

NACo Annual Conference to feature five mobile tours

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

County officials from around the country are gearing up to meet July 11-14 for the 90th Annual NACo Conference coming up in the City and County of Philadelphia. There will be plenty of options when it comes to mobile tours taking place on Monday, July 14 at the conference. Here's a preview:

Circulatory in Action in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park

• Philadelphia's Fairmount Park Organic Recycling Center is a shining example of local "circularity in action" in the heart of Philly's Fairmount Park. For over 40 years, the center has turned leaves, brush, fallen trees, and other organic materials into finished products like compost, mulch and wood chips that are available for free to city residents.

The tour will take participants through both the Organic Recycling Center and the Reforestation Hub operations, offering a firsthand look at how these programs turn waste into value, serving as a model for Philadelphia's circular economy. The tour will also include a visit to

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County Leadership Institute participants pause for a photo June 4 at NACo. See names Page 7. Photo by Charlie Ban

County government attracts new generation

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

The first time Joe Burgess and Jack Sayers stepped foot in a voting booth, they cast a ballot for themselves. Both 18 at the time, they weren't voting in a student council election or for prom king, but for spots on their respective county boards.

Burgess and Sayers, who are now both rising college sophomores, are in many respects just like any other teenagers. Sayers likes to play golf and go camping with his friends and you can find Burgess on the soccer intramural field or playing video games (his most recent victory was in

"Donkey Kong Country") — but they know a lot more about zoning and taxes than the average teenager.

"I think my age was probably the biggest thing working against me in the election, but at the same time, it was one of my strongest points," Sayers said. "Once you are an elected

official, it's very hard not to become, not necessarily complacent, but used to the status quo, used to how things have been.

"When you get somebody in who's young, who's just elected, they're really able to raise some questions and say, 'Maybe we can do it a different way.'"

While one might assume a

Gen Z running for office would center their campaign on social media, Burgess and Sayers both took a more traditional approach. Sayers volunteered in the community and attended events like the rotary club's spaghetti dinner, and Burgess

See TEENS page 3

County geography draws big crowds to extreme sporting events

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Rowing a canoe for 120 miles, through the dead of night, is tough enough. Watching the teams compete for the nearly 80-year-old race is another story.

The AuSable River Canoe Marathon has attracted two-person teams to Crawford County, Mich. since 1947 for a race from Grayling to Oscoda.

The competition has grown from a local-heavy event in the 1950s to an international draw in late July. The \$55,000 prize purse doesn't hurt.

It's one on a calendar full of summertime feats of strength that capitalize on counties' unique geographies, drawing adventure-seekers and spectators alike to try their hand at a challenge, marvel at the contestants mastering niche skills and endurance. It's a wide

world of wild sports.

"Canoe racing is popular, and we've got about 20,000 spectators following the teams down the river," said Michelle Millikin, a race co-chair. "It's super fun to watch, to see their pit crew chasing their team all night to replenish their liquids and give them food and supplements."

Early in its 77 years, the race

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NACo Annual Conference tours feature the arts, stormwater, housing and more

From TOURS page 1

the nearby Greenland Nursery managed by the city’s Parks & Rec’s Natural Lands team. The nursery uses the Reforestation Hub’s sawdust to help grow trees and other native plants for use in parks and restoration efforts.

Together, these programs demonstrate a uniquely integrated approach to circularity — combining waste diversion, reforestation, urban farming and workforce development under one park system. This collaboration is a rare and powerful example of how municipal departments can close resource loops and regenerate natural systems while supporting community resilience.

Green Stormwater Infrastructure at Venice Island

- Reconstructed in 2014, Venice Island houses the Philadelphia Water Department’s



This 30-foot by 24-foot mural, “Tribute to Jackie Robinson,” was painted in 1997 by artist David McShane. It is part of a mobile tour July 14 at the NACo Annual Conference in Philadelphia.

wastewater storage and pumping station along with the Venice Island Performing Arts & Recreation Center. The water department’s storage facility receives diverted flows from the sanitary intercepting sewer during intense rainstorms and

slowly pumps the water back to the sewer after the storm has passed. The site was designed with extensive green stormwater infrastructure on the ground and green roofs on both the rec center and water department facility. From the island you can also see the Manayunk Canal, which recently reintroduced flow from the Schuylkill River near the Flat Rock Dam as part of a large project to restore the canal’s headworks.

Masterpieces East Mural Arts Tour

- Experience firsthand how art ignites change: explore the world’s largest outdoor art gallery and get to know Philadelphia’s stunning mural collection on an exciting guided tour. Weave through diverse neighborhoods and be inspired by the incredible public art that makes Philadelphia the mural capital of the world. By taking a tour, guests are invited to explore four decades of creativity, featuring a curated collection of masterpieces that reflect our artistic expression over the past 40 years.

From the bold strokes of contemporary artists to the timeless

classics that have stood the test of time, join us on a celebratory tour that encapsulates the vibrancy, innovation and enduring beauty of art through the ages. Explore the show-stopping murals east of Broad Street with the Masterpieces East tour for an in-depth look at some of Philadelphia’s bold and brilliant public art. This route features inspiring works such as the iconic Jackie Robinson Mural by artist David McShane.

Riverview Wellness Village, a Model for Recovery-Based Housing

- Mayor Parker’s administration committed to shattering the status quo of an open-air drug market by developing innovative, outcome-driven, re-

covery-based housing aimed to break the interconnected, costly cycles for those struggling with challenges of substance use disorder, mental illness, trauma and homelessness.

As part of this effort, Riverview Wellness Village opened in January 2025, launching 336 recovery house beds combined with best-in-class on-site resources addressing all social determinants of health, including primary care, clinical supports for substance use disorder and mental illness, education and workforce development. Riverview Wellness Village is pioneering a new model that can provide a template for counties across the country.

Schuylkill Banks Walking Tour

- The Schuylkill River Development Corporation, a non-profit working with the City and County of Philadelphia, will lead a walking tour of Schuylkill Banks – an urban riverfront trail and greenway. The tour will include a walk over a recently completed cable-stayed bridge running along the river’s edge. This newly expanded extension of the Schuylkill River Trail creates a crucial connection between outlying neighborhoods in South and Southwest Philadelphia to the bustling business center of Center City and has been in the works for over a decade. This tour is primarily outdoors and requires 1-2 miles of walking. Please dress appropriately. **CN**



EXTREME WEATHER

2024 DISASTERS

COST/DEATHS

Hurricane Helene:.....	\$79.6 billion, 219
Hurricane Milton:.....	\$34.3 billion, 32
Hurricane Beryl:.....	\$7.2 billion, 46
Tornado outbreak:.....	\$6.6 billion, 3

Source: NOAA/Climate.gov



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‘Young people are the future of a community...we’re the ones who are going to live here’

From TEENS page 1

went out and knocked on doors around the county after his high school track practices.

Before getting elected as a Mills County, Iowa supervisor, Sayers interned at the state and federal level, working as a U.S. Senate page and as the Iowa House of Representatives’ appropriations clerk and majority leader page. Sayers’ grandfather, who served as a state representative and ran for governor, influenced his interest in government. A core memory for him was visiting the state capitol on a fourth-grade field trip, where his grandfather gave his class a behind the scenes tour.

“Every time after that, when I would go to Des Moines to visit my grandpa, he would say, ‘OK, Jack, do you want to go to the trampoline park, or do you want to go to the Capitol?’ ‘I want to go to the Capitol.’ ‘Do you want to go to the arcade?’ ‘I want to go to the Capitol,’” Sayers said. “So, it’s really something I fell in love with at such an early age, because my grandpa had such a love for it, and he really passed that down to me.”

Sayers initially saw himself running for office “sometime in his 30s, 40s, maybe 50s,” but ended up deciding to run at 18 to “make some change locally.” The county is part of the Omaha, Neb. metropolitan, which is growing, and an influx of young people and families has moved into Mills County in recent years. Sayers said the county is “evolving,” and he wanted to provide a fresh perspective to the board.

Sayers is not only the youngest supervisor on the Board, but also the first from the eastern half of the county since the 1990s, according to Sayers.

“It’s a group effort,” Sayers said, of the county board. “We all work together as one. And we have a lot of different personalities when it comes to Mills County elected officials — a lot of different ages, a lot of different former professions, so it’s good that dialogue is there.”

“I’ve always said, a government truly cannot operate [well] if it doesn’t have representatives from different areas of the population. If you were to have a Board of Supervisors that

was all teenagers, it would be a terrible idea — rightfully so. If you were to have a Board of Supervisors and everybody there was 60 years old, that would be a terrible idea. That’s not how government should operate. You need those different points of view.”

Burgess also decided to run because he thought his county could benefit from a younger voice at the table. A family friend who was Burgess’ predecessor on the York County, Neb. County Commission joked that he should run for his open seat, and after thinking about it, Burgess decided to go for it. He said

running for office first seemed real to him when he had to put down \$250 he had made life-guarding to formally file as a candidate; he beat out two other candidates, who were in their 50s and 80s.

“Go back even just four years ago, but especially 10-15 years ago, everyone was over 80 on the Board, basically,” Burgess said. “So, a lot of people were excited to see young people in government in general.”

Burgess, who studies chemical engineering at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, and Sayers, who takes online classes and is pursuing a de-

gree in healthcare administration through Clarkson College, both juggle being a college student with their roles in county government, which Sayers described as “definitely a balancing act.”

Burgess missed his first-ever college class for a county board meeting, but said that he’s getting the hang of working through scheduling, and summer break has freed up a lot more time — “just in time for budget season,” he noted.

“This last semester, I had a chemistry exam, and then right after, I get a phone call from a constituent, and we talked for two hours about solar zoning regulations,” Burgess said. “So, you kind of switch off and on.”

After getting elected, Sayers’ predecessor raised questions over his age, saying he was too young to represent Mills County on regional nonprofit boards, which handle issues like housing and conservation and is part of the role of being a supervisor in the county (there is no age limitation on serving as a board member for the nonprofits).

“There’re still some people in my community that if there’s an issue, they won’t talk to me, they’ll talk to the other two supervisors, because ‘I don’t know anything,’” Sayers said. “But most people, after they talk to me, they feel much more comfortable, so it’s just about that first conversation.”

While some people have been wary of the ability of someone so young to help make policy, Sayers said his youth has made him a more approachable entry point into county government for people unaware, but curious, as to what exactly counties do — particularly among his peers.

“Just about everybody that’s not in county government doesn’t understand how county government operates, so I get a lot of questions,” Sayers said. “One of the funniest things is when I’m hanging out with my friends, somebody will bring up ‘How does a road get paved? Who gets to decide that? Where does the funding come from?’ or they’ll talk about property tax levies and evaluations, and they’ll ask me, ‘How is this done?’ And then they’re able to

learn more about it.

“And sometimes they tell their parents who don’t even know, so I think I’m a pretty approachable guide to a lot of people.”

