

CROSSROADS

QUARTERLY JOURNAL • **County Road Association of Michigan** • VOLUME 11, ISSUE 4

SUMMER 2026

TOUGH WEATHER. ROUGH ROADS.

First-hand accounts pour in from Michigan's
spring 2026 extreme weather marathon



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50 years and working steady** pg. 38

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Crossroads is a publication of the County Road Association (CRA) of Michigan. The 83 county members of CRA support a safe and efficient county road system in Michigan. The Association is dedicated to helping members promote and maintain a safe, efficient county road right-of-way in rural and urban Michigan.

ON THE COVER

Snuff Country Road over the Hemlock River in Iron County is one of many roads damaged during Michigan's spring 2026 tough weather marathon. Photo courtesy of the **Iron County Road Commission**.

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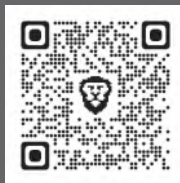
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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



It is an honor to serve as CRA president. I am grateful for the trust placed in me by the membership.

For those I've not yet had the opportunity to meet, I began my career with the **Lenawee County Road Commission** more than 30 years ago as county highway engineer. In 2010, I assumed the role of managing director, a position I continue to hold today.

At the recent CRA Managers Workshop in Petoskey, a familiar theme surfaced as discussions focused on working with townships and new road funding: Every county road agency, much like our township partners, sees itself as unique.

To a degree, that is true. Local politics, road miles, staffing, resources and relationships vary across our 83 agencies.

But beneath those differences, we share the same responsibilities and goals. The work of building and maintaining a safe, reliable transportation network for the people we serve is universal. The context may change, but the mission does not.

That shared mission is especially important as we begin to see the impact of the 2025 Road Funding Package. This historic, bipartisan investment represents a significant step forward for Michigan's county roads and bridges.

Realizing its full benefit will require thoughtful planning, strong partnerships and continued collaboration at every level. The opportunities before us are real, and so is the responsibility to make the most of them.

I look forward to working alongside each of you in the year ahead as we build on this momentum and continue delivering for the communities we serve.

Scott A. Merillat

Scott Merillat, PE

CRA President

Managing Director,
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COVER STORY

The March-April weather marathon: Rough weather, tough on county roads

Bradley Road in Iron County.

Even when you know a natural disaster is headed your way, there's very little that can be done to protect the transportation infrastructure ahead of time. But county road agency professionals are adept at sweeping up after a disaster and getting life back to normal for Michigan residents.

Late winter 2026 was particularly brutal. First, three deadly *winter* tornadoes ripped through Union City and Jonesville near the Michigan-Indiana border on March 6. The nation was transfixed with images of people's houses being swept up in bits over Union Lake. While there was lots of individual impact, counties saw minimal road damage once the downed trees were cleared.

But winter wasn't done with Michigan! Just over a week later, on March 16-17, an ice storm hit a swath of Michigan from Kalkaska and Roscommon

counties through Ogemaw, Alpena and Alcona, bringing flashbacks to the 2025 Northern Michigan ice storm.

That same front took the form of a blizzard that battered the Upper Peninsula from end to end, as well as the Northern Lower Peninsula, from March 13-17. The blizzard piled snow up to 4 feet in some populated areas of the UP, where it was enhanced by lake-effect snow and cold temperatures.

Are we done yet? Nope.

In mid-April, when the weatherman called for a rapid warm-up and rain – that's just what Northern Michigan's county road network *didn't need*.

The April snowmelt, while overdue, put all 83 Michigan counties on a flood watch at the same time. Some were on a flood warning, and some had dam bursts and threats, while others had

sewage system overflows that made the national news.

In the end, Governor Whitmer called three separate States of Emergency in about six weeks, then bundled them into one request for a Presidential Disaster Declaration which was pending in Washington, DC, at press time.

As always, county road agencies answered the call to re-establish transportation in their communities, ensuring that roads and bridges were solid and safe, often working around the clock to get it done.

Crossroads turned to some impacted counties to learn their road challenges in the 2026 spring weather marathon. We salute every county road agency that came through a disaster, provided aid to another county in crisis and kept Michiganders safe.

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Snuff Country Road over the Hemlock River.

IRON COUNTY

Brad Toivonen, superintendent-manager of the **Iron County Road Commission (ICRC)** for the last three years, thought things were going to be OK at first.

“To be honest, we were not doing too bad, and on April 17, I was checking with my neighboring road commissions to see how they were doing with the spring runoff,” Toivonen said. “The forecast

was calling for around ½” of rain that Friday night and, as the day went along, it seemed that the precipitation forecast was lessening.”

“I was concerned that we may have some after-the-fact damage,” Toivonen said, “but I went to bed Friday night thinking it was an average spring thaw. I was actually anticipating waking up to an inch of snow Saturday morning since the temperature was going from the

mid-50s to 27 degrees.”

Mother Nature had other plans. Instead, Iron County received 1.5 inches of rain overnight.

By Saturday morning, Toivonen was getting text messages from people living in the village of Amasa (pop. 300), which was being flooded by the Hemlock River.

“I witnessed this type of flooding back in a 2002 FEMA Federal Disaster Declaration — and this time the river was actually higher,” he said.

Things deteriorated quickly as melting snowpack combined with the heavy rain.

Residents stranded. “Basically, we used everything we had to close off roads affected by the rising Hemlock River,” Toivonen said.

Saturday afternoon, the road commission learned that Deer Lake Road, which serves remote residents north of Amasa, had washed out on the south end. A private logging road that also provided access to those residents was washed out, leaving them stranded.

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Snuff Country Road over the Hemlock River.



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V O L V O





Deer Lake Road along Camp Creek.

