

Watershed Steward Award

A program to recognize watershed leadership and innovation

How does it work?

The Watershed Steward Award is an annual rotating award program that circulates through the VLAWMO watershed. Nominations based on the current year activities are collected one month before the December Board meeting, final Board meeting of the year. Nominations are reviewed by a panel that consists of VLAWMO staff, Board members (BOD), Technical Commission Members (TEC), and Watershed Action Volunteers (WAV). The winner is announced one week before the Board meeting, with the award presented at the meeting with a photo recognition. Board meetings are held Wednesday evenings at 7pm. If the winner is unable to attend at the time of the meeting, a special photo recognition time will be arranged during working hours.

What does it take to win?

Watershed stewardship actions come in a variety of forms. Eligible nominees display an intentional effort in project construction, community education/outreach, maintenance operations, policy, and planning that strives to both recognize and improve local water resources in the VLAWMO watershed. Examples include:

- **Building stormwater best management practices (BMP's)** such as bio-swales, retention basins, stormwater filters, permeable pavement, native vegetation/prairie restoration, or raingardens. BMP's in public settings are supported by educational signage posted on-site, online, in relevant newsletters, and on social media. Partnerships between organizations and VLAWMO are eligible for nomination, as these support communication and teamwork that is needed for watershed stewardship.
- **Coordinating education/outreach** through intentional and specific campaigns such as pet waste pick-up, water-friendly lawn care education, adopt-a-drain promotion, or other relevant water-focused messages to respective community members and stakeholders. While both are important, this program prioritizes an outdoor surface water focus over indoor/human-use water conservation.
- **Planning with water in mind.** Cities may be nominated for planning stormwater features on the front end of construction and development projects, improving city code or policy to better reflect watershed protection (based on VLAWMO Water Policy). Reflecting VLAWMO's cost-share grant funding programs, award nominations prioritize efforts that go above and beyond basic stormwater standards. Award nominations may be extensions of grant funds received by VLAWMO for cost-share or capital improvement projects. Neighborhood groups or associations may be nominated to recognize improvements in contracted maintenance, allocated budget going towards water resources, or similar relevant efforts.
- **Conducting maintenance and operations** improvements such as Smart Salting staff training and implementation, equipment calibration and/or upgrades to assist smart salting or turf maintenance best practices, or instituting time and training towards maintaining stormwater BMPs such as storm ponds and public raingardens. Contracting for BMP maintenance, improved lawn care maintenance, smart salting, or shoreline restoration maintenance are also eligible, as these display a commitment to allocating budget, time, and communication towards water quality improvement.
- **Volunteer efforts** that are outstanding, ongoing, and connected to VLAWMO projects, events, or efforts. Examples include buckthorn removal days, macroinvertebrate Leaf Pack monitoring, public education events (booth support, community-level stormdrain clean-up, trash pick-up, or adopt-a-drain, and raingarden maintenance).

Who can win the award?

The award is open to cities, townships, businesses, congregations, nonprofits, schools, county or state agencies, homeowners associations, lake associations, and even individuals who are engaged in watershed volunteer efforts. VLAWMO recognizes that watershed leadership occurs on many levels from municipalities to community groups. To accommodate for this diversity, VLAWMO accepts nominations from any resident, group, organization, business, or agency that lives, has an office, or conducts a project within the VLAWMO watershed boundary. View the 25-sq mile watershed boundary at vlawmo.org.

How does one get nominated?

An official nomination form can be found and downloaded at vlawmo.org/get-involved. The form asks for summaries of the project, the hours and time duration, a description of the efforts impact on the watershed, and a quote or summary statement from someone connected to the effort. The nomination period opens each year in November, and closes one week before the VLAWMO December Board meeting. The nomination panel reviews and votes upon a winner to be presented at the December Board meeting. Nominations can be sent to VLAWMO staff through email, snail mail, or dropped off directly at our office within the Vadnais Heights City Hall. Nominations may be made by peers or through self-nomination. If a VLAWMO key personnel (TEC, BOD, WAV) is nominated for the award, that individual(s) must abstain from the nomination review process. VLAWMO reserves the right to contact award nominees for follow-up questions to gather more information and details about the effort, and to use this insight in the award review process.

What happens when someone wins?

The winner keeps the physical award (pictured below) on display at their city hall or office until December of the following year. VLAWMO will have the winner's name or organization etched onto the award with the year of the recognition. Name etchings will continue to accumulate on the award to grow the story of watershed stewardship. A more detailed record of award winning efforts complete with photos will be posted on the VLAWMO website under "Get Involved." In addition to hosting the award for the year, the main contact under the nomination will receive a dinner certificate at a local restaurant.

Winners are encouraged to announce and promote their accomplishment and the efforts behind it to their community as an educational tool. VLAWMO staff will assist in telling the story of the accomplishment through helping with a summary write-up and providing photos as they're available. Lastly, the winner helps keep the award going by helping nominate prospective award winners for the next year.



The Watershed Steward Award travels between award recipients annually.