

## **“Selling” Stormwater Authorities:**

*Tips for Gaining Community Support*

Eric Eckl  
10/21/2014

### **Agenda**

- About this Project
- Our Top Five Recommendations, Take 1
- Overview of Research
- Our Top Five Recommendations, Take 2
- Sample Outreach Materials
- Q&A

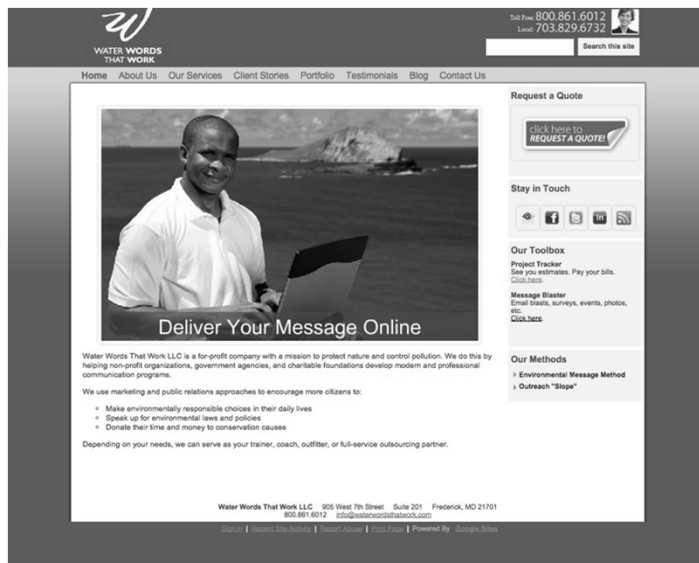
### **About this Project**

- Recognizing that Pennsylvania communities face increasing pressure to manage stormwater and protect residents from floods and pollution, the state legislature passed Act 68 in July, 2013.
- This law authorizes localities to create new stormwater authorities, or add stormwater responsibilities to any existing authorities that serve their residents.

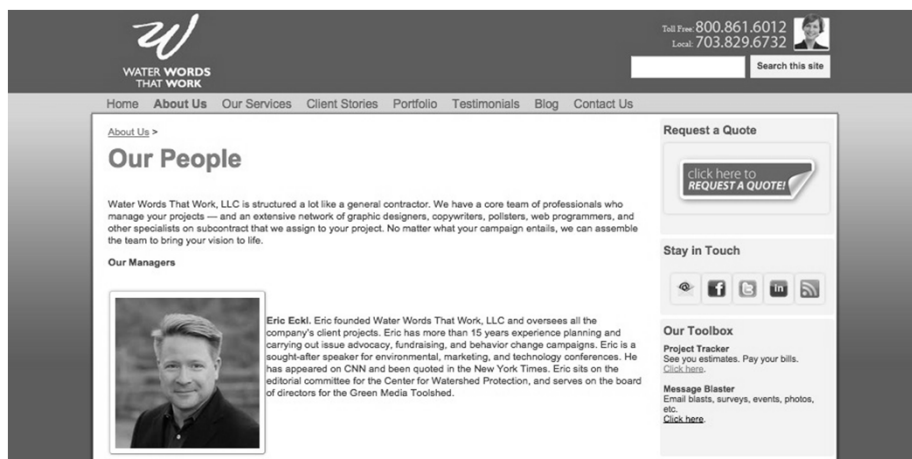
### **About this Project**

- Between June and October 2014, Water Words That Work LLC conducted a series of research projects to explore Pennsylvanians' attitudes towards the issues surrounding stormwater authorities
- Our goal is to help you introduce a stormwater authority to your residents in a way that maximizes their understanding and minimizes unnecessary backlash
- It is not our intention to answer the question "Is a stormwater authority right for my community?"

## About this Project



## About this Project



## About this Project



These organizations contributed funding and/or guidance to the research projects. However, Water Words That Work LLC is solely responsible for the research methods and the conclusions presented here.

## Our Top Five Recommendations: Take 1

If your local government believes a stormwater authority is right for you, here are our top five recommendations securing support of the community:

1. **Call it a “Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Fee” or something similar.** The name should emphasize the benefits rather than describe the problem.
2. **Clearly show ratepayers how the money will be invested.** Most importantly, use “before and after” photos.
3. **Present the fee as a solution to local problems and providing local benefits,** and *not* as a way to meet Chesapeake Bay or other regulatory requirements.
4. **Present the fee in its smallest increment:** (e.g. per household per month) rather than it’s overall target (e.g. \$3 million over 5 years).
5. **Affirm to ratepayers that the money will be used for its stated purposes -**  
- and that the funds will not be “raided” for other priorities.