“That Saturday night I worked with our county emergency manager to find emergency access. All attempts failed, and the search was aborted until Sunday morning,” he said.

Roads leading to the Deer Lake area from the east and west still had significant snowpack, and a road from neighboring Baraga County had washed out as well.

On Sunday, a Michigan Department of Natural Resources conservation officer found a route into the area using a tracked vehicle, allowing officials to confirm residents were safe and had food and heat. But they still could not drive out of their homes.

Once officials learned the residents had been reached, there was a brief pause of relief. Then Toivonen received word that WE Energies wanted to discuss the capacity of the Way Dam Reservoir.

Another concern soon emerged.

According to Toivonen, engineers were closely monitoring melting snowpack and river flows feeding the reservoir. With an additional 1.5 inches of rain already on the ground and more rain in the forecast, there was concern that water releases from the reservoir could overtop the M-69 bridge in Amasa, resulting in an emergency detour.

“The next day we had another briefing looking at forecasts calling for two more rain events that the National Weather Service was watching very closely,” Toivonen said. “Since we have an MDOT

contract, we began organizing an emergency detour.”

Briefings continued for another week and a half until conditions stabilized.

“WE Energies engineers did a couple of minimal releases that made room for the extra storm events and averted the crisis. Kudos to them!” he said.

Repair efforts proved equally challenging. However, the **Baraga County Road Commission** was able to restore a passable route on April 20, giving Deer Lake residents a way out by vehicle. The alternate route added approximately an hour to some commutes, but it took some pressure off.

Iron County continued attempting repairs to Deer Lake Road, but saturated road bases, lingering frost and seasonal weight restrictions repeatedly halted work.

“We tried again on Friday — a week

after the storm — and again had to shut down,” Toivonen said. “Finally, on April 27, we were able to fix the south crossing and started a second crossing north of that.”

Much work, cost ahead. At press time, ICRC still has one bridge closed, one pending a safety inspection and five culvert failures. Another 13 “scour critical” bridges are awaiting inspection before ICRC can reopen them.

All told, Iron estimates approximately \$380,000 to replace damaged sites — more than six times the FEMA threshold for a Federal Disaster Declaration in that county.

“To repair the impacted culverts and bridges up to current Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy (EGLE) standards, we’re probably around \$4 to \$6 million in damages,” Toivonen concluded.

“To repair the impacted culverts and bridges up to current EGLE standards, we’re probably around \$4 to \$6 million in damages.”

— Brad Toivonen, Iron County

Continued on page 13

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11 Mile Road near 220th Ave. in Lincoln Twp.



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OSCEOLA COUNTY

Mike Mattzela, PE, engineer-manager of the **Osceola County Road Commission** (OCRC) since 2021, also thought it might be a routine – rather than an historic – winter snow melt.

“Even though there were concerns ahead of time with the heavy snowpack and forecasted rain, we really did not realize how significant the situation would become until the flooding actually started occurring,” Mattzela recalled.

OCRC staff took the warnings seriously and prepared the best they could with available information.

“Our crews checked known problem areas, monitored rivers and drainage systems, and made sure equipment and materials were ready to respond,” Mattzela said. “But once the rain and snowmelt combined, the amount of water moving through the county quickly exceeded what many of the systems could handle.”

“We had roads begin overtopping with water, then culverts started failing and several roads began washing away. It became clear very quickly that this was not going to be a typical spring flooding event,” he said. “We also started seeing swamps and low-lying areas fill rapidly, pushing water onto roads and overwhelming drainage systems across the county.”

“ We had at least one road where a large structure failed just minutes after a vehicle had crossed it. ”

– Mike Mattzela, Osceola County

All hands on deck. “Once the flooding started it was immediately ‘all hands on deck,’” he recalled. “Crews were called in right away, including after-hours and weekend response. We began closing roads as quickly as conditions became unsafe and worked to keep the public as safe as possible. At that point, response shifted rapidly from monitoring to emergency operations, with teams actively placing barricades, assessing washouts and trying to stay ahead of rising water where we could.”

Public safety top concern. There were real and immediate public safety risks if prompt action hadn’t been taken. In several cases, conditions deteriorated within minutes.

“We had at least one road where a large structure [culvert] failed just minutes after a vehicle had crossed it. In other situations, culverts washed out – effectively

stranding residents on dead-end roads – or cut off access when one side washed out, and the other became impassable due to deep flooding,” Mattzela said.

“Because of how quickly conditions changed, we were often scrambling to close roads as water rose. In some instances, crews had to physically position themselves to stop traffic until barricades could arrive.”

Some help from our friends.

OCRC received important mutual aid from neighboring counties. **Mecosta County Road Commission** provided additional barricades, and **Kent County Road Commission** sent a trailer by Tuesday loaded with barricades, sandbags and traffic control equipment, like grabber cones, for Osceola and other “Up North” counties.

Continued on page 15

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“That support helped us respond and expanded our ability to close dangerous roads and protect the public during the peak of the flooding,” Mattzela said.

“For Osceola County, the 2026 flood was an historic, countywide disaster,” he said. “Three major river systems flooded simultaneously. The Muskegon River reached the highest crest ever recorded locally. Many roads were closed due to floodwaters overtopping them, failed culverts, washouts and unsafe driving conditions. Several roads were completely washed away.”

Osceola County roads experienced long-term, significant damage especially to gravel road surfaces and drainage infrastructure.

“We lost a substantial amount of gravel from multiple roads, and in some areas it may take several years to fully recover road conditions. In addition, we still have numerous culverts and structures that were damaged or failed entirely, and those repairs and replacements are expected to take one to two years, depending on funding and contractor availability,” Mattzela said.