While campaigning, Sayers was vocal about wanting Mills County Board meetings to be more accessible to the public, advocating for them to be live-streamed and shifted to a time when more community members could come and provide input, as opposed to the 8:15 a.m. meetings the county traditionally had.

“After I won, the meetings started to be live-streamed,” Sayers said. “And then now, since I’ve been elected, the first meeting of every month is at six o’clock on a Tuesday night, and usually it’s a packed house. We have a lot of people who come and want to be involved.”

Burgess said that he went into county government with a more pessimistic view of how government operates but has seen firsthand how much work goes into bettering the community — particularly in his work with the Southeast Nebraska Development District, a voluntary association of counties and municipalities that’s working to build affordable housing in rural communities.

“I can see different projects that they work on in my community, like houses they revitalize and rebuild and help people finance,” Burgess said. “So, it’s cool to be a part of that, even though I’m just getting started. But it definitely has given me a more positive view, just seeing that people are really working hard to help out their communities and build them and help out those that are in need.”

Since stepping into the county supervisor role earlier this year, young people from around the state have reached out to Sayers about running for local office and getting more involved in their communities, which has been exciting, he said.

“They want to have a seat at the table,” Sayers said. “They want to help make the decisions for the future, because, after all, young people are the future of a community — we’re the ones who are going to live here, work here and make it into what it is.” **CN**



Jack Sayers was sworn in as a Mills County, Iowa supervisor at the age of 18.



Joe Burgess campaigns for a seat on the York County, Neb. Board. He was elected at the age of 18 and was recently sworn in as a county commissioner.

GET TO KNOW...

North Slope Borough, Alaska



by Meredith Moran
staff writer

North Slope Borough, Alaska, established in 1972, is named for the Alaskan basin of the same name, which is located on the northern slope of the Brooks Range mountains. The borough, which is the largest county-level jurisdiction in the country, stretches nearly 95,000 square miles and is larger than 39 U.S. states. The majority of the people who live in the borough are Iñupiat Alaskan Natives.

The borough’s “county seat” is Utqiagvik which is one of the oldest continuously inhabited towns in America, with archaeological sites in the area indicating the Iñupiat lived in the area as far back as 500 AD. It’s 320 miles north of the Arctic Circle and is the northernmost community in North America (and the ninth northernmost city in the world). Most of the soil is frozen year-round due to permafrost. According to scientists, the Arctic region is warming twice as

fast as the rest of the planet, making it a significant research location on the impacts of climate change.

Home to more than 4,000 people, Utqiagvik is the largest city in the North Slope Borough. The city was named “Barrow” until 2016, when residents voted to change it back to its indigenous name of Utqiagvik, which translates to “a place to gather wild roots” in the Iñupiat language, as part of a growing movement to reclaim Alaskan Native culture and language. You can’t get to Utiagvik by road from other parts of Alaska (the Brooks Range mountains make them difficult to build), and most travel there by boat or plane.

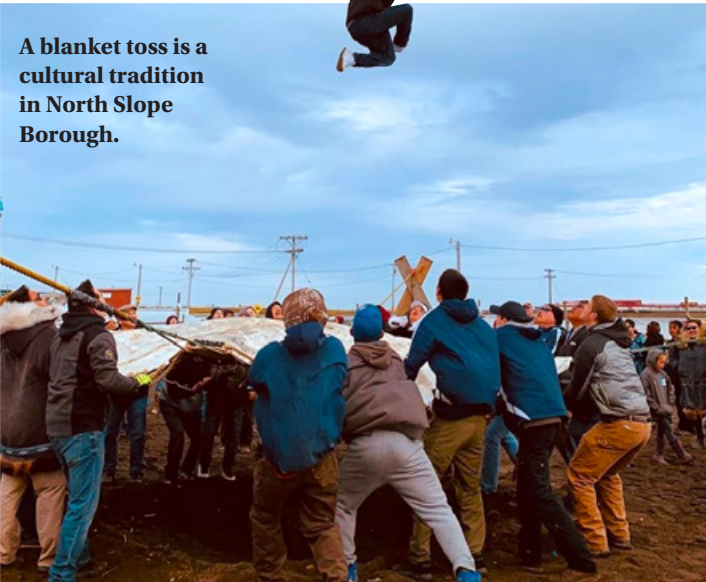
North Slope Borough was incorporated following the discovery of massive oil deposits at Prudhoe Bay, which allowed the Iñupiat Alaskan Natives to capture oil wealth for local use and help protect their environment. Today, the region’s economy is reliant on oil production at its reserves, which include Prudhoe Bay and the Alpine Fields. Oil from the North Slope is sent south through the Trans-Alaska Pipe-

line System to Valdez on the Pacific Ocean, where it is then shipped out to other places. Subsistence hunting, fishing and whaling are important to the local economy and are a way of life, with people hunting whales, seals, polar bears, walrus, waterfowl, caribou and catching fish from the Arctic Ocean or nearby rivers and lakes for food. The Whale Bone

Arch in Utqiagvik, which is constructed from the jawbone of a bowhead whale, is known as the “Gateway to the Arctic.” **Nalukataq, which marks the end of the spring whaling season, is an Iñupiat cultural celebration, and includes traditional songs and dances, including the blanket toss, where a dancer is tossed high in the**

air from a blanket made of seal skins. Temperatures are at or below zero degrees 160 days per year, on average, in Utqiagvik, and when the sun sets on Nov. 18 or 19, it doesn’t rise again for 65 days in a period known as “polar night.”

Get to Know features new NACo member counties.



A blanket toss is a cultural tradition in North Slope Borough.

BEHIND THE SEAL

MIAMI COUNTY, KANSAS

Established in 1855 as Lykins County after Baptist pro-slavery missionary David Lykins, this county south of Kansas City changed its name to Miami County on June 3, 1861 to honor the predominant Native American tribe soon after Kansas entered the union as a free state.

The covered wagons that carried settlers across the state

A horse, plow and farmer tilling the fields and haystacks to reflect the state’s agricultural heritage



a house for homesteaders who settled there

The Latin phrase “ad astra per aspera,” is the state motto, which translates to “a rough road leads to the stars.”

Would you like to see your seal featured in County News? Contact Charlie Ban at cban@naco.org.

ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS

- First Vice President **J.D. Clark**, Executive Director **Matt Chase**, Program Director **Elise Simonsen**, Associate Membership Director **Grace Blanchard** and Managing Director **Carlos Greene** attended the Florida Association of Counties Annual Conference in Orange County.
- Northeast Region Representative **Tammy Tincher**, Program Manager **Annie Qing** and Special Assistant **Jamara Green** attended the County Commissioners Association of West Virginia Annual Conference in Lewis County.
- South Region Representative **Ron Berry** and Membership Manager **Priscila Chrappah** attended the Mississippi Association of Supervisors Annual Conference in Harrison County.



Tincher



Berry

NACo STAFF

- **Alex Waskiewicz** has joined NACo as a program associate for health and human services. He previously served as an intern at NACo, and earned a master’s degree in public health from George Washington University and a bachelor’s degree in political science and public health from Elizabethtown College.
- Program Manager **Kimberly Ransom** earned a master’s degree in business administration from Howard University.
- Intergovernmental Affairs and Partner Engagement Director **Rick Hart** spoke at the International Liquid Terminals Association Annual Conference in Harris County.
- National Center for Public Lands Counties Director **Gregory Nelson** attended the New Mexico Association of Counties Annual Conference in Curry County.



Waskiewicz



Ransom

Assessment tool helps Ramsey County, Minn. make substantial strides cutting juvenile justice admissions

by Bryce Wilkom

In 2005, the juvenile justice system in Ramsey County, Minn. was in distress.

The county's Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) suffered from overcrowding, routinely admitting all youth, regardless of risk level or alleged offenses — including for status offenses such as truancy, curfew violations or underage drinking.

The overcrowding led to the harmful practice of “double bunking” where youth detained for minor fractions were housed alongside those facing serious, violent charges.

“We can't go on like this — we need change,” Ramsey County Attorney John Choi recalls saying, capturing the urgency that helped ignite a shift in how the county approached youth justice.

Choi, who has served in his role since 2011, opened NACo's Youth Justice Peer Exchange in Ramsey County June 3 by reflecting on this pivotal moment in the county's juvenile justice system.

Over the course of the peer exchange, Ramsey County officials addressed a diverse group of county leaders on their county's juvenile justice system that is virtually unrecognizable from the system in distress, less than two decades ago.

Notably, the county has seen a more than 90% reduction in JDC admissions since 2005. This drastic decrease is largely contributed to the county's Risk Assessment Instrument (RAI), introduced in 2008 to address overcrowding in its JDC and reduce unnecessary detention.

The RAI uses a structured scoring system based on a youth's current alleged offense and prior history to recommend one of three outcomes: Detention (including automatic detention for serious and sexual offenses), release to an alternative program with an expedited court date or release to a parent or guardian. Youth deemed eligible for release typically return home the same day and appear before a judge within a week.

In 2023, the tool showed



Peer exchange attendees visit a mural during a walking tour of Ramsey County, Minn.

strong outcomes — only 9% failed to appear in court, and 85% incurred no new charges before their hearing.

By focusing on the critical window between arrest and first court appearance, the RAI has significantly reduced admissions to the JDC and minimized the potential harm of unnecessary detention.

“We should care about where our kids' heads hit the pillow,” said Judge Jacob Kraus, who serves in the Juvenile Division in Minnesota's Second Judicial District, which encompasses Ramsey County. Allowing youth to await court dates at home, “without having to experience what jail feels like,” he added, has helped prevent deeper system involvement.

From the law enforcement perspective, there's a growing confidence that the RAI is making a positive impact.

“Accountability for youth doesn't always mean detention,” said Joseph Steiner, patrol lieutenant with the Maplewood Police Department, a municipality within Ramsey County. Steiner acknowledged that adapting to the RAI's principles can be challenging for officers, particularly the time and effort required to complete paperwork and transport youth to the JDC, only to see them released the same day.

Still, he emphasized the im-

portance of the system's design: “For youth, the system is built around low-level intervention. It's what keeps them off the street.”

Even when youth are released with a later court date, that early and restorative response is crucial.

In Ramsey County, collaboration among various stakeholders — both within and beyond

the court system — is a hallmark of its approach, and “everyone involved shares a deep commitment to the well-being of children,” added Kraus.