## Research Highlights

- Survey of Local Government Personnel
- Literature Review
- Survey of Susquehanna basin residents

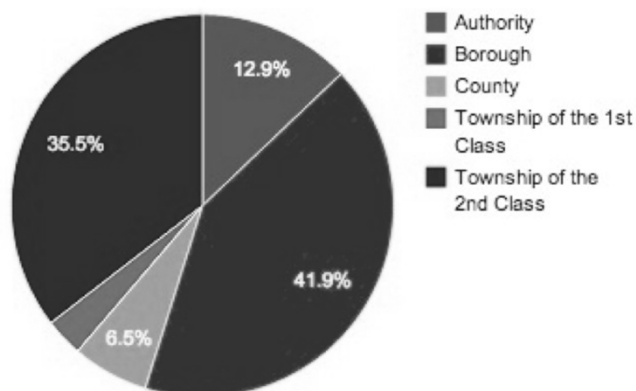
## Local Government Survey



320 Responses. Thank you!

## Local Government Survey

Localities that are currently contemplating a stormwater authority:



Local governments of every variety are giving at least some thought to introducing a stormwater authority.

## Local Government Survey

Six reasons that localities are contemplating authorities:

1. **Funding.** Authorities can use the dollars for stormwater management, comply with state and federal requirements, and match grants.
2. **Maintenance.** Fee dollars can be used to maintain the stormwater system, reducing flooding and water pollution.
3. **Choices.** Fees can be set several ways to best address each community's situation.
4. **Green Infrastructure.** Stormwater funds can be invested in rain gardens, tree planting, wetland construction, stream improvements, etc.
5. **Focus.** Authorities can concentrate activities and funding exclusively on stormwater management, rather than all other responsibilities faced by municipalities.
6. **Compliance.** Many authorities already manage DEP and EPA pollution permits and other regulations that will impact stormwater management responsibilities.

## Local Government Survey

Top reasons that local governments would *not* adopt a stormwater authority:

- Backlash from residents
- Upfront investment to develop the program
- Opposition from businesses/churches/nonprofits
- Higher priorities or lack of interest
- Not sure how much revenue we need to raise
- Difficulty of managing the program once established
- Doubt about our legal authority

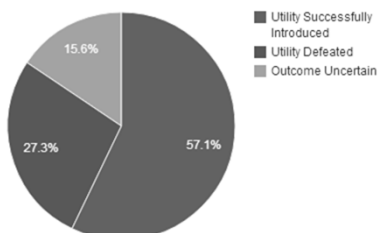
## Literature Review: Overview

77 citations from  
academic studies,  
case studies,  
survey results,  
focus groups,  
feasibility studies,  
etc.



## Literature Review: Highlights

Stormwater Utility Challenge Outcomes



**Organized opposition to stormwater fees is rare.**

Western Kentucky University documented 76 cases where a proposed stormwater utility was actively challenged politically or legally.