“ We had to quickly close the road which began to collapse just as a contractor arrived to install permanent barriers. ”

– Ryan Brege, Alpena County

ALPENA COUNTY

Ryan Brege, manager of the **Alpena County Road Commission** (ACRC) is one of a small handful of road commissions that have suffered a triathlon of state-level emergency declarations in the last 13 months.

“I did not have a good take on how things were ‘going south’ until Sunday night. My wife and I were in Florida – about as far away from Michigan as you could get,” Brege said.

About that time, ACRC foreman-on-call **Dwayne Coffman** had called in crews – for a third weather disaster that occurred on a weekend – to close roads that were flooded and to repair washouts.

Brege immediately began the drive back to Michigan, fielding calls along the way.

Close call. “One particularly dangerous example in Alpena County was on a heavily travelled road that the county drain runs along,” Brege said. “The drain began washing out beneath the pavement and we had to quickly close the road which began to collapse just as a contractor arrived to install permanent barriers.”

“When our road was collapsing, I had to quickly find barriers that could not be moved. Of course, I had to do this on Tuesday during the second leg of the 24-hour trip home from Florida,” Brege said.

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Anderson Road between Kirchoff Road and Monaghan Point Road.

“I contacted Team Elmers and coordinated closure and stabilization over the phone (hands-free of course). In just over three hours we went from facing a total loss to temporary stabilization.”

Overall, the main problems in Alpena were road washouts from heavy rains and sinkholes developing due to damaged culverts,” Brege said.

Mutual Aid. By midweek – five days after the rain and warm temperatures kicked in – ACRC realized they had run out of barricades to close roads.

“**Ottawa County Road Commission** delivered barricades to Alpena from their garage and also some picked

some up from the Montcalm County Road Commission.

At press time Brege noted that ACRC was still finding damaged culverts that add to the total cost of their latest natural disaster. “We have one crossing [culvert] that will require a bridge to re-open,” he added.

Lessons learned from the ice storms. Having been in the crosshairs of both the 2025 and 2026 ice storms, Brege has learned a thing or two about disaster preparedness.

“Being a different sort of disaster [a flood] there was a new learning curve,”

he said. “But I do now know that it’s better to call for help sooner than later.”

“One thing we found out fast is that damage from the two recent ice storms in the way of debris seriously compounded our problems with the flood. Debris plugged several culverts, significantly affecting their capacity. Also, debris clogging one of our major creeks definitely contributed to the washed-out crossing.”

“Sadly, the reality for us is that with back-to-back storms, uncertainty whether we’re going to get reimbursed for cleanup and accessibility there really is/was no path to completely prevent debris damage to infrastructure.”



Kurt Koteskey, CCRC truck driver, surveys damage to Richards Road in Wilson Twp.



Peck Road in Wilson Twp.

CHARLEVOIX COUNTY

Pat Weeks, manager of the **Charlevoix County Road Commission (CCRC)**, also included in the '25 and '26 ice storms, reported having 19 roads underwater after the first day of the '26 flooding disaster. When the water pulled back, CCRC found they could make most of the repairs on their own by adding new aggregate, regrading and replacing two culverts. Two roads were severely damaged and must be bid out for reconstruction.

Like Iron County, Charlevoix knew on Saturday morning that they were going to have problems, Weeks said. "When we checked our normal trouble areas we realized that our problems were on a significantly larger scale," he said. CCRC brought in a few staff early on to set up closures but had to wait until the water receded to fully evaluate the situation.

Keeping the public safe. "We had one area (Deer Creek Watershed) where all four roads were under water and impassable. Traffic

had to be routed through a seasonal road until water receded far enough for our crews to assess and make repairs," Weeks said.

Charlevoix also benefitted from inter-agency loans of cones and barricades, which Weeks called a huge help. "Everything we owned was already out on the roads."

Comparing storm events.

Weeks noted that the 2026 flood was very different than the '25 and '26 ice storms and said CCRC always aims to be ready to respond in such an event. "We did gather up signs, barricades, cones, etc., along with making sure equipment was ready," he said.

He doesn't anticipate any serious long-term damage, and expects to have the impacted roads back to decent shape by summer's end.

Total estimated cost for CCRC: About \$360,000 at press time.



Ridge Road in Eveline Twp.

Continued on page 19



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WEXFORD COUNTY

Even after 21 years in engineering and management at the **Wexford County Road Commission** (WCRC), turns out **Karl Hanson**, PE, engineer-manager, had *not* seen it all.

“Normally you have a disaster — the event happens — and then it’s over and you sort through the aftermath,” Hanson said. “But this was like a slow-moving train that keeps coming after you. We had water over the roads already because of the snowmelt and already had some road failures. Then we went into high-speed scramble mode due to warm temperatures and heavy rainfall that lasted two to three weeks.”

In a 60-day period, Wexford received 18 inches of rain, not including the heavy snowfall and snowmelt.

“Water kept coming at us — more roads were failing. The swamps holding

“ This was like a slow-moving train that keeps coming after you. ”

— Karl Hanson, PE, Wexford County

water were restrained by the culvert crossings and lakes restrained by their outflows,” Hanson said. “We are still having culvert failures on paved roads, including five in the last week, with two this past weekend [May 30-31].”

Hanson recalled that Wexford experienced a FEMA-qualifying flood in 2008, when 11 inches of rain fell in six hours.

“That was a completely different flood scenario — the event happened and then the water worked its way through the system. The triage portion lasted

maybe two days and you figured out what roads had failed,” he said.

When did you know it would be bad? “On April 11-12, I saw the forecast and saw where everything already was. I knew we were in trouble,” Hanson said. “On the one hand, there was nothing we could do but plan for the aftermath.