A prime example of this is the Collaborative Review Team (CRT) established under the (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth initiative in the county attorney's office. The CRT brings members from the community, public

defenders and prosecutors together to review cases through a restorative, trauma-informed lens to determine how to best respond. Additionally, committees such as the RAI committee, which was heavily involved in the development and oversight of the risk assessment instrument, included representatives

See **JUVENILES** page 12



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Extreme sports attract crowds, help boost county tourism

From ADVENTURE page 1

was planned as a post-Labor Day tourist attraction down the AuSable River nearly to Lake Huron, but the longer days of sunlight in July were too hard to resist. The race begins at 9 p.m. with a quarter-mile run to the river, with roughly 100 teams of two carrying their canoes. During the duration of the race, which takes 14-19 hours, teams must carry their boats around six hydroelectric dams. That's the only time they leave their boats, so in addition to the conditioning that partic-

ipants must undertake to prepare to row their canoes, they need to be ready for that much time in their seats. Millikin has been involved in the race for 12 years, ever since she and her daughters watched the race and picked a Canadian team to support. From there, her participation escalated. "Planning is a year-round effort," she said. "We rely on a strong working relationship with Crawford County to make the event work and ensure that participants are safe." The race's documentary se-



A team from the AuSable River Canoe Marathon carries their canoe during the competition, which has attracted crowds to Crawford County, Mich. since 1947. Photo by John Garrod

ries "AuSable - The River, The Race, The Legend" won the 2024 Michigan Emmy for Outstanding Sports Documentary. For more than 50 years, the race has also spawned the AuSable River Festival the weekend prior, capitalizing on the "marathon fever" for another week.

"There's a lot that draws people to the race, but I think the sense of history, that we've been doing this for almost 80 years, helps us hold a special place in their hearts," Millikin said.

Don't forget to stop

It takes a while to get to Lander County, Nev., but when hundreds of people flock there for more than 10 days in mid-September, they come with a purpose: To ride their bikes, fast. Really fast. They're shooting for 90 miles per hour to top Todd Reichert's 89.59-mph record from 2016, on a flat stretch of Nevada Highway 305. Participants have a 5-mile runway to reach their top speed, which is recorded over 200 meters.

The World Human Powered Speed Challenge, known colloquially as "the bike race," draws an international crowd, representing 14 countries since the event started in 2000, that can often fill hotel rooms for up to a month, as cyclists adapt to breathing at 4,500 feet. That gives visitors more time to get acquainted with central northern Nevada.

Paula Tomera, executive director of the Lander County Convention and Tourism Authority, said the 10-day event

duration gives participants the most versatility for the best possible weather conditions, which can include wind that isn't too fast.

"We've had people go faster than 90 miles per hour, but the tailwind is too strong, so their records aren't legal," Tomera said. "These bikes are really moving."

These aren't road bikes, though. They resemble pointed eggs shielding a recumbent cyclist from the elements and capitalizing on aerodynamics, so futuristic that a visitor could be forgiven for thinking the county was named after the lunar lander, rather than for Frederick W. Lander, chief engineer of a federal wagon route. They generally require two-member teams to help cyclists get moving because the cyclist is locked into a reclined position.

Battle Mountain, the county seat, swells with cyclists and their support crews, many of whom begin their visits weeks in advance to acclimate to the high altitude. Tomera said a pre-pandemic survey showed \$500,000 in tax revenue from race-related spending over the 10 days of the event.

"We have some people who build their bikes in their garages," Tomera said. "Some of them are not highly trained athletes, these are just people who have an avid interest in the sport and train in their off time and can move themselves at 75 miles per hour."

But Highway 305 is not in the same shape it was when it was first repaved to the race's specifications in 2009. Tomera

is hoping for attention from the state department of transportation in maintaining the road's surface to keep the competition in town. Her proposal for a 4.5-mile track to play host to the race has been tabled by the county commission.

"We don't have anything else that has nearly the drawing power of the bike race that will bring people to town," she said.

After the 200 meter top-speed stretch, participants have a 2-mile segment to slow down and stop, though Tomera said state highway patrol officers are on hand to follow behind them with their lights on in case the cyclists somehow forget to stop.

Highs and lows

A single district in Inyo County, Calif. contains both the lowest point in the contiguous United States and the highest. Human nature being what it is, it was only a matter of time before people tried to travel on foot between Death Valley (282 feet below sea level) and Mount Whitney (8,360 feet). Uphill, of course.

Hikes in the 1960s made way for running races in the '70s, and now the Badwater Ultramarathon annually draws roughly 100 entrants trying to cross two mountain ranges for the grand prize of a belt buckle and the notoriety of being brave enough to try in July, the hottest time of year for the region.

"When I moved down to Lone Pine and witnessed the

See ADVENTURE page 12

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CountyNews

HOT topics

DISASTER READINESS

N.D. counties' flood diversion project. [pg. H3](#)

Pacific NW counties prep for 'The Big One.' [pg. H6](#)

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

JUNE 23, 2025



ARE WE
READY
FOR THE
**BIG
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COUNTIES PREPARE FOR DISASTERS

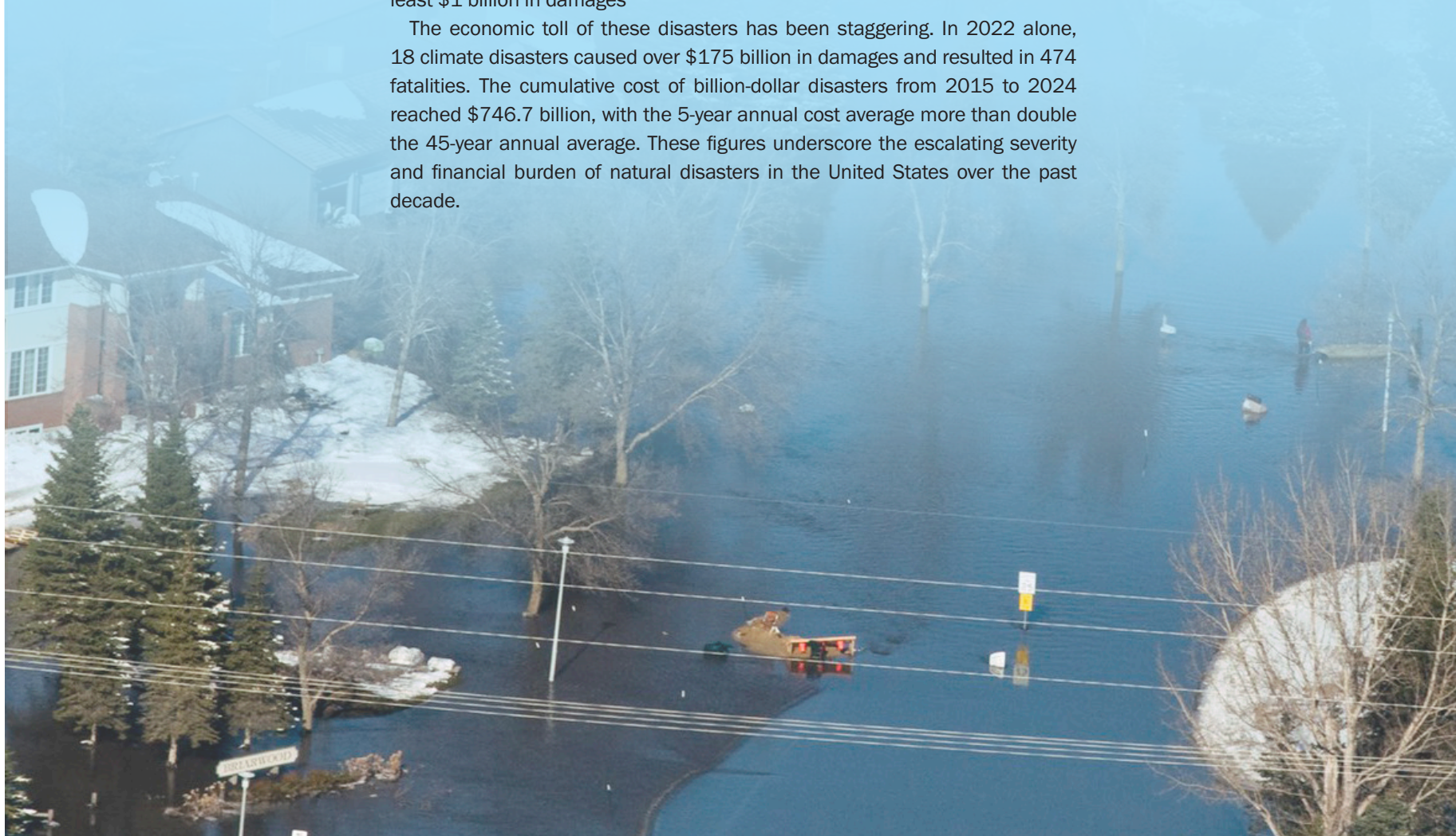
DISASTERS STRIKE MORE OFTEN AND HIT HARDER

From train derailments and chemical explosions to hurricanes and wildfires, counties are at the forefront of many types of disasters.

Over the past decade, the United States has experienced a significant increase in the frequency and financial impact of natural disasters. From 2015 to 2024, the country endured 190 separate billion-dollar disasters, resulting in more than 6,300 fatalities and approximately \$1.4 trillion in damages, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA). This period marked a notable escalation from previous decades, with the annual average number of such disasters rising from 12.8 in the 2010s to 20.4 in the 2019–2023 period.

Severe storms emerged as the most prevalent and costly natural disasters during this timeframe, according to NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information. Between 2012 and 2022, these events accounted for 99 billion-dollar disasters, followed by tropical cyclones (24), flooding (17), droughts (10), and wildfires (9). Notably, 2020 set a record with 22 billion-dollar disasters, including a record-breaking wildfire season that burned more than 10.2 million acres and 12 landfalling tropical cyclones, seven of which resulted in at least \$1 billion in damages.

The economic toll of these disasters has been staggering. In 2022 alone, 18 climate disasters caused over \$175 billion in damages and resulted in 474 fatalities. The cumulative cost of billion-dollar disasters from 2015 to 2024 reached \$746.7 billion, with the 5-year annual cost average more than double the 45-year annual average. These figures underscore the escalating severity and financial burden of natural disasters in the United States over the past decade.



DIVERSION PROJECT SPELLS RELIEF FROM FARGO-AREA FLOODING

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Flooding has been a part of Tony Grindberg's life going back to his childhood in Mapleton, N.D.

"As a kid, we fought floods almost every year," he said about his Cass County hometown. "I'd fill the gas can and man the pumps when we'd try to keep the Maple River under control."

The Maple River feeds into the Red River, which divides North Dakota and Minnesota and flows north toward Fargo and its sister city, Moorhead, Minn., in Clay County, then on north to Grand Forks, N.D. and Canada.

In 1997, what is now the region's second-largest flood, drove the largest evacuation of a community — 50,000 people — when Grand Forks was inundated. It was a record only broken by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Between 2006-2011, the Red River recorded four floods that stand among the top 10 worst for the Fargo area, including the 2009 flood of record.

"All it takes is a few 60-degree days in March to rapidly thaw the snowpack," said Jason Benson, executive director of the Metro Flood Diversion Authority (MFDA), a joint powers authority among the two counties, Moorhead, Fargo and the Cass County Joint Water Resource District. "If you add two inches of rain, you could quickly melt the snow; it would get into the river systems and cause a severe flood."

In 2010, Cass County got the ball rolling toward a \$3.2 billion flood diversion program that would circumvent high waters around 70 square miles that are home to more than 260,000 people. Voters approved a sales tax that will raise \$1.2 billion through 2084. Fargo also passed a sales tax.