*Local governments successfully overcame active opposition 57% of the time.*

Western Kentucky University  
Stormwater Utility Survey  
2013



C. Warren Campbell

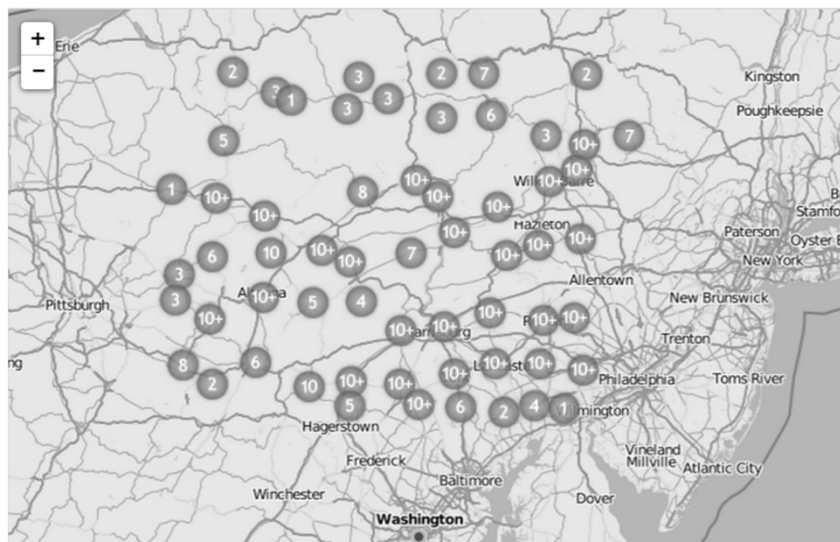
## Literature Review: Readability

Informational Piece	% of Residents with 4 Year College Degree or Higher	Readability Score
Maryland Department of the Environment Stormwater Utility FAQ	36%	22
City of Albany Stormwater Management Program & Stormwater Utility User Fee FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	17%	26
City of Richmond Stormwater Frequently Asked Questions	33.8%	49
City of Fort Worth, Texas Stormwater Utility Fee	26%	59
Johnson City, TN Stormwater Utility Fee FAQ	36%	61

Local governments prepared reading materials suitable for ratepayers generally in only 2 out of the 5 cases that we tested.



## Public Opinion Survey



1,000 Responses from the Susquehanna and Potomac basins

## Top Findings

Community Trait	Average Score
Environment	B-
Recreation	C+
Education	C+
Crime	C
Economy	C+
Transportation	C-
Taxes	C-

Community Trait	Average Score
Drinking Water	B
Water Recreation	B-
Waterways	B-
Sewer	C+
Stormwater or runoff	C
Flooding	C-

The tax issue is a genuine sore spot, but flooding is of equal concern

## Public Opinion Survey



Statement	% Somewhat or Strongly Agree
I see a problem that affects me, my family, or my community	45%
I see a problem that has affected me, my family, or my community in the past	36%
I see a problem may affect me, my family, or my community in the future	56%
My local government has a responsibility to help prevent this problem	68%

## Public Opinion Survey



Statement	% Somewhat or Strongly Agree
I see a problem that affects me, my family, or my community	65%
I see a problem that has affected me, my family, or my community in the past	61%
I see a problem may affect me, my family, or my community in the future	76%
My local government has a responsibility to help prevent this problem	81%

**Residents report that they *care more* about clean water than flooding. But they are more likely to *recognize* and *feel personally impacted* by flooding.**

## Top Findings

...how would you feel if your local officials wanted to create a {stormwater authority} like this where you live?

Disapprove ("Somewhat" or "Strongly")	35%
Neutral	27%
Approve ("Somewhat" or "Strongly")	38%

{stormwater authority}?

Disapprove ("Somewhat" or "Strongly")	19%
Neutral	27%
Approve ("Somewhat" or "Strongly")	53%

Baseline attitudes towards a stormwater authority were evenly split between supporters, opponents, and fence sitters. *But careful messaging moved a majority to support a new fee.*

## Our Top Five Recommendations: Take 2

If your local government believes a stormwater authority is right for you, here are our top five recommendations securing support of the community:

1. **Call it a “Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Fee” or something similar.** The name should emphasize the benefits rather than describe the problem.
2. **Clearly show ratepayers how the money will be invested.** Most importantly, use “before and after” photos.
3. **Present the fee as a solution to local problems and providing local benefits,** and *not* as a way to meet Chesapeake Bay or other regulatory requirements.
4. **Present the fee in its smallest increment:** (e.g. per household per month) rather than it's overall target (e.g. \$3 million over 5 years).
5. **Affirm to ratepayers that the money will be used for its stated purposes -**  
- and that the funds will not be “raided” for other priorities.

### Recommendation #1:

#### Call it a Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Fee

Name	% Answer
Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Fee	51.70%
Stormwater Control Fee	11.70%
Rain Tax	11.70%
Stormwater Authority Fee	7.30%
Stormwater Utility Fee	6.40%
Runoff Management Fee	5.60%
Stormwater System Fee	5.60%

In our survey, Pennsylvanians strongly preferred the name “Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Fee” to all others that we tested.

### **Recommendation #1:**

#### **Call it a Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Fee**

- In our literature, we came across findings that residents are more likely to perceive a system with rates based on property stormwater volume -- with discounts for BMPs such as rain gardens, swales, etc. -- as a fee.
- In contrast, residents are more likely to perceive a flat-fee model, with a fixed amount per property, as a “tax.”

### **Recommendation #2:**

**Clearly show ratepayers how the money will be invested.**

In our literature review, communities that have successfully introduced stormwater fees in the past report using pictures, video, and other types of visual media in their outreach to residents.

## Recommendation #2:

Clearly show ratepayers how the money will be invested.



The best argument for an authority -- before-and-after photos of the work that will be done!