“On the other hand, Wexford has prepared for this for many years because we have a very active culvert replacement policy.

Continued on page 21

cHc

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We've systematically gone through and analyzed our weakest links in the system, and then fixed them. I learned that lesson in 2008: When the system starts to break down, it goes more quickly than you'd think."

Planning for the inevitable. "After 2008, Wexford changed our whole organization and how we did everything," Hanson said. "We re-did a seasonal road out the back side of Lake Mitchell to get residents out in the event of culvert failures and flooding in low areas. That stayed in pretty good condition throughout this April's flood."

The impact of the 2008 flood extended beyond infrastructure improvements.

"2008 just about ruined us financially," Hanson said. "It took two years before we got our first FEMA check that reimbursed our emergency restorations. So, we were cash-poor for a long time."

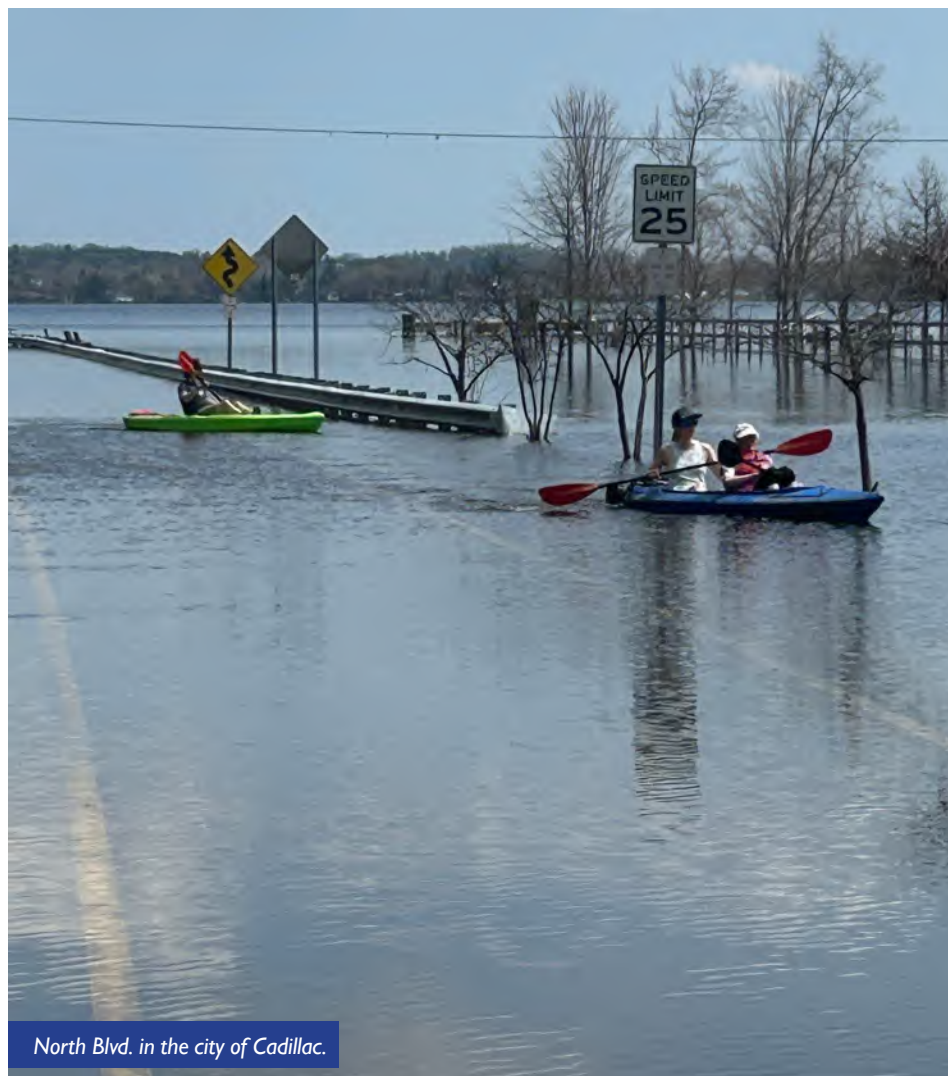
Helping muni partners. Wexford County was particularly hard-hit in the City of Cadillac. One of the city's main pump stations was being flooded by rising lake water, pushing sewage back up through toilets and drains into homes and businesses a mile or more away. Photos showed water in residential streets up to the bottom of stop signs.

Initially, the city tried to use sandbags around the pump station's electrical system to keep the water away, Hanson said. It quickly became obvious that wasn't enough.

"Then they called us at the road commission and asked if they could haul sand



Gravel bridge from a culvert washout.



North Blvd. in the city of Cadillac.

out of our pit. Yet the city didn't have the truck, skills, staff or equipment to do the job," Hanson said. "Our guys were working on our roads, but we had to call some of them off to go work on the sewage pump station. That was a tough decision. We needed them on our system, but we realized that about a third of the City of Cadillac and residents around Lake Mitchell were going to have a very significant sewage problem."

WCRC's skilled equipment operators brought sand to the site and built a berm around the facility over the next 24 hours, allowing the pump station to get one pump running. (photo, p. 19)

Unfortunately, rising lake water began to find a way around the berm and back toward the pump station.

"Then we had to build the berm bigger," Hanson observed.

Road damages, failing culverts, staffing costs and overtime have made this disaster very expensive for Wexford County. While damages were still being discovered at press time, Hanson reported \$1.7 million in damages to the local county road network and another \$1.6 million to the federal-aid system, plus an estimated \$400,000 for the sewer authority and \$800,000 for public structures in Cadillac (excluding private homes) — pushing the disaster over the threshold for a Federal Disaster Declaration.

The County Road Association is currently waiting to learn whether a Presidential Disaster Declaration will be issued for Michigan's marathon run of bad weather in April. If so, FEMA resources, including reimbursement funds for qualifying expenditures, are expected to be released — itself a challenging process. **CRA**

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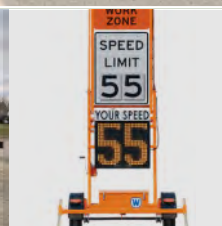
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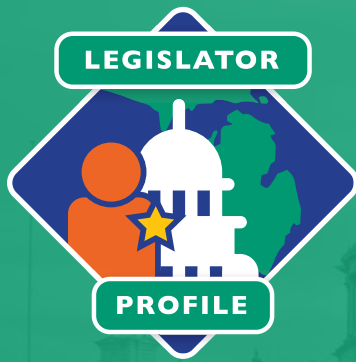
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SEAN McCANN
State Senator | 19th District



State Senator Sean McCann (D-Kalamazoo) represents Michigan's 19th Senate District and has been in the Senate since 2019. He previously was a member of the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners from 2015-2018 and served two terms in the Michigan House of Representatives from 2011-2014.

McCann is vice chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee and a member of the Senate Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee, as well as the Regulatory Affairs Committee and Transportation & Infrastructure Committee.

His legislative work includes efforts related to transportation and disaster relief, including introducing legislation to strengthen the state's disaster fund, increase support for local governments following emergencies and invest in hazard mitigation projects to reduce long-term risks from increasingly frequent and severe weather events.

Crossroads and CRA Chief Deputy and Legislative Director Ed Noyola sat down with Sen. McCann to discuss his priorities on transportation funding and policy, as well as disaster relief.

CRA: Tell us about your background and what led you to become a state lawmaker.

Sen. McCann: I was born and raised in Michigan and developed an early interest in public service while studying political science at Western Michigan University. Through its Capital Internship Program, I worked at the House Fiscal Agency, where I gained firsthand experience with the legislative process.

After graduating, I stayed in Kalamazoo, working in neighborhood revitalization and later serving on the Kalamazoo City Commission. That local experience – focused on infrastructure, community investment and core services – ultimately led me to pursue state office.

I was elected to the State House in 2011 and to the State Senate in 2018.

CRA: What accomplishments are you most proud of during your time in the State Legislature?

Sen. McCann: I'm proud of several accomplishments that have delivered meaningful benefits to Michigan residents, including bipartisan Medicaid expansion and cost-relief measures like expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit and repealing the senior pension tax.

On the infrastructure side, I'm glad we were able to put in place a more sustainable, long-term road funding package. Closer to home, one of my most meaningful achievements was helping secure funding to complete the US 131 Business Loop Connector in Kalamazoo County – a long-standing regional priority that is already improving traffic flow, reducing congestion and supporting economic development.

CRA: Following passage of the 2025 Road Funding Package, what are your priorities for transportation funding and policy moving forward?

Sen. McCann: My priority is making sure we implement it successfully and work closely with local partners, including the County Road Association, to understand what comes next. This is a transition period, and it's important to allow time for the new funding to take hold before pursuing additional policy changes.

Looking ahead, I'm interested in conversations around long-term sustainability, including how we fund transportation as vehicles become more fuel-efficient and electric. Exploring options like mileage-based user fees will be an important part of that discussion.

CRA: This session, you introduced SB 109 to strengthen Michigan's Disaster and Emergency Contingency Fund (DECF) and invest in hazard mitigation. What motivated the bill, and how will it improve disaster response and recovery for local governments?

Continued on page 25



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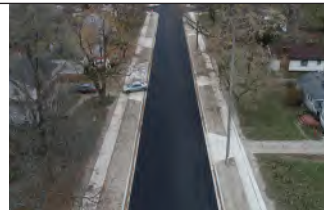
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Sen. McCann: SB 109 was driven in part by a tornado that impacted my district in Portage, where it became clear that existing disaster funding isn't always enough. In many cases, federal assistance and insurance only cover a portion of the damage, leaving local communities to fill the gaps.

The bill increases the DECF cap, from \$10 M to \$75 M, so resources are available when large-scale events occur. It's meant to provide a more reliable funding structure and reduce the need for repeated legislative action to replenish the fund, helping local governments respond more quickly and effectively.

CRA: SB 109 focuses on hazard mitigation. What does that mean in practice and why is it needed?

Sen. McCann: Hazard mitigation is about rebuilding infrastructure in a way that better withstands future disasters. Rather than simply restoring what was

damaged, it means investing in stronger, more resilient systems, whether that's reinforcing structures, upgrading materials or improving design.

As we see more frequent and severe weather events, this approach becomes increasingly important. By building back stronger, we can reduce long-term costs and avoid repeating the same damage when the next disaster occurs.

CRA: From your perspective, would SB 109 work alongside efforts to create a dedicated disaster relief program for county road agencies, and would you support that kind of legislation?

Sen. McCann: I'm open to learning more about that concept and how it might fit alongside SB 109. My focus with this bill is strengthening the state's overall disaster response framework by increasing available funding and improving how we respond to major events, but if there are additional tools to help local road

agencies manage costs not covered by existing programs, that's worth exploring. I'd be interested in how a proposal like that could fit into the broader system we're putting in place.

CRA: What challenges remain for the Legislature, particularly as they relate to transportation policy?

Sen. McCann: One of the biggest challenges is simply the breadth of issues we're dealing with. We cover a lot of ground, so we rely heavily on organizations like the County Road Association and other experts to help inform us and point us in the right direction.

At the same time, when it comes to infrastructure, it really is a bipartisan issue. There's no Republican or Democratic way to fix a pothole – you just fix it. That's what people expect from us. Continuing to listen, learn and work with local partners will be key to delivering on those expectations. **CRA**

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM LANSING

2026 Highway Conference & Road Show | Full Speed Ahead

The 2026 Highway Conference & Road Show brought more than 1,000 county road professionals and industry partners to Lansing for three days of learning, networking and a look at what's ahead for county roads and bridges!

With the historic 2025 Road Funding Package now in place, much of the conversation centered on implementation, timing and how new resources will shape county road agencies in the years ahead.

From the Road Show floor to breakout sessions covering everything from AI and environmental issues to communications and crisis response, the conference delivered a full slate of timely topics and practical takeaways.

From her remarks

Whitmer framed the moment as a turning point for Michigan's transportation network, pointing to the state's nearly \$2 billion annual investment in roads as a direct result of bipartisan collaboration.

"This year marks a new beginning for our shared priority," she said. "It's a big deal – and it's going to make a real difference in people's lives."

She also reflected on what she described as a "long, winding path" to reaching a long-term funding solution – one that required persistence from partners across the state and "in this room."

"For too long, you've had to focus on what you need to do just to get by," she said. "Now we can plan. Now we can dream a bit bigger. It means safer roads, smoother commutes, fewer blown tires and thousands of good-paying jobs tied to local road projects."

Whitmer closed by thanking attendees for their partnership and urging them to keep the momentum going.

"We did something meaningful together," she said. "Now we've got to keep fixing the damn roads!" **CRA**



Gov. Gretchen Whitmer joined the CRA Board for a group photo following her address.



Attendees explore the CRA Road Show, featuring more than 100 vendors at the Lansing Center.



Attendees connect with vendors and colleagues during the Road Show.



A media panel discusses Michigan's political landscape and the 2025 Road Funding package.



Author and journalist John U. Bacon shares the story of the Edmund Fitzgerald and its leadership lessons during his keynote luncheon presentation.



Tom Steinbis, CRA legislative specialist (left), and Ed Noyola, CRA chief deputy and legislative director, walked attendees through the 2025 Road Funding Package and its impact on county road agencies.



Bob Kolt, CEO of Kolt Communications, presenter John Truscott, CEO of Truscott Rossman (off camera, right), on navigating communications in high-stakes situations.

55TH ANNUAL AWARDS SPOTLIGHT

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE ACROSS MICHIGAN'S COUNTY ROAD AGENCIES

CRA's annual Awards Ceremony at the 2026 Highway Conference in March recognized outstanding achievements by county road agency professionals across Michigan. Here are the individuals and agencies who set the standard in 2025!

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

COUNTY ROAD AGENCY

- **Dennis Borchard**, manager, Saginaw County Road Commission
- **John Lindsey**, former managing director, St. Joseph County Road Commission



CRA Board Chair Jerry Byrne (right) congratulates Dennis Borchard on his award.



John Lindsey (left) displays his award with Byrne.

HIGHWAY INDUSTRY

- **Gretchen Whitmer**, Governor of Michigan

MERIT AWARDS

- **Karla Gurski**, Clinton, for outstanding service on the job
- **Jerry Byrne**, Kent, Friends of Transportation Roads+SM Golf Outing organizer
- **Jake Welch**, Barry, Friends of Transportation Roads+SM Golf Outing organizer
- **Brendan Mullane**, Leelanau, Northern Roads+SM Golf Outing organizer
- **Dave Czerniakowski**, Oakland, Urban Roads+SM Golf Outing organizer
- **Chris Cannon**, Shiawassee, Southern Roads+SM Golf Outing organizer
- **Ian Stampfly**, PE, Schoolcraft, County Engineers Workshop organizer
- **Jo Ann McCollum**, Washtenaw, Commissioners Seminar organizer

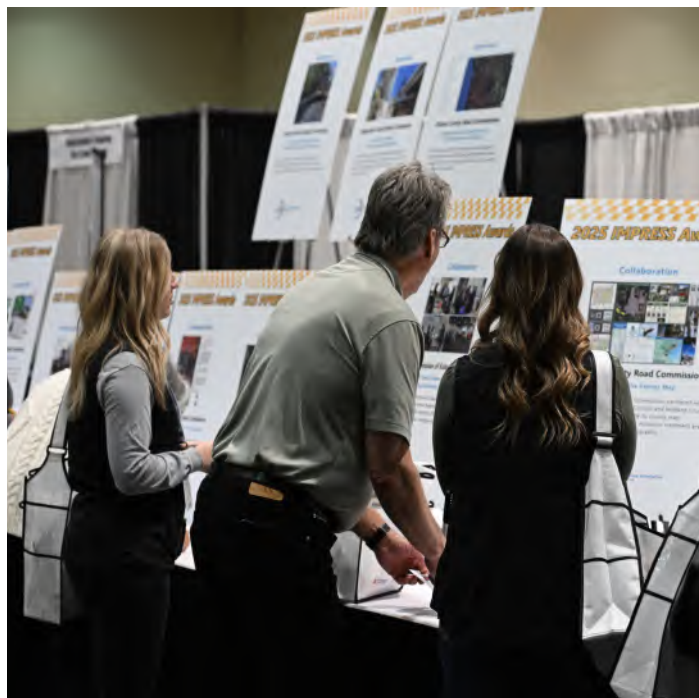
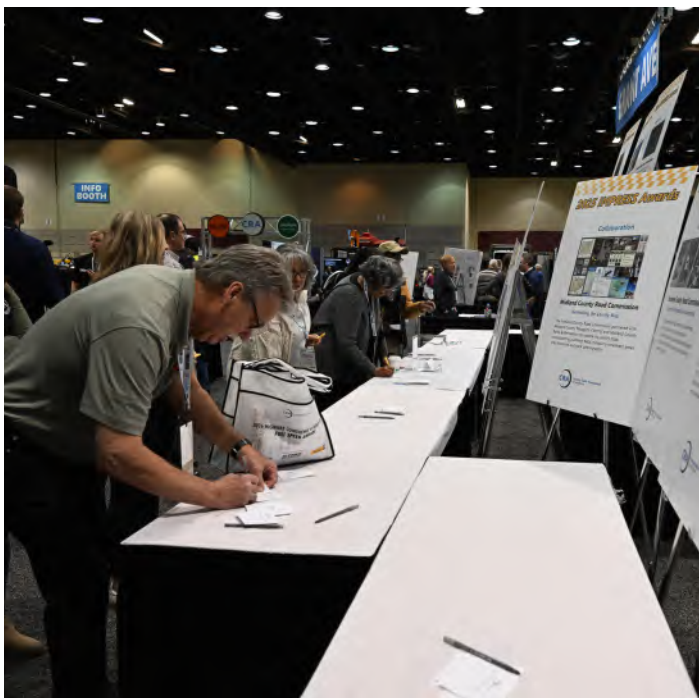


Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (left) accepts the Distinguished Service Highway Industry Award from Byrne. And a "Fixed the Damn Road Funding" plaque.

- **Macy Barcheski**, Kent, Finance and Human Resources Seminar organizer
- **Dawn Solka**, Marquette, Finance and Human Resources Seminar organizer
- **Craig Bryson**, APR, Oakland, Communications Workshop organizer
- **Jennifer Henderson**, JD, Oakland, Legal Issues Symposium organizer



IMPRESS AWARDS



Highway Conference attendees make their voices heard at the Road Show, casting votes for the People's Choice Award winners.

Congratulations to the following counties that earned IMPRESS Awards, recognizing innovation in **Communication**, **Operations** and **Collaboration**.

BARRY

Award in **Operations** for its "Road Warrior Training Series" capturing employee expertise and establishing standardized procedures to improve consistency, communication and efficiency.

GENESEE

Award in **Collaboration** for "Connecting Communities on Genesee Road." Genesee County partnered with the City of Burton, utility companies and contractors to advance a complex Genesee Township project requiring coordination across jurisdictions.

Genesee also earned an Award in in **Communication** for its "Information at the Handle," delivering door hangers directly to residents to provide clear, timely updates on road work.

KALAMAZOO

Award in **Collaboration** for its series of open house events designed to strengthen partnerships with township officials and residents through education, dialogue and collaboration.

Award in **Communication** for the successful launch of "RCKC Chats," a recurring Facebook Live and Zoom discussion series designed to meet residents where they are and encourage open dialogue about local road issues. A **People's Choice Award** winner!

MARQUETTE

Award in **Operations** for its "County Road Bridge 480 Rehabilitation," using an innovative in-house drill rig support system designed and fabricated by staff to address structural deficiencies.

MIDLAND

Award in **Collaboration** for its "Rethinking the County Map." MCRC partnered with Midland County Mosquito Control and Midland County Parks and Recreation to create an updated map incorporating planning data, mosquito treatment areas, trail locations and park photography.

Continued on page 31

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MUSKEGON

Award in **Communication** for its “Winter Operations and Safety Education Series,” helping residents better understand snow removal priorities, what to expect during winter storms and how to drive safely in challenging conditions.

OAKLAND

Award in **Collaboration** for its partnership with the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute to improve a traffic signal timing using an algorithm-based approach.

OCEANA

Award in **Communication** for its “CDL Truck Driver Training Program,” supporting workforce development through funded CDL training tied to a service commitment

Also recognized in **Operations** for its “Paving through Swamp and Celery Flats” project, where crews stabilized deteriorating roads by layering gravel

over existing asphalt before crushing and repaving.

OTTAWA

Award in **Operations** for its “Digital Operations Communication and Field Modernization Initiative,” equipping staff with real-time communication and data-sharing tools to improve coordination and operational awareness.

SAGINAW

Award in **Collaboration** for its “Six-Year Road Millage,” developed with 27 townships to coordinate road planning following voter approval in 2024. This project also earned a **People’s Choice Award**.

Award in **Communication** for its “Bi-Annual Company Newsletter.”

Award in **Operations** for its high-capacity salt barn facilities that improve winter operations and storage efficiency. A **People’s Choice Award** winner!

TUSCOLA

Award in **Operations** for its “Custom Skid Steer Attachment for Efficient Bridge Guardrail Maintenance.” Crews designed and fabricated a tool that allows safer and more efficient cleaning beneath guardrails.

WASHTENAW

Award in **Collaboration** for the “Dexter-Chelsea Road Project,” completed in partnership with the City of Chelsea to overcome long-standing cost-sharing and coordination challenges.

Award in **Communication** for its “Staying Connected” initiatives, strengthening internal communication through Spring Training, Touch-A-Truck and employee appreciation events.

Award in **Operations** for its “Wing Plow Racks,” custom-built using repurposed materials to safely store nearly 75 plows during the off-season.

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PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARDS – JUDGED BY YOU!

These projects earned top votes from Highway Conference attendees:



SAGINAW

Saginaw County Road Commission (SCRC) took home two coveted People's Choice Awards: **Collaboration**, for its "Six-Year Road Millage" project; and **Operations** for its "Salt Barn Facilities." Way to go!

The SCRC team pictured from left: Deb Kestner, commissioner; Rob Hudec, maintenance superintendent; Sarah Gross, administrative assistant; Dennis Borchard, managing director; and Dan Armentrout, PE, engineering director.



