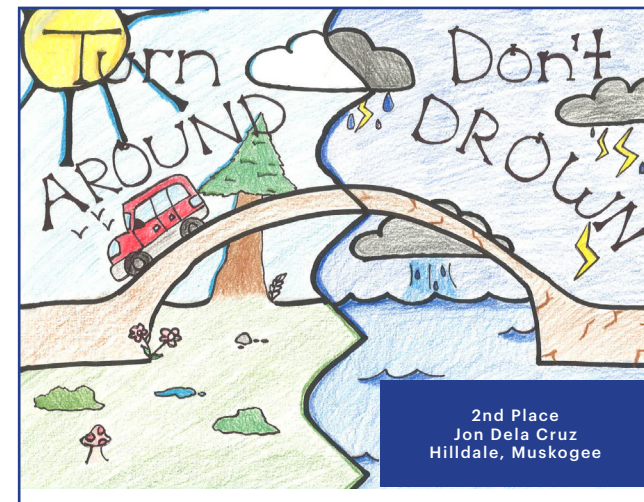
First, second and third place winners receive cash awards in the amount of \$150, \$100, and \$50, respectively. The top 13 posters in the state are published in the OFMA Turn Around Don't Drown® calendar. Each student participant is awarded a certificate of participation. Teachers receive a letter of appreciation.

Thank you to the following schools for supporting student participation in this year's program:

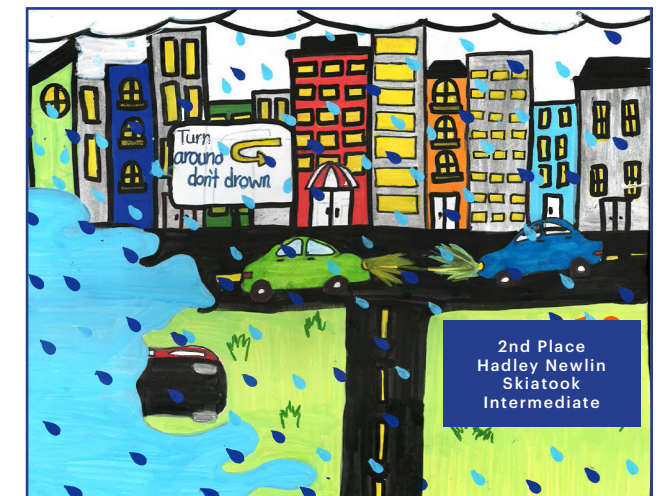
- Bearden School
- Bridge Creek
- Bridge Creek Intermediate
- Bristow Adventist School
- Canyon Ridge Intermediate
- Chouteau Public Schools
- Creek Elementary
- E-School Virtual Charter
- Fort Gibson IE
- Greenwood Elementary
- Hilldale Elementary
- Inola Elementary
- Lincoln Elementary
- MacArthur Elementary
- Maryetta School
- Metro Christian Academy
- Northeast Elementary
- Roland Schools
- Rush Springs Elementary
- Skiatook Intermediate
- Skiatook Public Schools
- Stone Canyon Elementary
- Tenkiller Public School
- Tonkawa Elementary
- Tulsa Adventist Academy
- Zion Public Schools



1st Place
Laikyn Zimmerman
Rush Springs



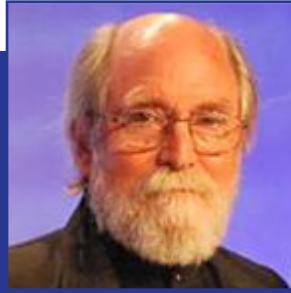
2nd Place
Jon Dela Cruz
Hilldale, Muskogee



2nd Place
Hadley Newlin
Skiatook
Intermediate



Honorable Mention
Cydney Posey
Owasso Northeast
Elementary



OFMA DRT Corner

Rev. W. B. "Bill" Smith, PE, CFM | OFMA DRT Coordinator

Working Together – Emergency Managers and Floodplain Administrators

Over the years, I have been sharing my thoughts on Disaster Response, sometimes relating to the role of the Emergency Managers and the Floodplain Administrators when disaster strikes a community or a state. With our already violent 2026 storm season – record tornados in March and the line of storms that rolled through on April 14th, the need for cooperation and working together seems to be even more important. Fortunately, we have a Director of the OEM who understands both Emergency Management and Floodplain Management and continues to get us all to work together.

When a disaster strikes a community, one of the first responders to the site of the damage is the local Emergency Manager. This individual has the responsibility of assessing the damage in that location along with many others perhaps, with the goal of estimating the associated damage costs. This information is provided to the Governor of the State for the purpose of issuing a State Declaration, if the damage meets the state requirement, and/or requesting a Federal Declaration, again if the damage meets the threshold. Once that assessment is complete, the EM will continue the efforts of response and recovery and possible mitigation efforts. This disaster could be within or outside the Special Flood Hazard Area or both.

When a disaster strikes a community one of the second responders to the site is the Floodplain Administrator. This individual has the responsibility of assessing the same damage as the EM with the goal of determining if the damage to the structures reaches the level of "substantially damaged" or not as well as if the damaged structures are compliant. They

then issue floodplain development permits if: 1) the structure is not substantially damaged, 2) the structure is substantially damaged, but compliant, or 3) the structure is substantially damaged and not compliant for reconstruction or modification.

The roles of these two individuals assisting our communities are not a territorial battle – they are two different perspectives on the same disaster. The EM and the FPA are on the same team in the community – assisting those citizens in need. Sometimes the EM and the FPA are the same individual and when that occurs the EM needs to "turn their hat around" and assess the same damage from the perspective of the FPA as well. That EM/FPA may have to turn their hat around a number of times during any single disaster.

The FPA can assist the EM with information that will assist our citizens – including possible evacuation route information, possible immediate citizen evacuation from their homes or businesses due to rapidly rising waters, information about roadway crossings where culverts or bridges may be subject to washout, information about temporary housing outside the 500-Year floodplain if FEMA temporary housing is required, etc. etc.

Our OFMA DRT has worked hand in hand with OEM and Emergency Managers on many disasters since 2008 and will continue to do so as we have a cooperative respect for each other's duties and responsibilities. We learned it was much easier to work together for the benefit of the community, than to dispute over territorial roles. That's the way it should be. Be safe out there this spring. The rains and storms are here, and it looks like may be for some time with the shift in the spring season.

Just another 2 cents of my opinion!!

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