

*The Monthly Dirt & The Rain Events Present*  
250TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION  
**DIRT IN AMERICAN HISTORY**



**A 250th  
Commemorative  
Edition**

In honor of our country's semiquincentennial, let's take a journey through American history, happenings, folklore, terminology, and more from a storm water perspective. And while there are so many historical moments which have defined storm water in the United States – the Cuyahoga River fire in 1969, the formation of the EPA in 1970, all the explorers and conservationists who saw the beauty of our land and fought to preserve it for generations – John Muir, Teddy Roosevelt, and many more; for this month's commemorative edition of **The Rain Events**, we are going to focus rather on little known, famous, or interesting facts about dirt, mud, and erosion throughout the course of history here in America. Much has been said about how storm water regulations have evolved over time, so for this newsletter we will be taking a lighthearted approach to one of storm water's biggest sources of pollution—all things dirt.

Whether you are standing in awe at the rim of the Grand Canyon looking at all the layers of rock



and soil that has been eroded, exposing beautiful layers of history below the surface we walk on every day, or admiring Yellowstone National Park's mud pots which

ooze and bubble hot mud in a very peculiar way, you are admiring dirt and mud. It's a big part of our country's landscape, history, and



traditions. Whether you're enjoying an off-roading mudding event or browsing items for sale at the legendary Lancaster Amish Mud Sales or searching for wild clay to turn into beautiful pottery pieces; you are not only admiring the mud but becoming active participants in using it. Not to mention the folklore tales about



characters like Paul Bunyon and his prints in the mud which supposedly turned into lakes and rivers across the country, or the speculation that



your everyday cup of mud (coffee) supposedly got dubbed that by miners and cowboys during the Great Frontier Period who made coffee the consistency and taste of the mud they worked tirelessly around day in and day out.

Have you ever heard the phrase, "**his name is mud**"? While some may speculate that this phrase simply means that his name means nothing of significance or that it is just a disparaging comment, others speculate that this phrase originated after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. After John Wilkes Booth shot President Lincoln on April 14, 1865, he broke his leg



during his escape. Riding from Washington DC he entered the town of Bryantown and sought medical attention at the home of Doctor Samuel Mudd in the early morning hours. Doctor Mudd patched him up and allowed him to spend the night at his house. In the days that followed, Samuel Mudd was arrested as a conspirator in Booth's assassination plot. However, Doctor Samuel Mudd was pardoned in 1869 by President Johnson as being a victim of hysteria and that he didn't actually know what had happened or whom he was offering medical aide to. But sadly, the damage was done to his reputation, and the name Mudd was linked to disgrace. However, as plausible as that explanation sounds of the origin of the phrase, the saying predates Samuel Mudd's incident several decades by appearing in the book *A Dictionary of the Turf* published in 1823 by John Badcock. Where he defines mud as being a "stupid twaddling fellow".



"The Dirty Thirties" later dubbed **The Dust**



**Bowl** by news editor Edward Stanley of the Kansas City Associated Press in 1935 was an infamous erosional disaster in American history which has ramifications even to this present day in how we implement erosion and sediment



controls. With the Homestead Act of 1862, the end of the Civil War in 1865, and the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869, migrants and immigrants started moving and settling into the Great Plains region of the United States. And while this region can have very good wet periods and make great fertile farming areas, the climate has the tendency to swing the opposite way and become a dry and barren wasteland. Such was the case in 1909 when the Enlarged Homestead Act was passed to give settlers even more land in that region to allow them to profitably ranch



and farm the area during dry periods. However, the farmers used poor soil management and stewardship, expanded their farms and exposed soil areas just as the wet cycle was about to turn from ideal to things nightmare are made of. During the drought of the 1930s, the unanchored soil due to the removal of all the deep-rooted prairie grass in plowed fields which turned into dust which in turn became overpowering, billowing, forceful clouds which traveled great distances at speeds up to 60mph, stripping the land of its fertile topsoil and making life miserable, dangerous, and



depressing. The Dust Bowl affected 100 million acres in the Texas Panhandle and Oklahoma Panhandle and surrounding areas of New Mexico, Colorado, and Kansas. They say these dust storm clouds would reach places as far east and north as Boston, Cleveland, New York City and Washington DC. And in the winter of 1934-1935, red snow fell in New England from the erosional disaster of the Great Plains. In May 1934, a two-day dust storm removed massive amounts of topsoil in one of the worst storms of The Dust Bowl and deposited 12 million pounds of dust



in Chicago. It was a hard lesson to learn about proper erosion control and farming techniques, but from The Dust Bowl was born the Soil Conservation Service which is today known as Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Which in turned lead to the creation of the equations you might be familiar with – RUSLE, formerly known as USLE.