In 2013, Grindberg, then a North Dakota state senator, led the effort to contribute state funding to fund a flood diversion plan to help Cass County and neighboring Clay County, Minn. avoid future disasters, allocating \$850 million from the state. Cass County is home to roughly a quarter of North Dakota's residents. Minnesota added \$86 million.

The federal government contributed \$750 million to the project, including \$437 million from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of January 2022.

Now chair of the Cass County Commission, Grindberg also chairs the Metro



A diversion outlet returns floodwaters to the Red River in northern Cass County, N.D. A diversion channel carries floodwater west of Fargo and other Cass County areas. Photo courtesy of the Army Corps of Engineers

Flood Diversion Authority.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to be involved," he said. "This is a legacy project for our region, both in Minnesota and North Dakota. The real bedrock of this is the citizens assessing themselves the sales tax and their commitment not to ever have to live through a flood again."

Construction is more than 70% complete, with a finish line less than two years away.

The process wasn't always easy, including intensive negotiations between the governors at the time, Mark Dayton from Minnesota and Doug Burgum from North Dakota, over which state would see more disruption and impact from the projects.

For 13 years, Benson, then the Cass County engineer, served as the incident commander for flooding in the county, a role usually reserved for a county sheriff. The sheriff reported to Benson when the water rose.

Fortunately, the region has seen mild winters in the last decade-plus.

"Right now, there are a lot of people that weren't here for the flood of 2009, 2010 or 2011," Benson said. "People that don't have that memory and that experience may not have voted for a sales tax that would last that long."

The Metro Flood Diversion Authority

approached the Army Corps of Engineers with the prospect of entering a public-private partnership — a first for the Corps.

"Using the public private partnership, it seemed like that was going to get things done for us a lot better than a traditional model for the Corps," Benson said. "We could complete the project faster and cheaper."

"We didn't have decades to get this project done."

Where will the water go?

The Army Corps of Engineers is building the flood gates south of Fargo on the Red River and the Wild Rice River. When floodwaters reach 37 feet, the gates will close, storing water in a 20-mile embankment. Levees will protect areas developed downstream of the flood gates.

An inlet control structure will then open, releasing waters into a 30-mile diversion channel that bypasses Fargo to the west, which is being built by private contractors, until it rejoins the Red River north of Fargo. The Corps is responsible for the embankment and the inlet control structure.

The private contractors are building bridges spanning the channel they are digging: Four interstate bridges, three railroad bridges and 12 county road bridges.

"Before this, a lot of those county roads were just gravel," Benson said. "Now all of a sudden, those 12 bridges will be among Cass County's top 20 longest, just because of how wide this diversion channel is."

Adding complexity to the project, two 15-foot-deep tributary rivers will cross over the diversion channel, which will range between 20 and 30 feet deep.

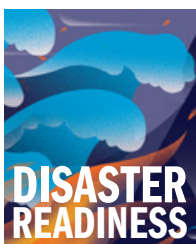
"We have to carry the natural river waters over top of the diversion channel, to allow for fish passage and maintaining the natural water in the river system throughout the year," Benson said.

"During a flood, we'll restrict the water that goes into the protected area across the aqueducts and the rest of the floodwaters will spill into the diversion channel."

Benson noted that there are only a few similar aqueduct structures like this in the world, with natural flows over top of a man-made channel. None, however, are in a cold environment like North Dakota, so the channels will have to be heated to keep the rivers from freezing.

"It's definitely been a great collaboration and we've needed that collaboration because you know, we're working with so many different entities on both sides of the river," Benson said.

See FLOODS pg H7



HOUSE DRAFT OF FEMA REFORM PACKAGE FEATURES MAJOR WINS FOR COUNTIES

by Naomi Freel

The U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has released a draft bill for a sweeping Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reform package aimed at improving disaster response, streamlining aid and increasing local flexibility — reflecting many long-standing county priorities.

The Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act would remove FEMA from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and reestablish it as an independent, cabinet-level agency.

“We have clearly seen that FEMA is not working as it should for Americans who’ve been impacted by disasters,” said Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Sam Graves (R-Mo.). “Congress has passed FEMA reforms over the years, but it simply hasn’t been enough. By releasing this discussion draft legislation, we hope to engage our colleagues and stakeholders on comprehensive FEMA reform.”

The bill would shift FEMA to a grant-based structure from its current reimbursement model. Under the new framework, FEMA would be required to disburse funds within 120 days of a disaster declaration. It also introduces a sliding federal cost-share ranging from 65 to 85 percent, tied to the implementation of local mitigation measures.

To further speed up recovery,



Proposed legislation would reestablish FEMA as an independent agency.

ery, the bill streamlines environmental and historic preservation reviews. Additionally, it incorporates the NACo-endorsed “Disaster Management Cost Modernization Act” (H.R. 744/S. 773)

which would allow management costs to be spread across multiple disasters, offering counties more flexibility in administrative planning.

“FEMA is the last line of defense for families impacted by increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters,” said Ranking Member Rick Larsen (D-Wash.). “Republican and Democrats on this Committee agree that it is an important agency in need of reform.”

The bill includes several key changes to streamline and improve Individual Assistance

aid for survivors. It creates a universal disaster application which would simplify and speed up the process of accessing assistance. It also expands FEMA’s authority to repair homes beyond basic habitability, addressing a current limitation that often leaves survivors in unsafe conditions. Finally, it clarifies that charitable donations will not be treated as a duplication of benefits, ensuring that individuals who receive private aid are not disqualified from receiving federal assistance.

States would be allowed to develop a list of pre-approved mitigation projects, enabling faster implementation once funding becomes available. To ensure broad access, states would be required to identify at least one project in each county. It also broadens the definition of what qualifies as meeting building code requirements under FEMA programs, offering greater

flexibility for local governments.

Finally, the legislation calls for a series of Government Accountability Office reports on improving FEMA transparency — potentially opening the door for proposals like a “FEMA dashboard,” which counties have already recommended.

County impact

This draft bill responds directly to county feedback, including major reforms that would speed up recovery timelines, ease administrative burdens and improve support for survivors. Counties will be especially encouraged by the PA (public assistance) reforms, universal disaster application and mitigation flexibility — all of which are essential to building stronger, more resilient communities. Many of these proposals were recommended by the NACo Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force, which continues to work toward meaningful FEMA reform to improve disaster mitigation, response and recovery efforts across the country.

Next steps

While this proposed legislation’s creation marks a major win for counties in the disaster space, it is only the beginning of the legislative process. The proposal will need to be introduced before advancing through the full House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and ultimately gaining bipartisan support in both chambers. 

Freel is a legislative associate in NACo’s Government Affairs department.



GRAVES



LARSEN



NACo disaster task force extends work into fall

by Brett Mattson

In a pivotal moment for national disaster policy, NACo has announced the continued work of its Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force into the fall, following key developments including the release of the FEMA Act discussion draft and heightened engagement with the FEMA Review Council.

Formed under NACo President James Gore’s leadership, the task force has become a central voice for counties in federal disaster policy reform — especially as natural disasters increase in frequency, severity and cost. Over the past year, the group has conducted high-level engagements with Congress, the White House and the Department of Homeland Security,

pushing for more streamlined, reasonable and locally informed approaches to disaster response, recovery and mitigation.

These efforts have already yielded concrete results. The FEMA Act discussion draft, recently released by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, incorporates key recommendations from county leaders. The proposed legislation aims to reduce bureaucratic barriers, accelerate the delivery of federal disaster aid to local governments and enhance coordination among federal, state, and local partners.

“The release of this discussion draft shows that county voices are being heard,” said Gore, who has overseen multiple presidentially declared disasters


in Sonoma County, Calif. “We’re making sure federal reforms reflect the reality on the ground, not just theory from afar.”

The task force’s work also intersects with ongoing administrative reforms. Members have engaged directly with FEMA’s newly established Review Council, an internal body charged with assessing how the agency’s disaster programs can better serve communities and build long-term resilience. These interactions provide counties with a direct line to influence not just legislation, but the operations and culture of FEMA itself.

As disaster costs escalate and communities demand faster, more effective federal action, NACo’s extension of the task force’s timeline signals a continued commitment to ensuring counties have a

permanent seat at the table.

“Reform is not a one-time event — it’s a process,” Gore said. “We need to build systems of partnership where federal, state and county governments work in sync before, during and after disasters. That’s what this task force is all about.”

Looking ahead, the task force will continue advocating for policies that empower local governments, including hazard mitigation funding reform, post-disaster housing solutions and modernized recovery frameworks. With Congress considering major changes and FEMA reexamining internal practices, counties are staying engaged — and driving the conversation. 

Mattson is a legislative director in NACo’s Government Affairs department.

As Washington zeroes in on disasters, counties must stay at the table

by James Gore

Disasters don't check calendars. They don't wait for elections, budget cycles or bureaucratic green lights. And they certainly don't pause when a task force's term is set to expire.

That's why, as president of NACo, I've decided to extend the work of our Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force. When we launched this group, it wasn't just a ceremonial initiative — it was a response to a reality that county officials like you and I know all too well: We are on the frontlines of every disaster.

The task force was born out of hard experience. In my own county, we've faced nine presidentially declared disasters in the past seven years. That means nine times we've had to mobilize local resources, navigate red tape and fight for the attention of our state and federal partners. Some of those battles were won. Others revealed just how much more work we have to do.

What's become clear to me — and to many of you — is that the current system isn't built to keep pace with what's coming. The federal government is starting to recognize this. From FEMA to Congress, there's a growing appetite for reform. That's good news. But let's be clear: Reform without local input isn't reform, it's a missed opportunity.

That's where counties come in. Our voices, our stories, our solutions — they belong at the center of this conversation. And this task force is how we make that happen.

Extending the task force means continuing the momentum we've built. It means taking the lessons we've learned on the ground and turning them into federal policy that works for all counties — big and small, coastal and inland, urban and rural. It means pushing for smarter, faster, more balanced disaster systems that reach the people and places that need them most.

So, to every county official reading this:



NACo President James Gore of Sonoma County, Calif., speaks to fellow county officials. Sonoma County has seen several devastating wildfires in recent years.

Thank you. Thank you for showing up in times of crisis. Thank you for sharing your experiences with us. And thank you for standing together to shape a better system — not just for our own communities, but for counties across the nation.

We're not done yet. Let's keep going. **Hi**

Sonoma County, Calif. Supervisor James Gore became NACo president July 15, 2024 at NACo's Annual Business Meeting held in Hillsborough County, Fla.

Insurance Incentives Fortify Against Disasters

by Tim Temple

I learned throughout my 20-plus year journey in the insurance industry that it takes everyone to be part of the solution, whether you are a consumer, insurance company, claims adjuster or agent.

The challenges we face today provide a unique opportunity to build a more stable and predictable insurance environment. My priority is to make our state a more desirable destination for insurance companies to do business while protecting consumers.