## Recommendation #2:

Clearly show ratepayers how the money will be invested.

...how would you feel if your local officials wanted to create a {stormwater authority} like this where you live?

Disapprove ("Somewhat" or "Strongly")	35%
Neutral	27%
Approve ("Somewhat" or "Strongly")	38%

Now that you see where your dollars would go, how do you feel about a {stormwater authority}?

Disapprove ("Somewhat" or "Strongly")	19%
Neutral	23%
Approve ("Somewhat" or "Strongly")	53%

In our survey, "before and after" photos moved ratepayers' opinions more than any other argument.

### Recommendation #3:

**Present the fee as a solution to local problems  
and providing local benefits**

Here are reasons to SUPPORT a new charge. Rank them from best (on top) to worst (on bottom).

1. **Clean Water.** Your fees will go to clean up water for drinking, recreation, and wildlife (Average Score 2.3)
2. **Fairness.** All properties pay for the pollution and flood control services they receive (Average Score 3.2)
3. **Flood Damage Reduction.** Your fees will be used to protect the community from floods(Average Score 3.2)
4. **Accountability.** Local governments must use the money for pollution and flood prevention (Average Score 3.4)
5. **Economic Development.** The investments create local jobs and improve the business climate (Average Score 4.4)
6. **It's the Law.** The community has a legal responsibility to clean up its waterways somehow (Average Score 5.4)
7. **Chesapeake Bay.** The investments help clean up the Chesapeake Bay downstream from us (Average Score 6)

In our survey, Pennsylvanians rated reasons for an authority between 1 (best reason) and 7 (worst reason)

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### Recommendation #4:

**Present the fee in its smallest possible increment**

From the literature review:

- "Talking about how many millions of dollars a program will cost can make it seem unmanageable. Psychological research concludes that by reframing larger monthly or yearly fee amounts, into smaller time frames, like weekly or daily expenses, people find them more manageable and reasonable."
- "By putting the costs into small monthly and weekly costs per household, large million dollar projects begin to seem manageable. A \$3 million repair to a failing storm drain system isn't as daunting when put in terms of \$5 per household per month. Also, by spreading the costs over the community, you are reminding everyone that "we are all in this together."



## Recommendation #5:

### Affirm to ratepayers that the money will be used for its stated purposes

Here are reasons to OPPOSE a new charge on your water bill. Rank them from best (on top) to worst (on bottom).

1. **Misuse.** Local government will misuse the money it collects (Average Score: 2.58)
2. **Cost.** A few dollars per household per month is too much to pay (Average Score: 3.31)
3. **Other Options.** Local government can find the money somewhere else (Average Score: 3.48)
4. **Slush fund.** Local government will raid the fund for other purpose (Average Score: 4.23)
5. **Permanent.** The fee will be in place forever (Average Score: 4.64)
6. **Not Fair.** Churches, nonprofit organizations, and the poor should not pay this charge (Average Score: 4.73)
7. **Other Priorities.** Local government has bigger problems than pollution and flood control (Average Score: 5.03)

In our survey, residents reported they were substantially more concerned about the prospect that the funds would be misused than the cost itself.

## Sample Outreach Materials

Here are materials we could provide you to brief others. Rank them from most useful (on top) to least (on bottom).

1. Sample brochures or fact sheets for you to customize (Average Score: 1.89)
2. Sample PowerPoint presentations for you to customize (Average Score: 2.73)
3. Compelling photos that you can use on websites and in publications (Average Score: 3.04)
4. Surveys demonstrating residents' support for stormwater authorities (Average Score: 3.41)
5. Sample press releases for you to customize (Average Score: 4.52)
6. Sample blog posts for you to customize (Average Score: 6.00)
7. Sample social media posts for you to customize (Average Score: 6.40)

In our survey, local government representatives asked for a selection of outreach materials that they can **customize and reuse**.

## Sample Outreach Materials

**Stormwater Authorities in Pennsylvania**  
A new option for Pennsylvania local governments to protect your water supplies, reduce flooding, and improve their communities

A new option for Pennsylvania local governments to protect your water supplies, reduce floods, and improve their communities

Recognizing that Pennsylvania communities face increasing pressure to manage stormwater and protect residents from floods and pollution, the state legislature passed Act 68 in July, 2013. This law authorizes localities to create new stormwater authorities, or add stormwater responsibilities to any existing authorities that serve their residents.

The organizations that have created this website are all standing by to you explore this option and determine if it is right for your community. We have prepared the following materials for your use:

- Sample FAQs for you to customize and present to ratepayers
- A collection of photos to illustrate stormwater problems and solutions
- A customizable PowerPoint presentation that you can use to brief community groups and civic organizations

**Market Research**

Document	Description	Size	Version	Time	Author
Stormwater Fee Literature Review.pdf	A review of case studies, market research, and other studies from across the country that shed light on how to successfully introduce a stormwater fee.	839k	v. 2	30 minutes ago	Eric Eckl
Survey of Pennsylvania Local Government Officials.pdf	A survey of 1,000 Pennsylvania residents (Susquehanna and Potomac basins) on their views about stormwater authorities.	188k	v. 2	30 minutes ago	Eric Eckl
Survey of Pennsylvania Residents.pdf	Results of a survey of 320 local government representatives about their views on stormwater authorities.	341k	v. 2	30 minutes ago	Eric Eckl

**Sponsors**

Funding and content for this website, the market research, and outreach materials provided by:

NFWF  
Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds

amec

BSA / LA  
The Authorities

<http://stormwater.pennsylvaniawatersheds.org>

## Sample Outreach Materials

**Market Research**

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NFWF  
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BSA / LA  
The Authorities

PA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

<http://stormwater.pennsylvaniawatersheds.org>

## Sample Outreach Materials

Sample Outreach Materials

<input type="checkbox"/>	Before and After Illustrations.zip <a href="#">View</a> <a href="#">Download</a>	A collection of illustrations that you can use to show residents how their "Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Fee" dollars might be used.	3160 k	v. 3	23 minutes ago	Eric Eckl
<input type="checkbox"/>	FPW_StormwaterAuthorityFAQs_09162014.docx <a href="#">View</a> <a href="#">Download</a>	An FAQ document with suggested language and images to explain to residents how a "Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Fee" might work. You can customize and adapt this FAQ to fit your local situation.	2702 k	v. 2	23 minutes ago	Eric Eckl
<input type="checkbox"/>	Photo Collection Part 1.zip <a href="#">View</a> <a href="#">Download</a>	A collection of photos that you are free to use in any outreach materials that you prepare.	1374 k	v. 2	3 minutes ago	Eric Eckl
<input type="checkbox"/>	Photo Collection Part 2.zip <a href="#">View</a> <a href="#">Download</a>	More photos that you are free to use in any outreach materials that you prepare.	1541 k	v. 2	3 minutes ago	Eric Eckl
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stock PowerPoint to Customize.pptx <a href="#">View</a> <a href="#">Download</a>	A PowerPoint with suggested language and images to explain a "Pollution Control and Flood Reduction Fee" might work. The PowerPoint is on a plain white background, ready for you to customize and adapt to your own purposes.	2826 k	v. 2	23 minutes ago	Eric Eckl

<http://stormwater.pennsylvaniawatersheds.org>

## Sample Outreach Materials

Useful Links

<input type="checkbox"/>	2013 Stormwater Utility Survey <a href="#">View</a>	Western Kentucky University's annual survey of stormwater fees across the country.	Oct 17, 2014, 4:40	Eric Eckl
<input type="checkbox"/>	Low Impact Development Technologies <a href="#">View</a>	The Whole Building Design Guide's introduction to alternative site design strategy.	Oct 17, 2014, 4:43	Eric Eckl
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stormwater Ordinance Compliance Calculator <a href="#">View</a>	A tool for quickly and generally investigating options for stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) for regulated developments.	Oct 17, 2014, 4:42	Eric Eckl

purposes.




<http://stormwater.pennsylvaniawatersheds.org>

## Sample Outreach Materials

**(Name) Stormwater Authority**  
*Frequently Asked Questions*

What is a Stormwater Authority and what will it do?


(Name) Stormwater Authority will be a local government agency that has three related jobs:

Guard the purity of the waterways that provide drinking water. Protect people, property, and roads from flooding. Ensure waterways are clean enough to enjoy and for wildlife to thrive.

What do water pollution and floods have in common?


All floods and most polluted waterways have one thing in common: stormwater runoff.



When rain, sleet, or snow melts faster than it can soak into the ground, the runoff ends up in local waterways. When more runoff reaches these waterways than they can hold, they flood.



Stormwater runoff isn't just muddy. It's dirty, too. Water running off streets and parking lots carries chemical fertilizer, oil, animal waste, and trash into waterways.

It's not very concentrated – but there is a lot of it. Stormwater runoff is the fastest growing type of water pollution in Pennsylvania.





How will (Name) Stormwater Authority prevent pollution and floods?



(Name) Stormwater Authority will invest in projects that control stormwater runoff. Here are a few examples:

Current conditions: Storm sewer pipes are clogged, broken, or corroded, so they handle less water runoff. Improved stormwater management: Storm sewer pipes can handle larger volumes of water runoff, reducing pollution and floods.

Current conditions: Rain falls onto streets and sidewalks. Most of it becomes runoff. Improved stormwater management: Rain falls into trees and other green areas, so less of it becomes runoff.

Current conditions: Eroding streambanks fill streams with mud, and these streams flood more quickly. Improved stormwater management: Reversed stream banks retain their soil and the streams flood less often.

## Frequently Asked Questions

## Sample Outreach Materials

How will (Name) Stormwater Authority prevent pollution and floods?

(Name) Stormwater Authority will invest in projects that control stormwater runoff. Here are a few examples:



Current conditions: Storm sewer pipes are clogged, broken, or corroded, so they handle less water runoff.



Improved stormwater management: Storm sewer pipes can handle larger volumes of water runoff, reducing pollution and floods.



Current conditions: Rain falls onto streets and sidewalks. Most of it becomes runoff.



Improved stormwater management: Rain falls into trees and other green areas, so less of it becomes runoff.

The FAQs include “before and after” images

## Sample Outreach Materials


(Name) Stormwater Authority will achieve the following goal over the next five years:

- Replace and improve xx miles of storm sewer pipe
- Restore XX acres of eroded shoreline
- Plant XX trees

How much will these investments cost me? How will you calculate my fair share?

The average fee works out to about \$(some amount) per household per month. It is low because all properties pay it. The small amounts add up. The total will be enough to make real investments that will make a difference.

Fees can be flat by category, or we can calculate each individual property's fee using a formula that accounts for the size of the property and the amount of hard surfaces – pavement, asphalt, roofs – that cause water runoff.



Why is this a fair way to calculate the fee?

This is fair because properties that create more stormwater runoff pay more, and properties that create less stormwater runoff pay less.

Eric Eckl 9/17/14 1:49 AM  
Comment: Each locality can put their own goals here

Eric Eckl 9/18/14 2:37 PM  
Comment: Each locality can customize the amount




Eric Eckl 10/2/14 10:40 PM  
Comment: Each locality can customize the description of how the fee is calculated

The FAQs have many sections designed for you to customize with local information.

## Sample Outreach Materials

How can I reduce my fee?

You can reduce your fee by reducing the amount of stormwater flowing from your property. We have a credit system in place that rewards property owners for taking the following steps:

	Attaching a rain barrel to a downspout (description of credit)
	Creating a rain garden (description of credit)
	Planting a shade tree (description of credit)

Eric Eckl 10/2/14 10:42 PM  
Comment: Localities can modify or remove this section, depending on the fee structure they propose.

The FAQ includes a section on credits. You can modify or remove this section depending on the structure you ultimately adopt.

## Sample Outreach Materials

### **{Name} Stormwater Authority**

This sample PowerPoint is provided for you to place on your local government's template and customize for the purpose of briefing civic groups and others in your community.

Sample PowerPoint: Ready for you to add your own logo and modify content.

## Sample Outreach Materials

### **What kind of flooding problems do we have here?**

Here are a few examples of local flooding problems we want to address:



- Recent examples of flooding
- Recent examples of flooding

Picture of local flood in your area

The PowerPoint has a number of slides where we recommend that you drop in your own photos.

## Sample Outreach Materials

How will {Name} Stormwater Authority prevent pollution and flooding?

Current Situation	Improved Stormwater Management
	
Current Situation: Many storm sewer pipes are clogged or corroded, so they handle less water runoff.	Improved stormwater management: Storm sewer pipes can handle larger volumes of water runoff.

The PowerPoint uses “before and after” illustrations.

## Sample Outreach Materials

How will {Name} Stormwater Authority prevent pollution and flooding?

{Name} Stormwater Authority will achieve the following goal over the next five years:

- Replace and improve xx miles of storm sewer pipe
- Restore XX acres of eroded streambank
- Plant XX trees

The PowerPoint has a number of slides where you would add information about your particular situation

## Sample Outreach Materials



Download and use our “Before and After” illustrations however you wish.

## Sample Outreach Materials



Download and use our photo collection however you wish.



**Download the research reports and sample  
outreach materials at:  
<http://stormwater.pennsylvaniawatersheds.org>**

**Q&A**