Did you know that according to Rule 4.01(c) in the Official Major League Baseball Rules it reads *“The umpire shall inspect the baseballs and ensure they are regulation baseballs and that they are properly rubbed so that the gloss is removed.”*? What does that have to do with mud you may ask? Well, after Cleveland’s Ray Chapman died in 1920 from being hit in the head with a pitched ball, the game made efforts to improve the safety of the players. Pitchers weren’t able to get a grip on new shiny baseballs, and hitters were sometimes blinded by the sun reflecting off the white surface of the ball. In July 1929, National League President John Heydler issued an edict to all the umpires to treat new baseballs with dirt as a way of giving pitchers a firmer grip on the ball and as a way to lessen the glare of the ball’s cover. But there were no original methods or regulations for carrying out this edict. Some umpires used tobacco juice, shoe polish, or the dirt from around homeplate to scuff the baseballs. That is until Lena Blackburne, an eight-year veteran of the big leagues, and at the time a third base coach with the Philadelphia Athletics came up with the perfect solution. As a kid, Lena discovered a very special mud when exploring the creeks and rivers near his childhood home in



southern New Jersey. This inky black and sticky mud was found where two streams came together and filtered the

mud into a super fine substance. When he was a kid playing baseball, he and the kids would use mud on their baseballs when they were lucky enough to get a new one. With memories of his childhood and his passion for the sport, Lena began harvesting this special mud and adding a secret ingredient which would de-gloss new baseballs without damaging the ball or staining it too much. Lena gave a can of it to American League umpire Harry Geisel, and not long after that began selling his special



mud at first to the Junior Circuit and later in the 1950s to the National League. This secret formula was passed down to his childhood friend and his family when Lena passed away. Lena Blackburne Mud is used on all Major League Baseballs to this day - it is the only legally allowed foreign substance to be rubbed on the baseballs.

One of the earliest creative and beneficial uses of dirt in American history is that of using bricks of dirt and sod to build sod houses (or soddies)



in the Great Plains during the 1800s. When the Homestead Act of 1862 opened the Great Plains for settlement with 160-acre allotments, settlers streamed West in search of a better way of life and adventure. And

while some regions – especially those around the Missouri River, had plenty of access to timber for building homes and barns, settlers soon discovered that the further west they went, the







less trees and building material there was. So, they had to get creative. Cutting large blocks from the prairie, settlers stacked these deep-root-bound sod bricks together to form houses and barns. And while it might seem like crude building materials, aside from being made from mud, erodible, and prone to unwanted vermin intrusions, sod structures were actually very protective from summer heat, winter harshness, prairie fires, and even tornadoes. A simple sod house could typically be built in a week for a cost of less than five dollars. While most of these structures have crumbled due to the elements and years, a few original sod houses are still standing today with a few improvements and updates to preserve their history.

Negative campaigning – more often referred to as “mudslinging” is something every person is familiar with when it comes to American politics. And while this tradition of dragging one’s opponent’s reputation through the mud may seem like a modern approach, it actually began



in 1800 during a contested election between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams that had to be decided by the House of Representatives. According to Professor Kerwin Swint, there are “two ‘golden ages’ of negative campaigning: 1864 to 1892, and 1988 to present. The initial round of negative campaigning in American history was driven by post-Civil War politics, the end of Reconstruction, an increasingly corrupt federal government, and a rabid partisan press. The current golden age of mudslinging and dirty politics is driven by huge increase in campaign spending, television advertising, decreased civility in public life, and a muckraking mass media.”<sup>1</sup>

No war in American



history was without its detrimental mud elements as well. Whether it was mud and muck filled trenches in World War I, the horrific muddy battles of Okinawa in 1945 during World War II, or The Mud March in 1863 during the Civil War. Mud made for some horrible battlefield conditions. It made life miserable, created health hazards, and posed dangers to troops and troop movements.