The best way to address Louisiana's property insurance crisis — or any regulatory challenge — is to identify the issues, bring the right people together and create solutions that directly address the problems.

Louisiana is no stranger to natural disasters. Hurricanes have played a big part, but we've also experienced wildfires, tornadoes, flooding and even the occasional snowstorm. Following a string of devastating hurricanes in 2020 and 2021, a dozen insurers that wrote policies in Louisiana went insolvent. Insurance is increasingly unavailable and unaffordable in Louisiana because we have struggled to compete for the investment dollars of insurers and reinsurers.

Though hurricane exposure will always be a factor insurance companies consider when determining where to write policies, we can create an environment that increases the affordability and availability of insurance by enacting reforms that stimulate our market. We can do this while pro-



tecting insurance consumers by holding the industry accountable to our laws and regulations. That's been my focus since taking office.

I was recently appointed to co-vice chair of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners' International Insurance Relations Committee and was selected as vice chairman of the Surplus Lines Task Force. I am also serving on the Government Relations Leadership Council and Reinsurance Task Force. We have been working together across state lines to address the evolving challenges in the insurance market.

Every state shares a mission to protect consumers and ensure fair, competitive and healthy insurance markets across the country. Through task forces, working groups and special committees, we share best practices, analyze trends and coordi-

nate our responses to emerging risks.

In fact, our Louisiana Fortify Homes Program (LFHP) is modeled on Alabama's Strengthen Alabama Homes program. It offers grants of up to \$10,000 for homeowners to upgrade their roofs to standards set by the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, helping Louisiana homeowners strengthen their roofs to better withstand hurricane-force winds.

There are over 50,000 FORTIFIED homes there, and four out of every five are built outside the grant program. With over 2,430 FORTIFIED roof grants issued since the program began in 2023, the LFHP is making Louisiana a more attractive place for insurers to do business and encouraging other homeowners to fortify their homes without a grant. The number of homes FORTIFIED without a grant grew

tremendously in 2024, nearly quadrupling to over 6,652 today from 878 on Jan. 1.

The Louisiana Department of Insurance is leading the effort to move toward that level of adoption in Louisiana, whether through the grant program, self-funding, increasing building codes or adding the new FORTIFIED endorsement to more homeowners policies.

Legislative support and public interest in the LFHP have been strong. So far, the legislature has allocated \$45 million for the program.

The lottery system is new, and so is the focus on the Coastal Zone. In discussions with the team behind Alabama's program and with reinsurers, we learned that concentrating fortification in specific areas may have a more substantial impact on attracting insurers than the program otherwise could.

The federal government needs to look at what Louisiana and other states are doing when it comes to prioritizing funding and resources for individuals and state and local governments that are building resiliently. When homes and infrastructure are built resiliently or upgraded to withstand disasters, it protects property and keeps insurance rates stable and affordable.

It would be helpful for Congress to incentivize those efforts through federal tax incentives and funding for mitigation projects. **Hi**

Temple is insurance commissioner for the state of Louisiana.



Pacific Northwest counties prepare for ‘The Big One’

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

The Cascadia subduction zone is a fault line off the coast of the Pacific Northwest that stretches 700 miles from Northern California, through Oregon and Washington up to British Columbia.

When it eventually ruptures, which scientists predict could happen in the next 50 years, it will devastate the Pacific Northwest in an unprecedented way, generating an earthquake that could reach a magnitude 9.0 or greater and setting off a 100-foot tsunami that could alter the floodplain footprint for centuries. If only the southern part of the Cascadia subduction zone gives way, the resulting earthquake will have a magnitude between 8.0 and 8.6, which scientists predict there's a 37%-43% chance of happening within the next 50 years.

If the entire zone gives way at once — a full-margin rupture — the magnitude will reach somewhere between 8.7 and 9.2, which researchers say has a 16%-22% chance of happening within the next 50 years. According to FEMA, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake on the Cascadia fault would kill an estimated 14,000 people in Oregon and Washington.

Not a matter of ‘if’

What scientists refer to as “The Big One” could happen in five minutes or it could happen in hundreds of years; what is known is that it will happen, and counties must work to mitigate its destruction through inter-governmental and -agency collaboration, according to Chris Voss, emergency management director for Multnomah County, Ore., one of the communities in the Cascadia subduction zone.

“This isn’t an ‘if,’ it’s an absolute ‘when,’” Voss said. “Fifty years, well it may seem like a long time, but from a geological sense, it’s nothing. It’s a blink of an eye.”

Robert Ezelle, Washington state’s emergency management division director, has said it will be “the worst natural disaster in our country’s history,” and if the natural disaster happens in the winter, destruction will be even “twice as worse,” because wet soils cause more damage, according to Voss.

The rupture of the Cascadia subduction zone will also have drastic effects long-term. Models released in April, created by U.S. Geological Survey scientists and researchers at Virginia Tech, the University

of North Carolina and the University of Oregon, show that the number of structures — such as hospitals, airports, water and electricity plants — and roads exposed to frequent flooding will triple in the aftermath of the disaster and it could remain that way for centuries.

When The Big One hits, people living in coastal counties along the Cascadia subduction zone will have to be self-sufficient for at least two weeks — the time it’ll take for external aid to come in, according to county emergency management officials in the Pacific Northwest.

Establishing evacuation plans

The majority of people won’t be able to evacuate, which is why it’s so important for communities to establish strategy ahead of time — especially because, during disasters, people often make irrational decisions because of how emotionally charged they are, so having a set individual plan ahead of time is key, according to Tiffany Brown, Lane County, Ore.’s emergency management manager.

“In that moment, your head isn’t working clearly, and so to what extent you can think about things ahead of time, do so,” Brown said.

“Prepare yourself ahead of time, so that you’re not having to ‘MacGyver’ your way through that very bad day. And one of the key things, yes, physical preparations, but what’s most likely to leave us unhinged in that environment is not knowing where our people are — not knowing where our

loved ones are, if they’re safe.

“So, a big part of preparing emotionally and psychologically is coming up with a communication plan ahead of time about how you’ll reunite with people, how you’ll communicate with them.”

Neighborhood teams

Pierce County, Wash. has established a model of neighborhood emergency teams, in which communities go through a planning process ahead of disasters to determine what hazards and assets it has as far as response, according to Mike Halliday, Pierce County Emergency Management’s public information specialist.

“So, who in your neighborhood has medical training? Who maybe has tools that could be useful for helping do some minor extraction of people from a collapsed structure or who has understanding of how to shut off electrical panels and gas lines?” Halliday said. “And then, who in your neighborhood is going to need extra assistance? The elderly or disabled neighbor — knowing who those people are.

“And then from there, you practice, so that when we have this situation, you’re ready to help your community.”

Evacuation that does occur will likely look like Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, where the goal was to get people far away, as opposed to evacuation to nearby counties, which will likely also be devastated, according to Voss. Vulnerable populations — including the thousands

of people in Multnomah County on dialysis and in assisted living and nursing homes — will have to be airlifted out of the area by the federal government, he said.

While federal recovery support and funding flows in the aftermath of a natural disaster, the on-the-ground work and immediate response is done at the local level, which sets up other counties to be the best frontlines of support when Cascadia ruptures, Voss said.

It will be beneficial to bring in “people from counties across the country who understand the local environment and work in the local environment on an everyday basis,” Voss said. “When we’re asking for law enforcement, I think bringing in state and locals from other counties, that’s the way you want to go. When we’re asking for firefighters, when we’re asking for public works organizations to assist — the best way counties are supported during a big emergency is from other counties.”

Beyond establishing collaborative emergency management plans, counties in Oregon and Washington are working to better prepare for the eventual Big One through grant-funded projects that include seismic retrofitting infrastructure, including hospitals and bridges, and creating resilience hubs.

“It’s a race for time,” Brown said. “And we’re never going to be ready, so it’s really just everybody trying to get done what they can in the meantime.”

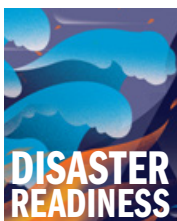
Resilience hubs

King County, Wash. is building resilience hubs, which provide a safe space for resource distribution and communication coordination before, during and after emergencies, and it’s also something Brown said she wants to see implemented in Lane County.

“In my vision, my perfect world of what I see happening in the future, every county is sliced into hubs and regions and locations,” Brown said. “So that we can start encouraging folks to start looking at how they will take care of themselves after an event, whether that’s with our support ahead of time, or them coming up with solutions on their own, a combination of both.”

King County’s preparation work has also included projects that look at “population islands” that would develop in the wake of the earthquake, identifying issues such as roads that would be un-

See BIG ONE pg H7



From BIG ONE pg H6

usable and bridges that would collapse throughout the eight counties in the Puget Sound region; creating connections with the maritime industry to arrange bringing in supplies with the knowledge that traditional, over-the-ground transportation networks will be disrupted and working with local suppliers to get food and other basic necessities to people as quickly as possible after the disaster, according to Brendan McCluskey, director of King County's office of emergency management.

Earthquake-resistant bridges

Multnomah County is in the process of replacing the Burnside Bridge in Portland, making it seismically resilient to better withstand natural disasters, including The Big One. The bridge will be critical infrastructure in emergency response and recovery efforts.

"We are getting better and better prepared, but we also have more than twice the unreinforced masonry that the city of Seattle has," Voss said. "And we're smaller, so we have real risks."

One of those risks is liquefaction. Oregon has no refineries, so about 95% of Multnomah County's fuel comes from Washington through a pipeline, which has a capacity to carry around 350 million gallons, according to Voss.

"To put that in perspective, we're expecting between 100 million and 200 million [gallons] to leak," Voss said. "Exxon Valdez [the 1989 Alaskan oil spill] was 11 million.

"So, you're potentially talking about an environmental disaster that's going to be caused as well. We won't just have the fuel, but a lot of it's going to be in our river or on our land — there's these layering of incidents."

The majority of local government mitigation work is made possible through federal grant funding. FEMA's cancellation of its Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, which provided local governments with funding for hazard mitigation projects that reduce the risks and costs related to natural disasters, has been a rough pill for counties to swallow, according to Brown. Grant funding sources like BRIC are the only way some communities, particularly those that are rural, can even conceive of completing infrastructure projects, she noted.

"With respect to Cascadia, loss of the BRIC funding is huge," Brown said. "They were hard enough to get; we had too few of them already. It's demoralizing in terms of the little progress that we do feel like we're making."

Lane County's small coastal neighbor, Clatsop County, Ore. (with a population of just over 41,100 people), received more than \$20 million in BRIC funding for tsu-

nami and seismic resiliency to retrofit its rural hospital, which is in the tsunami inundation zone. FEMA's cancellation of the BRIC program has left the rural community without funding to complete the project.

The report released by Oregon's emergency management following the 2016 Cascadia Rising exercise scenario, which brought together multi-level government agencies to assess how coordination will work during the natural disaster, stated that Clatsop County will likely have the highest number of tsunami-related injuries and deaths — with an estimated 4,000 casualties in the city of Seaside alone.

Clatsop County Commissioner Mark Kujala, who is also the executive director of the Columbia Memorial Hospital Foundation, co-signed a letter to FEMA earlier this month requesting its original funding agreement for the project.

The hospital is not part of a larger health care network and receives no tax revenue. Outside of the BRIC grant and philanthropic donations, the project is entirely self-funded, with the hospital borrowing funds for capital construction with "substantial" monthly interest, according to Kujala and Erik Thorsen, the hospital's CEO.

"Significant harm to the Clatsop County community will result if grant funds are rescinded from this project that [Columbia Memorial Hospital] has been promised and depended on for almost two years," the letter reads. "We respectfully request your review and approval of obligating the remainder of the grant award. Doing so will enable us to move forward with constructing a resilient, cost-effective facility that will be a model for other vulnerable, coastal communities."

With federal funding sources up in the air, localities can also incentivize homeowners and businesses to do mitigation work. King County and the city of Seattle have special tax program incentives to seismic retrofit buildings, according to McCluskey.

"This is the proverbial, 'How do you eat an elephant?' And it's one by one," Voss said, of mitigation work. "I imagine that at some point, we'll be finished with the Burnside Bridge in a few years, and then we'll be looking toward, 'OK, what's the next one that we try to retrofit or improve?' But it will take us probably decades to be at a point where we'd say, 'Our bridges are going to be in good shape. They will fare well.'

"We're trying to eat this elephant one bite at a time, but you'd like, sometimes, if those bites could be a little bit bigger — it'll get us there a little faster, rather than just nibbling at this thing, because I don't know that we have 300 or 400 more years to prepare." **H**



This diversion inlet will collect flood waters on the Red River south of Fargo and redirect to the west, around developed areas, and back to the river. Photo courtesy of the Army Corps of Engineers

'We were filling 300,000 sandbags for floods'

From FLOODS pg H3

A will and a way

As the flood diversion project nears completion, the Fargo region must survive one more winter before it can reap the benefits of the work that's been done.

"It's likely that all aspects of the project won't be completely done next year, but we'll have a channel that's operable and the control mechanisms that control gates will be operable," Grinberg said. "Whether or not the project is certified as operational in 2027, if we have a flood that spring, nobody's going to stand in the way of opening their gates to protect this community."

The diversion channels will encircle many of the rural residential areas that had been experiencing flooding.

"From a county standpoint on these really large floods, we'll still have some of the rural flooding happen outside of the protected area, we'll still have some roads that get washed out, but by and large, the level of impacts and the effort that the county and definitely the effort that the city of Fargo and Moorhead, Minn. will have to put in is going to be extremely small compared to what we had to do in the past," Benson said.

That will likely be the end of Cass County's prolific sandbag production process. For decades, they were the region's last line of defense against floodwaters.

When the call goes out, volunteers converge on the Fargodome and have been able to fill 250,000 bags in a day, which is what some of the eastern North Dakota floods have called for. Local high school students are held in reserve to be the muscle that places the sandbags on the levees.

"We were filling 300,000 sandbags for some floods and now it will be down to a few thousand," said Cass County Manager Robert Wilson.

The project's completion will mark an era of security and stability for the growing region. In addition to agriculture, kept fertile by the Red River, industrial and commercial projects have fueled consistent population growth.

"We've got some very large businesses in our community and we're driving economic growth for the region, but soon, we won't have to worry about losing huge chunks of the town from a flood," Benson said.

Grinberg said the investment that residents make through the sales tax that is funding the project will come back to them.

"Residents here are paying something close to \$60 million annually in flood insurance premiums to protect their homes," he said.

"If we can remove the threat of flood, that's close to \$60 million that will remain in our local economy." **H**

HotTopics

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AHEAD OF THE STORM: BREAKTHROUGHS IN DISASTER PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT

by Mary Ann Barton
editor

As disasters become more frequent and more costly, counties are getting more creative in ways to prevent or plan for them. The following are some examples of some of those innovative actions, from cutting-edge tech to old-fashioned standbys.

Wildfire technology

"As the founder and chairman of the Douglas County (Colo.) Wildfire Action Collaborative — a coalition I launched after the Chatridge II Fire came within feet of destroying the Backcountry neighborhood in Highlands Ranch — I know just how close we've come to catastrophe," Commissioner Abe Laydon said last month at a press conference to discuss how the county is fighting back.

"That fire was a warning shot, and Douglas County heard it loud and clear," he said. "Today, we are leading Colorado in wildfire defense — and are the only county in the state with a dedicated fire-fighting helicopter and Helitack team on standby 365 days a year."

To ensure the county's access to year-round aerial wildfire support, the Douglas County Board approved a contract for \$1,530,000 in January for a company to provide use of a helicopter to fight wildfires through the end of the year.

Keeping an eye out

In addition to the helicopter, the county also mounted camera stations on 12 cell towers that identify the first signs of smoke and alert emergency responders. The wildfire detection system is funded by utility companies in a public-private partnership with the county.

California also uses cameras to check for wildfires; during a two-month trial period, 77 wildfires were spotted before 911 calls were made, according to a recent report by the *Sonoma County Gazette*.

Using drones for evacuation decisions

In Horry County, S.C., the fire and rescue department is using drones to make evacuation decisions during wildfires.

"For example, here with this fire, the night of the fire, we have four [drones] relay real-time video data back to the incident commanders, so they were able to make real decisions, seeing where the fire was going, what it was doing, what neighbors needed to be evacuated in real time," Captain Mike Rice with Horry County Fire and Rescue told WPDE-TV in



AI-equipped cameras attached to towers were the first to spot the Bear Creek Fire in Douglas County, Colo. Photo courtesy of Douglas County



Amateur radio setup. Photo by Jerry Clayton, Texas Public Radio

March. That's when the county was battling a 2,000-acre wildfire in the region.

"We've been using drones around the perimeter, especially if we need to go check a remote area of the fire using the thermal imaging, and especially in the evening when the sun goes down, we can see where the hotspots are and it saves a lot of time and a lot of manpower," said Rice.

Wildfire app

Watch Duty is a new app for wildfire alerts that has interactive maps allowing users to track evacuation zones, shelter locations, live camera feeds and fire perimeters as well as information about containment on specific fires.

The basic version is free to download, and the non-profit that makes it is funded through donations and subscriptions to advanced and pro versions. The app draws from various official sources of wildfire information. The app is populated with information from a small army of volunteer contributors and staff reporters with firefighting, emergency dispatch and journalism experience who watch wilderness camera live streams and listen in on fire-

fighter radio communications in the field.

Everything old is new again

When it comes to managing disasters, not every new idea is cutting-edge. When the power or cellphone networks fail during disasters, some of the old tried and true ways of communicating become a godsend.

When Hurricane Helene took out power and cellular communication across western North Carolina, first responders were able to stay connected using radio infrastructure.

Many counties are upgrading their existing radio systems to take advantage of new feature sets that make radio even more effective during a disaster.

Illinois's Madison County, for example, is investing \$10 million in a new emergency radio system, and in Pennsylvania, Washington County commissioners recently approved a contract to install a new emergency radio system for first responders.

Amateur radio

Another old-fashioned way of communicating during a disaster, amateur radio or ham radio, also has its proponents. When Hurricane Helene made landfall near Perry, Fla., Sept. 26, as a Category 4 storm with winds of 140 miles per hour, it was the strongest hurricane on record to slam into Florida's Big Bend.

Ham radio operator volunteers were embedded with county officials and at the State Emergency Operations Center. The "hams" passed along more than 100 surface reports that were used by forecasters to make more informed decisions about the storm and helped coordinate com-

munication for relief efforts as the storm moved to the Carolinas.

Ham radio also has its proponents on Capitol Hill. U.S. Senators Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), and Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), recently reintroduced the Amateur Radio Emergency Preparedness Act, which would give amateur radio operators the right to install amateur radio antennas and serve their communities.

Many homeowner associations prevent amateur radio operators from installing outdoor antennas on residential properties. However, this communication method has proven to be essential in emergencies and natural disasters.

The Amateur Radio Emergency Preparedness Act would limit the scenarios in which homeowner associations could ban, prevent or require approval for the installation or use of amateur radio antennas. Among other provisions, this legislation would:

- Prohibit homeowner association rules that prevent or ban amateur radio antennas;
- Clarify the approval process for installing amateur radio antennas; and
- Give amateur radio operators a private right of action.

"They're able to relate real time information about what is happening and give ground truth as far as flooding and tornado activity or whatever," Josh Jonston, director of emergency management with the National Association for Amateur Radio, told Texas Public Radio.

"But they're also able to pass health and welfare traffic or be able to get word out if they know that a family is safe and they've got a family member they're trying to contact." **HT**



WORD
SEARCH

WASHINGTON
COUNTY, ARK.
Created by Mary Ann Barton

T S N O T N I L C T Z Y N D F Q V Q Z U
U Q A I M G B R H C D O B Q B E Y F G I
Y C G F Z Q A G J O R X F E J L T G R T
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AIRPORTS: The county is served by both Drake Field or Fayetteville Municipal Airport in the County and Northwest National Airport in adjacent Benton County.

BEAVER: Beaver Lake, which features 480 miles of shoreline, is partially located in the county. It was completed in 1966 at a cost of \$46.2 million.

CLINTONS: Bill and Hillary Clinton lived in the county and were married there in 1975; the two taught law school at the University of Arkansas School of Law.

COURTHOUSE: The Historic Washington County Courthouse was built in 1904 in the Richardson Romanesque style.

FAYETTEVILLE: The county seat is Fayetteville, named by two commissioners who moved there from Fayetteville, Tenn., which is named for the Marquis de Lafayette.

FULBRIGHT: Sen. J. William Fulbright, the longest serving chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, grew up in the county.

HISTORY: The county was established in 1828.

MOUNTAINS: The county is located in the Ozark Mountains.

NEWSPAPER: The *Northwest Arkansas Times* was first established as *The Democrat* in 1860.

NORTHWEST: The county is located in the northwest corner of Arkansas.

RAZORBACKS: Most county residents are likely big Razorbacks sports fans. The Razorback, a wild hog, is the symbol for the University of Arkansas sports teams.

TRIBES: The area was home to the Osage and Cherokee tribes.

UNIVERSITY: The county is home to the University of Arkansas, founded in 1871; it has a student population of more than 32,000.

VENESIAN: The oldest restaurant in the county is the Venesian Inn, in operation for 78 years. Its specialty dish is spaghetti and fried chicken.

WASHINGTON: The county was named for President George Washington.

Identification caption for CLI Graduates from page 1.

Members of the 2025 County Leadership Institute cohort celebrate the end of a challenging and rewarding three days of dynamic, adaptive leadership training at NACo’s Washington, D.C. office June 4. From left: Macomb County, Mich. Commissioner Antoinette Wallace; Comal County, Texas Commissioner Jen Crownover; Wood County, Ohio Commissioner Craig LaHote; Greene County, Mo. Presiding Commissioner Bob Dixon; Santa Clara County, Calif. Supervisor Susan Ellenberg; Roosevelt County, Mont. Commissioner Gordon Oelkers; Perquimans County, N.C. Commissioner Wallace Nelson; Washoe County, Nev. Commissioner Clara Andriola; Washington County, Utah Commissioner Adam Snow; Niagara County, N.Y. Legislator Jeffrey Elder; Jones County, Ga. Commissioner Sam Kitchens; San Juan County, N.M. Commissioner Terri Fortner; Scott County, Minn. Commissioner Barbara Weckman Brekke; Kansas Association of Counties Deputy Director Jay Hall; Pinal County, Ariz. Supervisor Stephen Miller; Delta County, Colo. Commissioner Wendell Koontz; Thurston County, Wash. Commissioner Carolina Mejia; Uinta County, Wyo. Commissioner Mark Anderson and La Crosse County Wis. Board Chair Tina Tryggestad. Photo by Charlie Ban

PROFILES IN
SERVICE

REBEKAH SNYDER

NACo Board Member
Lake County, Ill. Forest Preserves-
Director, Community Engagement
and Partnerships

Number of years active in NACo: Less than one year
Years in public service: 22
Occupation: Fundraising/External Affairs
Education: BA in Environmental Science, Northwestern University; MA in Environmental Studies, Yale University

The hardest thing I’ve ever done: Train for my first marathon
A dream I have is to: Take a submersible into an abyss.
You’d be surprised to learn that I: Hate the Beatles
The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done is: Skydiving
My favorite way to relax is: Camp with my family



SNYDER

I’m most proud of: Establishing a new, sustainable revenue source for our county agency: A permanent endowment, which is held and managed by our non-profit charitable partner.
Every morning I read: *The New York Times* headlines and Instagram feed

Three people
(living or dead)
I’d invite to
dinner:
Jane Austen,
Franklin D. Roosevelt,
Walter Payton



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NACo’s new career site!
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SPONSORED CONTENT

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES AGAINST INLAND FLOODING

AFFORDABLE NEW FLOOD DETECTION TECHNOLOGY NOW AVAILABLE THROUGH PUBLIC PROMISE PROCUREMENT AND SAFEWARE, INC.

As climate change accelerates, inland flooding from hurricanes and heavy rainstorms is becoming one of the most pressing threats to American communities. While coastal storm surge often dominates headlines, inland flooding now accounts for more than half of all hurricane-related deaths in the U.S. Local governments are increasingly called upon to protect infrastructure, property and lives from these unpredictable and devastating events.

A new tool is now available to help: The Aware Flood Detection System, a cutting-edge solution designed to provide real-time flood monitoring and early warning capabilities.

Inland flooding is no longer a rare or isolated event — it's a recurring crisis. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), nearly 45,000 properties across the United States have been designated as Severe Repetitive Loss Properties, meaning they've flooded multiple times and are at high risk of future damage.

Recent examples include:

- Montpelier, Vt. (2023): Record rainfall caused the Winoski River to overflow, flooding downtown and causing millions in damage.
- Eastern Kentucky (2022): Catastrophic flash flooding killed dozens and destroyed entire neighborhoods in rural mountain communities.
- Hurricane Helene (2024): This Category 4 storm caused catastrophic inland flooding across Georgia, the Carolinas, and Tennessee, resulting in widespread power outages and dozens of fatalities.
- Washington, D.C., New York City, and Miami: A 2022 WAMU investigation revealed that these cities face a future of frequent and severe flooding due to rising sea levels and more intense rainfall.

The Aware Flood Detection System was developed in close collaboration with the Depart-



ment of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate (DHS S&T). The project began under the DHS Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program, where it was one of three companies selected to develop and field-test flood sensors across six jurisdictions.

Following successful trials



and strong performance evaluations, DHS awarded a \$3.26 million Phase III SBIR contract to finalize development and scale production of the Aware system for nationwide deployment.

The system features:

- Solar-powered, IoT-enabled sensors that monitor water levels in real time
- Wireless communication via cellular or satellite networks
- Rapid deployment in both urban and rural areas without major infrastructure
- Optional modules like precipitation gauges and cameras for enhanced situational awareness

The sensors are now being produced at scale, with capacity to manufacture up to 1,000 units per week, ensuring rapid availability for state and local governments.

The Aware system is built to withstand extreme weather

and deliver reliable, actionable data to emergency managers. It integrates seamlessly with existing emergency management platforms and supports early warning alerts to mobile devices and public safety systems.

To make this technology more accessible, Aware Flood Detection is now available through Public Promise Procurement's cooperative contract with Safeware, Inc.. This allows public agencies to acquire this technology immediately at pre-negotiated rates, through a competitively bid contract led by Cobb County, Georg.

Safeware, a trusted partner in supporting emergency preparedness, ensures that local governments can quickly and legally acquire Aware systems to pro-

tect their communities.

As stewards of public safety, local officials must act decisively to prepare for the realities of a changing climate. The Aware Flood Detection System offers a proactive, data-driven approach to flood resilience — empowering municipalities to act before disaster strikes. For more information about the Public Promise Procurement Safeware contract, scan the QR code here to watch the webinar, "Eyes on the Surge: Harnessing AWARE Flood Sensors via NACo PPP-Safeware for Hurricane Readiness & Rapid Recovery," National Association of Counties.



To learn more, visit the Public Promise Procurement website at www.publicpromiseprocurement.org or reach out directly to Safeware, Inc.

BRIGHT IDEAS | ORANGE COUNTY, FLA.

Airport's Unclaimed Lost and Found Items Repurposed at Florida County Animal Shelter

PROBLEM: Items left behind at the airport were going unclaimed.

SOLUTION: The items get a new life at the county animal shelter, where staff and volunteers make new uses out of many of the donated items.

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Broward County, Fla. is giving new life to items left behind at the airport. Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport staff donate its lost and found collection to Broward County Animal Care, which repurposes items like blankets, towels and clothing into toys for the rescue animals in its shelter.

The airport donates its lost and found collection to Animal Care every three months, and more than 30 large boxes or bags of unclaimed items have been donated since the partnership's inception, according to Arlene Satchell, Broward County Aviation Department's public information officer.

"Our efforts are always to reunite people with their lost items," Satchell said. "But if they're unclaimed after 30 days, then we have to find new life for them in various ways."

"... By donating these unclaimed materials, the Broward County Aviation Department-Animal Care partnership extends their life cycles by repurposing them into caregiving and enrichment products to benefit Broward County's homeless animals."

Amanda Butler, Animal Care's outreach coordinator, gave a demonstration to WPLG-TV, a news station in the community, on how staff repurpose the items.

She cut donated bedsheets into strips and braided them into a rope toy.

"People travel with crazy things," said Attiyya Atkins, Broward County Animal Care's



Amanda Butler, Broward County Animal Care's outreach coordinator (left), braids bedsheets donated from Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport's lost and found, transforming them into a toy for the shelter's dogs. Photo courtesy of Arlene Satchell

public information officer at the time. "So, this was a sheet that was in the lost and found, donated by the aviation department, and we're going to show how we turn it into something that's useful for the dogs."

Donated blankets are also used as bedding for the shelter animals' comfort, according to Satchell. Other lost and found items donated to Animal Care include apparel, comforters, dog leashes and collars, pet strollers, bowls and pet food.

The partnership has allowed Animal Care, which has limited resources, to fill in other funding gaps it has, according to Satchell. Hundreds of toys and accessories have been created out of the items for animals in need.

"The agency continually embraces ways to involve the



community in its pet care regimen through volunteer recruitment, adoption, donations and fostering events, such as baby showers for kittens," Satchell

said. "With the shelter often operating at full intake capacity, there is a growing need for donated items to help offset its operational needs."

The donations not only benefit animals in need but also cut down on unnecessary waste for the county, according to Satchell.

"The program serves a key sustainability and environmentally friendly function by redirecting items from potentially ending up in landfills," she said.

The partnership initially came about in 2018 from a conversation between Animal Care and Aviation Department staff and has "blossomed into a formal and structured interagency collaboration" since the pandemic, with Animal Care's growing need for cost-effective pet-care items and the airport's desire to find more sustainable and recyclable options for the left-behind items, Satchell said.

"For both Broward County agencies, the lost and found donation partnership is a way to foster collaboration among government entities, help solve mutual challenges to further county goals and educate the local community about their respective roles, programs and services," she said. **CN**

The program earned Broward County the Best in Category Achievement Award last year in the County Administration and Management category.

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE

ALABAMA

The Tuskegee News, a 160-year-old newspaper in Tuskegee, Ala., has been **saved from potential closure** after the owner retired thanks to the intervention of the **MACON COUNTY** Economic Development Authority. When no private buyers emerged, MCEDA Director Joe Turnham — an eight-year contributor to the paper — took the lead, facilitating its purchase through a newly formed entity, Tuskegee Media LLC. Turnham emphasized the importance of preserving the newspaper as the voice of Macon County and a key driver of local economic momentum.

Ellen McNair, secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce, hailed the initiative as a model for community-focused innovation, noting that local journalism is essential to a thriving economy. Turnham's action stands out amid the rising number of U.S. counties becoming news deserts, highlighting the critical role of local media in rural America.



CALIFORNIA

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY is continuing its **transition to EVs** "pretty aggressively," in the words of Garrett Wong, the county sustainability division manager, the Santa Barbara Independent reported. The county is not relying on any federal funds to support the transition.

IDAHO

In late May, paramedic Ashley Lynn helped a man call 988 — the Idaho crisis and suicide hotline — and stayed with him until more help arrived.

A paramedic for 20 years, Lynn is leading a new program in rural **WASHINGTON COUNTY** that's meant to help steer people experiencing **mental health issues** or searching for help for others toward the best resources, the Idaho Capital Sun reported. They hope the new program also frees up resources for ambulances and law enforcement.

"The two worst places for someone in crisis to go is the hospital and jail," Lynn said, repeating what she'd heard in crisis intervention training.

It already has momentum, Wong said, backed by funding from the state — including a recent \$4.7 million grant — that is not at risk.

"We all understand that climate change will be combated on a local level," said County Supervisor Laura Capps.

GEORGIA

The **COBB COUNTY** Department of Emergency Communications is stepping up its game by introducing **AI simulations** into its training regimen, according to Hoodline Atlanta News. Trainees encounter intense and unpredictable 911 calls in a risk-free simulated environment, where dynamics — from background noise to distressed callers — are a part

of the onboarding process.

ILLINOIS

The **KANE COUNTY** Board has approved a major upgrade to the Sheriff's Office **bomb detection** capabilities, replacing equipment that has been in use for nearly 27 years. The Sheriff's Office will purchase a new \$350,000 robotic explosive detection system that resembles a dog. The device can climb stairs, open doors and deploy a disruptor to neutralize explosives from a safe distance.

In addition to bomb detection, the "robot dog" will be used in SWAT situations, taking on tasks that could put human lives at risk. With the Kane County bomb squad responding to more than 100 calls

annually, the Sheriff's Office emphasizes the importance of having reliable, cutting-edge tools to protect both deputies and the public.

KANSAS

CRAWFORD COUNTY will serve as a testing ground for a new **AI-driven railroad crossing alert system**, thanks to a \$450,000 grant awarded through the Kansas Transportation Innovation Program, KOAM-TV reported.

The project is one of 20 selected statewide for funding by Gov. Laura Kelly, who announced a total of \$4.5 million in awards to support cutting-edge transportation initiatives across Kansas.

The local project, led by By-

Step LLC and Island Radar Co., aims to improve safety and traffic flow by piloting a blocked railroad crossing alert system. The system will use artificial intelligence and sensor technology to detect blocked crossings and communicate real-time alerts to drivers and traffic management systems.

MICHIGAN

Families can win prizes for **exploring MARQUETTE COUNTY** this summer, WLUC-TV reported. Travel Marquette recently launched the Junior Explorer Pass to drum up



tourism in the county. Residents and visitors can use the pass to check in at seven locations throughout the county and learn about the Leave No Trace principles along the way. They can also win prizes like a patch or a backpack by checking into several locations. The patch features a little "bigfoot" with a hiking stick and backpack.

"It's just a different opportunity to get locals as well as visitors to go around the county and try different and new locations," said Travel Marquette CEO Susan Estler.

MISSISSIPPI

The **RANKIN COUNTY** Board of Supervisors recently voted to pay \$1.5 million to replace its **weather warning system** with 40 new sirens in rural unincorporated parts of the county, WAPT-TV reported. The board identified the need to replace the sirens as a critical priority in the county's public safety.

Director of Rankin County Emergency Operations Center Brian Grantham said, "The citizens of Rankin County expect their leaders to focus on public safety, law enforcement and providing well-planned, well-maintained public infrastructure. I appreciate very much that the supervisors are willing to invest heavily in public safety. One of the critical initiatives that the supervisors identified is our need to



COLORADO

Nearly 40 goats began working earlier this month to clear approximately 3 acres of **invasive weeds** on land that surrounds the **EL PASO COUNTY** Jail, KRDO-TV reported. The county Sheriff's Office said the goats, which are owned by local rancher B3C Show Goats, were set to graze around the jail and its surrounding facilities for the next two weeks.

SHOW GOATS CLEAR THE LAND
EL PASO COUNTY JAIL



MARYLAND

The **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** Department of Transportation has enlisted a robot named Parker to **help patrol a county parking garage**, WTTG-TV reported. The plan is to have it patrol for a year and then potentially expand the program to other garages.

Parker is equipped with 360-degree cameras that can store footage for 30 days and it can also be equipped with license plate readers. If, for example, a stolen car was parked in the garage, Parker could alert police.

County Executive Marc Elrich told WTOP-FM that officials with the Department of Transportation “are making decisions about how it can be used; issues about data will have to be resolved,” referring to the recording and storage of data by the robot.

From NEWS FROM page 10

modernize the outdoor weather siren system.”

NEVADA

A \$5 pet microchipping service is part of a new program by **CLARK COUNTY** to help **keep cats and dogs out of shelters** and with their families, KLAS-TV reported. The new county program is in partnership with three local animal welfare organizations.

“Too many pets are ending up in our shelters and rescues because there is no way to identify where home is for them,” Clark County Commissioner Michael Naft said.

“By making microchipping mandatory and partnering with local non-profits to offer this service at low-cost, we’re making pet safety and animal well-being more accessible.”

OHIO

LORAIN COUNTY Commissioners recently approved an unusual **vehicle exchange agreement** with the **MORGAN COUNTY** Sheriff’s Office – trading a 2021 Ford Explorer police vehicle for a 2012 hovercraft and trailer, Cleveland.com reported.

After Lorain County consulted with the Emergency Management Agency and fire department, they concluded that a hovercraft would be valuable for winter rescues on ponds and Lake Erie, as well as search missions involving individuals with disabilities near water.

SOUTH CAROLINA

RICHLAND COUNTY has become the first county in South Carolina to approve a **hate crime ordinance** which goes into effect next month, aiming to punish individuals

who harm others or their property based on hate.

Councilwoman Tyra Little, who proposed the ordinance, said, “Every push forward, actually shows that the residents and citizens want to see a hate crime bill.” The ordinance makes it illegal to cause harm to a victim or their property based on ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and physical or mental disability, regardless of whether the perception is correct.

TEXAS

This year’s Fourth of July might not go off with a bang after the **EL PASO COUNTY** Commissioners Court **banned specific types of fireworks**, KDBC-TV reported. The commissioners voted to prohibit the sale and use of fireworks known as “skyrockets with sticks” and



VIRGINIA

After six months of controversy over a **data center proposal** in **PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY**, supervisors recently voted down the developer’s application for a needed rezoning — after first voting to deny the company’s request to withdraw the application, Cardinal News reported.

The meeting drew a crowd of hundreds, carrying signs opposing the data center. The shirts read “No Power Plants, No Data Centers in Rural Neighborhoods.”

Board members voted 6-1 against the project because of the proposed layout of the project, the height and profile of the buildings, the expected emissions, the limited benefit of jobs created in the county and the lack of clarity in the proffers and plans.



MINNESOTA

The harder the road to **high school graduation**, the bigger the celebration. A celebration is what drew dozens of gowned and grinning high school seniors together recently at the University of Minnesota’s McNamara Alumni Center, the Star Tribune reported. More than 100 students’ lives had intersected with county services, whether they were teen parents, formerly incarcerated or were part of the foster care system. This was their annual Recognition of Success ceremony, a party thrown every year by **HENNEPIN COUNTY**, the YMCA and Connections to Independence for students who have overcome major obstacles to get to the finish line.

“These youths have gone through trauma and so many things that the world just throws at them,” Hennepin County Commissioner Angela Conley said. “Yet they show up in a cap and gown, and they walk across that stage. That is moving to me. I’m getting chills just thinking about it.”

“missiles with fins” in the unincorporated areas of the county. The decision was made as a precautionary measure due to extremely dry conditions.

UTAH

Rep. Celeste Maloy (R-Utah) has reintroduced a bill, the Public Land Search and Rescue Act, that would create a grant program to **help fund search and rescue operations on federal land**, easing costs for rural counties, *St. George News* reported. The bill would establish a grant program to assist states and counties with the costs of search and rescue activities on land managed by the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

WASHINGTON COUNTY Commissioner Adam Snow said his county “strongly supports” the bill. “Two-thirds of the county is owned by the federal government,” Snow said. “That’s roughly where two-thirds of all our search and rescues take place — on federal land.”

WASHINGTON

CLALLAM COUNTY and Astound Broadband have begun construction on a new partnership that will **bring affordable fiber access** to more than 1,500 homes across the largely rural Northwestern part of The Evergreen State, Broadband Breakfast reported.

The deployment is a joint collaboration between The Public Utility District No. 1 of Clallam County, Astound Broadband and the Northwest Open Access Network (NO-ANet), a nonprofit coalition developed by regional Washington Communications Utility Districts (CUD).

The expansion will provide last-mile fiber access to at least 1,500 new local residents, but will also prioritize bringing fiber to fire houses, schools, libraries, medical clinics, and other key anchor institutions in the county of 78,000.

Send your news to Mary Ann Barton: mbarton@naco.org

Unique county geography attracts uber-athletes

From ADVENTURE page 6

race for the first time, I was struck by the insanity,” said Will Wadelton, who represents the district on the Inyo County Board of Supervisors.

“It highlights the vast size of my county and the huge diversity that we have. We have the highest and lowest point, and in the lower 48, the hottest temperature on record in the shade.”

Though most of the race follows state roads, both ends of the 135-miler include county roads, including the finish at Mount Whitney Portal.

It’s not a major imposition on the county to play host to the event, and besides the road permits for the finish area, the county’s commitment is limited to setting up electronic message boards for the roads, and Wadelton noted that the race organizers usually bring them back to the county’s garages, saving time for the staff.

The runners supply their own teams of volunteers to serve as race crews, driving



Badwater Ultramarathon participants run out of Death Valley, in Inyo County, Calif., in July 2024. Photo by Arnold Begay

alongside in a van or recreational vehicle, providing support and medical care.

The race hasn’t seen any fatalities, despite being held in temperatures regularly topping 120 degrees during the day and rarely dipping below 100 degrees at night.

The entrants are among the best long-distance runners in the world, and must finish within 48 hours. The top finishers have run the distance in under 22 hours on both men and women’s sides, and in 2022, a 77-year-old man, the race’s oldest finisher, did so in just over 48 hours.

“I wanted to get up there to see the finish and I figured if

I got there 24 hours after the start, I’d be safe, but I got there and they said seven people had finished already,” Wadelton said.

The extreme nature of the event limits the number of entrants, but considering the number of runners, crew members and spectators, the visitors fill the hotel rooms and rank among the county’s top 10 events.

“It brings people from all over the world to see what Inyo County is all about,” Wadelton said. “You’ve got European runners and Asian runners coming all the way here and they’ll go home and talk about what they saw here.” **CN**

County invests in juveniles’ lives

From JUVENILES page 5

from the Community Corrections, county attorney’s office, law enforcement, county commissioners, community organizations and more.

Collaboration with partners in the community is exemplified through an innovative workforce development initiative called “Power Within Us.”

This program connects probation-involved youth ages 16-24 with paid job training and educational opportunities through a monetary, incentive-based model.

Participants engage with over 18 community-based organizations offering services such as educational pathways for degree attainment, housing stability, training in trades and construction and more.

Youth receive \$75 for each session attended, with an additional \$50 incentive upon enrolling in a program of their choice. The program has seen measurable success: 53% of participants have been connected to a resource, including 12 youth who


have gone on to college. Once youth are appropriately placed, apart from an initial follow-up by county staff to ensure adequate fit, community partners take the lead, ensuring sustained engagement and improved outcomes.

Initially funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Ramsey County is now exploring new funding options to continue the program, which has proven to be a low-cost, high-reward model with the majority of funds invested in staff and fixed costs such as meeting space, rather than direct payouts to youth.

By reducing unnecessary detention, embracing restorative practices and fostering strong collaboration, Ramsey County has reshaped its juvenile justice system.

Their investment in young people has not only improved outcomes — it has fundamentally changed lives. **CN**

Wilkom is a program associate in NACo’s County Practices and Innovations department.



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and fix gaps to reduce
risk and enhance
safety in your jail
and community.

Correctional Health Care Consulting

Prevent Critical Incidents • Reduce Liability • Improve Care



KEY SERVICE AREAS

Suicide Prevention • Health System Assessment • Contract Monitoring

In-Custody Death Investigations • Medication-Assisted Treatment

RFP/RFQ Development and Support • Training and Education • Health Care Space Design

Contact us at info@NCCHCresources.org or visit NCCHCresources.org