

# Inundated: Great Lakes flooding crises generate national attention



Photo by Nick Hagen/Planet Detroit, "[Climate costs imperils Detroit's unique, diverse Jefferson Chalmers neighborhood](#)", [Inundated](#)

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A nine-inch deluge of record-setting rain struck Chicago in July 2023, leading to one of the worst floods in recent memory.

"It was devastating for our community," Efrain Soriano of Borderless Magazine said during an interview on WTTW, Chicago's PBS station. "Every neighbor that I spoke to was affected by the flooding in some capacity."

Soriano contributed to reporting on [a potential solution](#) for communities disproportionately impacted by flooding problems for "[Inundated](#)," a collaboration from the Institute for Nonprofit News published in August 2023. The project, examining flooding-related issues in Chicago, Milwaukee, Minnesota and Detroit, was made possible with support from the Joyce Foundation.



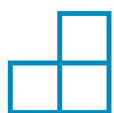
The series featured reporting from six INN member newsrooms, with project editing from Sharon McGowan:

- **Ensia**, a solutions-focused outlet reporting on the changing planet, examined the [perfect storm of flooding vulnerability](#) in cities, rural areas and Indigenous communities across the Great Lakes region;
- **Grist**, dedicated to telling stories of climate solutions and a just future, shared how residents are [addressing issues from a century-long battle](#) with flooding from Lake Michigan that has only worsened from climate change;
- **Wisconsin Watch**, which supports investigative reporting statewide, contributed a new perspective to coverage of [an interstate expansion project that could increase the flood risk](#) for surrounding neighborhoods primarily made up of people of color;
- **Planet Detroit**, designed to inform readers about the environment and public health in Detroit and Michigan, detailed how [financial stress on residents could accelerate gentrification and displacement](#) in a historic area known as “the Venice of Detroit”;
- **Sahan Journal**, reporting for immigrants and communities of color in Minnesota, examined how [climate change has caused increased flooding in the state’s rural and Indigenous communities](#), causing wild rice harvests to suffer;
- **Borderless**, spotlighting immigrants fighting injustice in the Chicago region, built on their [flooding impact analysis](#) for a previous INN collaboration by examining [a program that aims to enlist residents in creating green infrastructure](#). As with their previous reporting, Borderless’ story is available in both English and Spanish.

“As a hyperlocal news organization, we often need to look outside our city and region for solutions to our problems,” Planet Detroit Founder and Editor Nina Ignaczak wrote about the project in [Above the Fold](#) from the Solutions Journalism Network. “That’s what makes collaborative projects like ‘Inundated: Flooding and vulnerable communities in the Great Lakes Region’ so valuable.”

## Local focus, national attention

Series reporting was republished by 30 organizations, including national partners The Guardian and Inside Climate News, and participating journalists were interviewed about their work on NPR’s [Here and Now](#) and [Latino Voices](#) from WTTW Chicago.



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"With the climate crisis, flooding is only going to become a bigger and bigger issue and the Guardian was very happy to be a co-publishing partner on these well-timed and important stories that centered communities that have been hit the worst, but are responding with resilience and hope," said Mark Oliver, environment editor for Guardian US.

The series attracted more than 130,000 unique visitors from the participating newsrooms and national republication partners, plus audiences at 15 additional newsrooms and 13 non-news organizations. It was also featured in [Inside Climate News' newsletter](#), which has 300,000 subscribers.

The project stories were in the top 10 stories by unique visitors on the websites of participating outlets for which data was available, with two newsrooms reporting their series articles were the top stories on their sites. Series reporting by Kari Lydersen for Ensia was featured in a [PBS Climate Virtual Town Hall](#) on flooding, co-hosted by Great Lakes Now and Ideastream.

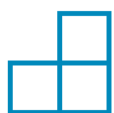
### Lessons learned and looking ahead

Timing was the primary challenge of this project, as reporting took some participants longer than expected and one newsroom experienced a leadership change over the course of the project.

Additional impacts of the reporting on the issues spotlighted in Inundated will take some time to become clear. Series participants are planning to follow up with information for residents on applying for FEMA funds, the progress of the projects covered and how well local governments have delivered on their promised aid to residents impacted by flooding.

Following publication, all newsroom participants indicated they would participate in future INN collaborations.

"We're very likely to participate in future (INN) collaborations because they challenge us to be our best," said Sahan Journal Managing Editor Chao Xiong. "They shake us awake out of the daily haze of running a newsroom. They re-energize us. They remind us that we're part of a vital and thriving nonprofit news ecosystem that's producing great work across the country."



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## Appendix

### Outlets that republished stories

#### *National*

Inside Climate News

[Yes! Magazine](#)

The Guardian

[MSN](#)

#### *Regional*

Great Lakes Now

#### *State/Local*

Cicero Independiente

La Raza

[Minnesota Public Radio](#)

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) (print and online)

WPR (radio)

[Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service](#)

[Milwaukee Courier](#)

[Madison Times](#)

[Urban Milwaukee](#)

[TMJ4 \(online\)](#)

[Channel 3000 \(Madison\)](#)

[WNOV](#)

### Pickup by non-newsroom organizations and individuals

[Capitol Fax](#)

[Daily Kos](#)

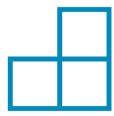
[Democratic Underground](#)

[Giving Compass](#)

[Global Diaspora News](#)

[Industrial Workers of the World](#)

[RadioFree](#)



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[Minnesota Ag Connection](#)

[Newsbreak](#)

[Resilience.org](#)

[Society of Environmental Journalists](#)

[The Good Men Project](#)

- Prominent Milwaukee opinion journalist Dan Shafer [posted](#): "Terrific piece from @WisconsinWatch on how widening I-94 and adding 29 acres of asphalt is going to increase already-high flooding concerns in some of Milwaukee's most diverse neighborhoods. Evers is still making a huge mistake with this project."
- HuffPost Senior Editor Philip Lewis [posted](#): "One of the most unique neighborhoods in Southeast Michigan is known as the 'Venice of Detroit,' an extensive system of canals that cut through the city's east side

Its residents want to stay, but they say they're being pushed out by those who can afford to handle the rising climate costs that come along with living there

'You can't put a price tag on this neighborhood.'"