Through drought and mud, recreation or disaster, health benefits or health detriments, this mud and dirt has made the country we enjoy and celebrate today. We say thank you to the men and women who fought hard for our freedom through fields of mud in front of enemy fire, the farmers and migrants who fought to rebuild after an environmental disaster, the settlers and pioneers who explored new lands and opened up new possibilities, the dreamers and doers who preserved the nature and beauty of this nation for generations to come, and to each of you who daily do your part in



history to keep our environment and storm water clean, and keep the mud and dirt where it belongs.

<sup>1</sup> <https://wagner.edu/newsroom/node-239/>



## Did the Boston Tea Party Pollute The Harbor?

In our day-to-day jobs we know we shouldn’t be dumping pollutants into water bodies. So in light of the 250th Anniversary of our country, let’s answer the question at hand. Did the Boston Tea Party cause any water pollution, or was it just really diluted salty tea? Water pollutants which come from tea include BOD/COD, fluoride, aluminum, polyphenols, discoloration from tannins and lignins, pH alteration from natural acids (black tea is acidic 4.9 - 5.5 pH while green tea is slightly caustic with pH up to 10.0), and if the tea is not organic - residual pesticides (but of course pesticides were not present in 1774 because they were not in use).

“In May 1774, a Virginian newspaper suggested the quality of fish caught in Massachusetts waters had deteriorated, possibly because of the Boston Tea Party five months earlier: “Letters from Boston complain much of the taste of their fish being altered. Four or five hundred chests of tea may have so contaminated the water in the Harbour that the fish may have contracted a disorder, not unlike the nervous complaints of the human Body. Should this complaint extend itself as far as the banks of Newfoundland, our Spanish and Portugal fish trade may be much affected by it.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup><https://alphahistory.com/pastpeculiar/1774-boston-tea-party-spoils-taste-of-fish/>

## The Rain Events

Lead Editor: John Teravskis  
QSD/QSP, QISP, CPESC, ToR, IGPTT Participant  
[jteravskis@wgr-sw.com](mailto:jteravskis@wgr-sw.com)  
(209) 334-5363 ext. 110 or (209) 649-0877

Supporting Editors:

Aaron Ortiz, QISP, ToR, [aortiz@wgr-sw.com](mailto:aortiz@wgr-sw.com)  
(209) 334-5363 ext. 114  
Rebekah Burnett, [rburnett@wgr-sw.com](mailto:rburnett@wgr-sw.com)