KALAMAZOO

Road Commission of Kalamazoo County (RCKC) received a People's Choice Award in **Communication** for its "RCKC Chats," a recurring Facebook Live and Zoom discussion series. Congratulations!

RCKC team pictured from left: Toni Kennedy, commissioner; Randy Thompson, commissioner; Sarah Phillips, communications administrator; Mark Worden, public relations director; Debbie Hill, human resources director; Larry Stehouwer, PE, commission vice chair; Travis Bartholomew, managing director; and David Pawloski, commission chair.

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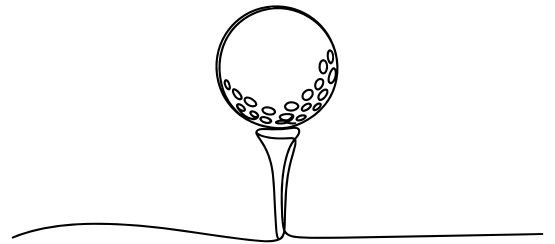


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Peter Stumm is the new engineer assistant at the **Antrim County Road Commission**.

Allen Musall is the new manager of the **Antrim County Road Commission**.

Keith Moore is the new managing director of the **Manistee County Road Commission**.

Caitlyn Sanderson is the new director of human resources for the **Saginaw County Road Commission**.

Kevin Stack, PE, is the new director of engineering for the **St. Joseph County Road Commission**.

Jeff Balkema is the new road maintenance supervisor for the **Oceana County Road Commission**.

Renee Curtis is the new assistant managing director-CFO of the **Oceana County Road Commission**.

Mile Markers →

Ed Shinevarre has retired as superintendent of maintenance for the **Monroe County Road Commission**.

William Gonyon has retired as a commissioner for the **Newaygo County Road Commission**.

Lori Holmes has retired as finance and human resources director for the **Oceana County Road Commission**. **CRA**



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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Steve Whitaker – 50 years and
“working steady” at Eaton County
Road Commission.

When **Steve Whitaker** joined the **Eaton County Road Commission** (ECRC) in 1976, he was simply looking for steady work. At the time, he operated heavy equipment for a private contractor, where winter layoffs were part of the job.

ECRC offered year-round employment, the opportunity to continue operating equipment and the chance to follow in the footsteps of his father, Harold Whitaker, who worked for the agency before him.

Fifty years later, Whitaker is still reporting to work.

“I never thought I’d be here this long,” Whitaker said. “It’s the people and the work – you take pride in what you do, and that keeps you coming back.”

Over five decades, Whitaker has seen nearly every aspect of county road work evolve from equipment and materials to safety features and technology. When he started, the work was far more physical and labor-intensive. Whitaker remembers when 5-yard single-axle trucks were common and crews relied more heavily on manual labor.

“Now machines do a lot of the work,” he said.

Back in his early days, road work often came with a dose of unpredictability – and plenty of memorable stories.

During chip seal operations, Whitaker

recalls crews gathering around the chip spreader while waiting for the tar truck to refill. “It became ‘gossip central’ ... the place to be,” he joked during remarks at his 50-year celebration held at ECRC in March.

Another memory stands out from his time working with a bridge crew. During a lunch break, the crew cooked hot dogs over leftover wood from a bridge deck, unaware the wood had been treated with creosote.

“We built a fire and cooked the hot dogs,” Whitaker recalled with a laugh. “I don’t know how nobody got sick from that!”

While the stories bring humor, Whitaker has also witnessed the more difficult side of the job. He remembers helping clear roads after tornadoes tore through local communities, leaving widespread destruction behind.

“That’s something I’ll never forget,” he said. “You see houses completely gone.”

Over the years, Whitaker has worked through blizzards, ice storms and countless Michigan winters. He points

to the Blizzard of 1978 as one of the most intense periods of his career, with crews working long hours to keep roads passable.

“When the public is told to stay home, we go out,” he said. “It takes a team to get it done.”

That sense of teamwork and responsibility has remained a constant throughout his career and is a big part of what has kept him at ECRC for so long.

Looking back, Whitaker says one of his proudest accomplishments is carrying on the work ethic his father instilled in him.

“A guy always wants his dad to be proud of him,” he said. “He taught me to work hard and always go to work if you’re able to.”

After 50 years with ECRC, Whitaker’s advice to younger workers is simple: Find work you enjoy.

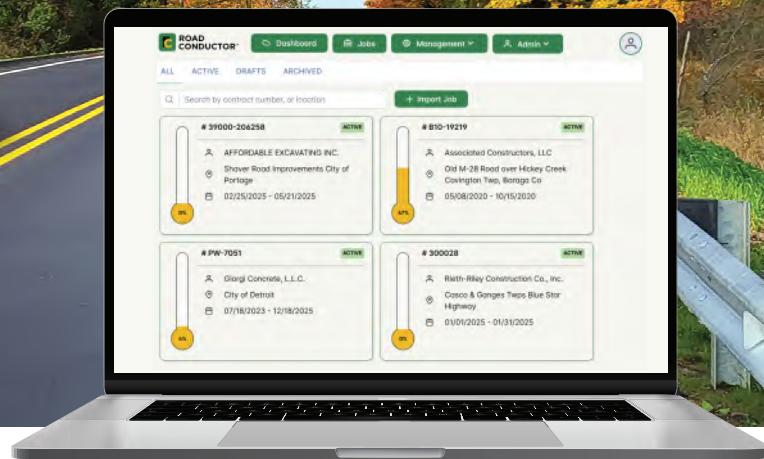
“If you hate going to work in the morning, you’re going to be miserable for a long time,” he said. “Find something you like to do.” **CRA**



Whitaker reflects on his 50 years at ECRC at a celebration held at the road commission in March 2026.

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