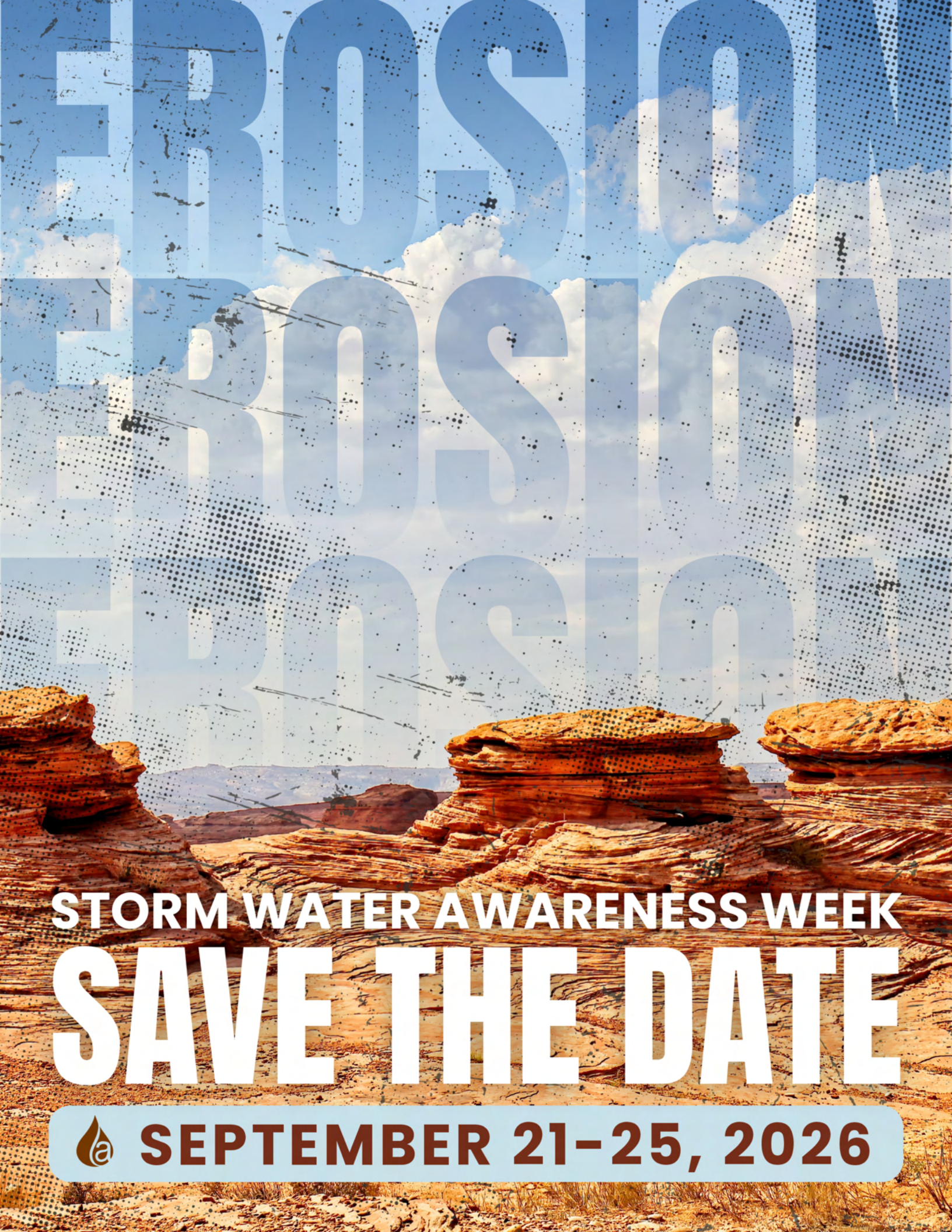
★ CELEBRATING 250 YEARS ★ 1776 - 2026 ★

# INDEPENDENCE DAY

GOD BLESS AMERICA, MY HOME SWEET HOME







EROSION  
EROSION  
EROSION  
EROSION

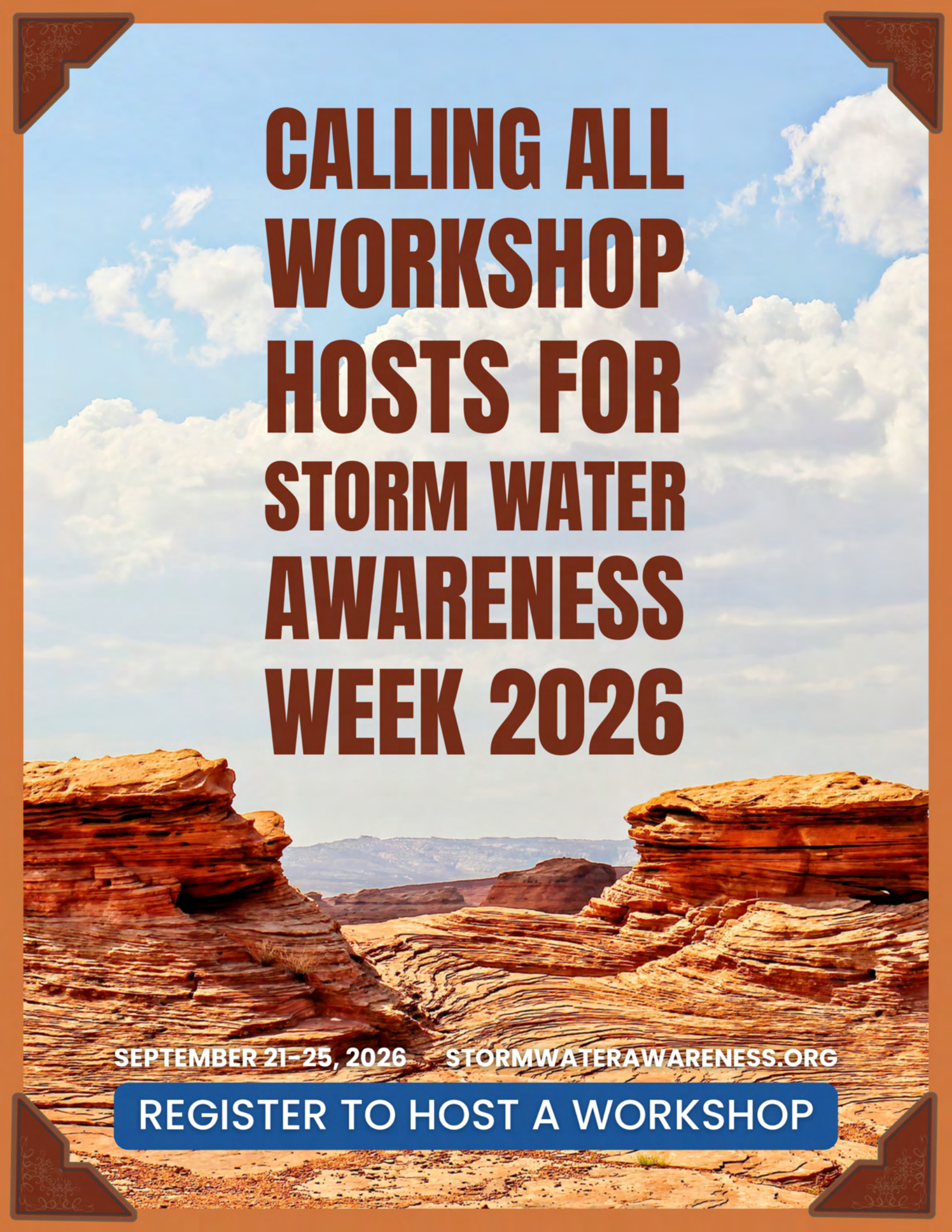
**STORM WATER AWARENESS WEEK**

**SAVE THE DATE**



**SEPTEMBER 21-25, 2026**





# **CALLING ALL WORKSHOP HOSTS FOR STORM WATER AWARENESS WEEK 2026**

**SEPTEMBER 21-25, 2026    [STORMWATERAWARENESS.ORG](https://stormwaterawareness.org)**

**REGISTER TO HOST A WORKSHOP**





FORGE

# SUMMER SAVINGS

**SAVE BIG THIS SUMMER WHEN  
YOU ENROLL IN SELECT COURSES**

*valid 7/1/26 – 7/31/26*

**SHOP THE SALE**

# *Storm Water Contest...*

Each month, we invite our readers to participate in a contest to test their knowledge of the Industrial General Permit and show their storm water compliance program. We enter all submittals to our monthly newsletter question into a drawing and one person is selected at random to receive a \$25 gift card.

*What is the most powerful tool you can utilize in your pollution revolution at your facility?*

Congratulations to Melissa who answered, *"The most powerful tool you can utilize in your pollution revolution at your facility is Best Management Practices - BMPs!"* We hope you enjoy a tasty all American steak dinner at Texas Roadhouse!

## *...This Month's Contest*

*Send us a historic mud/dirt/erosion story or fact that we didn't share in this newsletter!*

We need industrial storm water sleuths to help us with this month's question. Submit your answers by Friday, August 14th. Email your answer to [jteravskis@wgr-sw.com](mailto:jteravskis@wgr-sw.com). One winner will be selected by a random drawing to receive a \$25 gift card to Bass Pro.

**GET SOCIAL:**



[WWW.WGR-SW.COM](http://WWW.WGR-SW.COM)

WANT TO STRENGTHEN YOUR CRAFT? CHECK OUT [FORGE](#) - AN ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORM.