
Floodplain-Shoreland Management Notes

September 1999

WHERE ARE WE WITH MITIGATION?

Roxanne Gray
State Hazard Mitigation Officer

Prior to the 90's mitigation was an unfamiliar term for most planners and emergency managers. My, how times have changed. Wisconsin has received twelve federal disaster declarations since 1990 and over \$25 million has been spent on mitigation activities in the state, funded primarily through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP).

The HMGP, administered by Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM), funds projects that will eliminate or reduce the cost of damages in future disasters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency covers 75% of grant, with 12.5% state funded, and 12.5% funded through a local match. The amount of money available in the HMGP is limited and is based on a percentage of total dollars paid out in all of the other disaster programs. It has been estimated that for every \$1 spent on mitigation, \$2 is saved in future disaster damages.

The 1993 Midwest floods forced the country to look long and hard at the effects of unchecked development in floodplain areas. Determined to turn the tide, the President signed the Hazard Mitigation and Relocation Assistance Act in December 1993. It amended the HMGP to increase federal funding from 50% to 75%, and changed the funding formula to dramatically increase the amount available for each disaster.

Due to this change, the state received almost \$10.5 million in HMGP funds from the Midwest floods. This marked the first time that grant funds were used to acquire floodplain properties. Once policy and guidelines were established at both the federal and state level for a buyout program, several

Wisconsin communities began to purchase flood damaged properties.

It has been a long road since the summer of 1993 and much has been accomplished. We've melded the talents and resources of local, state and federal partners to remove 190 structures from harms way and floodproof another 19. Pierce County acquired 73 properties; the City of Eau Claire purchased 49 homes and floodproofed one commercial structure; and Eau Claire County purchased 16 homes and floodproofed another two.

The most complicated project was in Darlington. The city acquired 12 commercial properties and has floodproofed 16 commercial buildings with the majority of the structures located in the downtown historic district. Construction is underway on five more downtown buildings.

Contamination, handicap access, and historic preservation were some of the hurdles to overcome to keep the project moving. The city has been recognized nationally for their mitigation efforts, receiving a Historic Preservation Achievement Award from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for their outstanding downtown preservation efforts in the wake of the 1993 flood.

Several other counties undertook acquisition programs utilizing several different funding sources. Jefferson County received a small HMGP grant under a 1991 disaster declaration in addition to HMGP funds from the 93 flood declaration. These grants were combined with Department of Natural Resources and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to acquire 28 properties on Blackhawk Island. In addition, Kenosha County also received CDBG funding and has acquired 12 properties along the Fox River

The 1993 Midwest flood spurred the state to form the Wisconsin Interagency Disaster Recovery Group (IDRG). It includes state and federal agency partners and is chaired by the State Hazard Mitigation Officer. The Group's goal is to assist local governments in their recovery efforts, provide technical assistance, prevent duplication of efforts and funding, identify and prioritize mitigation projects, and identify funding sources. The IDRG has continued to meet since the '93 flood, and convenes after disaster declarations.

In the wake of three major disaster declarations in the past two years, many Wisconsin communities have applied for HMGP funding.

The July 1997 flood disaster that struck Ozaukee, Milwaukee, Washington and Waukesha counties spurred more than 60 municipalities to submit HMGP requests that exceeded \$60 million. The amount available was \$6.2 million. The Wisconsin IDRG decided to fund those projects which involved acquisition or floodproofing properties in designated flood hazard areas.

The State's Hazard Mitigation Officer, Roxanne Gray, is pleased to report that HMGP funds totaling \$6,265,003 have been approved for mitigation projects in six communities. Wauwatosa received a grant of \$2,388,661 to acquire 24 properties along the Menomonee River. The city is also working with the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) to acquire additional floodplain properties with local funds.

The city of Brookfield received a grant for \$222,075 and has acquired a property that was damaged in the June 1997 flooding, and again damaged in August 1998, causing the structure to be substantially damaged (damaged over 50% of the equalized assessed value.) Grants have also been approved in the amount of \$1,886,927 for the village of Menomonee Falls to acquire 10 homes located along Lilly Creek; and \$114,340 to the city of West Allis to acquire one property.

The latest grant to be approved was \$1,613,000 for the city of Milwaukee to acquire 18 structures substantially damaged in the Lincoln Creek area and floodproof 24 homes in the Menomonee Valley area. The city is also working with MMSD to acquire eight homes in the Menomonee Valley and construct a flood wall to protect the neighborhood.

The city had originally applied for floodproofing the homes in the Lincoln Creek area, but as a result of the second flood in August 1998, the city amended its application for acquisition instead. Milwaukee County Emergency Management was also awarded a grant to produce a mitigation video and brochures, which will be distributed to the libraries and other locations throughout Milwaukee County. The video will identify mitigation measures that property owners can undertake to protect themselves from future flood damages.

On July 24, 1998, Wisconsin received a major disaster declaration in 14 counties followed by a second declaration on August 12th for Milwaukee, Racine, Rock, Sheboygan, and Waukesha Counties. \$6.4 million in HMGP funds were made available statewide. Pre-applications submitted for the program totaled more than \$50 million. "As you can see, the demand for mitigation dollars far outweighs the amount of funding available in the program," Gray stated.

Following FEMA's priority rankings, the state is giving highest priority to acquiring properties that were substantially damaged. Any remaining funds will be used to acquire flood damaged properties that meet FEMA's cost/benefit requirements. The third priority is floodproofing structures located in flood hazard areas.

To date, grants have been approved under the two declarations for the cities of Brookfield, Milwaukee, and New Berlin, and the villages of Brown Deer and Elm Grove totaling \$2,660,748. Brown Deer received a grant in the amount of \$1,304,650 to acquire nine homes that were damaged in both 1997 and 1998 resulting in the determination that they were substantially damaged. To date, the village has purchased seven of the properties.

An application has been submitted to FEMA for the city of Sheboygan for acquisition of 17 homes along Fisherman's Creek. Staff are still processing applications for acquisition of flood damaged properties from several other communities.

The 1994 National Flood Insurance Reform Act paved the way for developing the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Program to provide pre-disaster mitigation funding. This program is designed to reduce or eliminate flood damages to structures repetitively or substantially damaged and for which flood insurance claims are paid. It is funded through

WELCOME CARMEN WAGNER

the National Flood Insurance Program. WEM administers it and it is 75% federally funded through FEMA with a 25% local match.

Communities can apply annually for grant funds to develop flood mitigation plans. Once a community has an approved plan, they can apply for FMA project grant funds. In the last three years the state has received approximately \$12,000 in planning grant funds and \$120,000 in project grant funds each year. Planning grants have been awarded to the city of Brookfield, and Crawford, Eau Claire, Jefferson, Kenosha and Ozaukee Counties. Project grant funds were awarded to the city of Darlington and Jefferson County to assist with flood mitigation projects underway in those communities.

FEMA recently directed the states to prioritize use of future FMA and HMGP funds to reduce the number of repetitive loss structures insured through the National Flood Insurance Program. There are an estimated 322 repetitive loss structures in the state located in 60 communities.

Since the 1993 Midwest floods over 20,000 structures have been removed from floodplains throughout the country. In Wisconsin, over 190 properties have been acquired with the land remaining in open space uses. In addition, another 19 structures have been floodproofed eliminating future damages to those structures.

We have made a good beginning, but there is still much to be done. While historical flooding in Wisconsin has usually not been as intense or as frequent as other parts of the country, we have recently suffered several major flooding events and we can expect more such events in the future.

Rampant development and urban sprawl are rapidly reducing the amount of natural ground cover available to retain storm water runoff. Paved surfaces also conduct flood waters downstream much faster, increasing flood heights and flows. As these problems worsen, mitigation will often be the best answer to protect people, building and property from the hazards of flooding.

For more information on mitigation, contact Roxanne Gray, Hazard Mitigation Officer, or Linda McDermott, Assistant Hazard Mitigation Officer at Wisconsin Emergency Management, 608-242-3232.

Carmen has joined our staff and we are tickled pink to have her. She replaces John Hagengruber in the project position for shoreland planning. John has accepted a permanent appointment as a floodplain planner with the program.

Carmen is originally from Antigo, which may be the potato capitol of Wisconsin – we do know that Antigo silt loam is the state soil. She journeyed to Madison to go to school and they haven't been able to get rid of her since.

Carmen received a B.S. in Soils & Biological Aspects of Conservation and a certificate in Environmental Studies. Not content to be a bookworm, she toiled for five years at CRM Ecosystems, Inc. in Mount Horeb as a Restoration Consultant for prairies, woodlands, and wetlands. She also managed the native plant nursery, hired and fired people (she enjoyed both), and learned how to delegate responsibility, a key trait for any DNR employee.

When firing people lost its thrill, she returned to school and is working on a masters in Urban and Regional Planning at the UW. She worked this past spring and summer for Water Management Specialist Chris DeRemer in Janesville. When asked what she learned from Chris, she said that Craig always chokes at the state basketball tournament and that people don't take no very well and are fond of using many colorful adjectives when hearing the aforementioned "n" word.

At home she enjoys gardening, both vegetable and flower. Carmen and her husband are members of a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) group and harvest vegetables on Thursdays.

Carmen's favorite Packer game, besides the Ice Bowl and San Francisco game in the snow, is the game in Chicago where it rained/snowed/sleeted on Halloween and Brett Favre ran in three touchdowns. She had friends from Chicago at the game, who said the only people that stayed until the end were Packer fans.

According to Herr Hagengruber, Antigo is a middlin' football power in the Wisconsin River Valley Conference, but certainly not competitive with Wisconsin Rapids or D.C. Everest, his alma mater.

Ten Counties Receive Disaster Declaration

Ten counties in Northern Wisconsin will receive federal disaster assistance following the devastating wind and water damage caused by a series of storms in July.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) confirmed that Public Assistance disaster funds were approved for the counties of Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, Florence, Iron, Oneida, Price, Rusk, Sawyer and Vilas.

Many areas were primarily affected by high winds, with downed trees blocking roads and knocking power lines out. However, Florence County was hard hit by severe flooding, with several dozen structures damaged and numerous roads washed out. Flooding also struck some Bayfield County communities near Lake Superior.

The timber industry took the hardest hit of any business group, with over 70 million board-feet of lumber downed in Bayfield County alone. Tourism and local retail also suffered losses.

Unfortunately, the declaration will only pay for damages to public facilities, such as roads, bridges, wastewater treatment plants, etc. Many individuals suffered losses, but at this time there is no federal assistance available to help them.

Help For Digital Flood Data Questions

Communities which have DFIRM-DLG or Q3 digital flood data should know about the FEMA Digital Flood Data Technical Support Line. This service handles any technical questions about the above digital flood map formats, including: data content, attribute definitions and coding, data formats, DLG data structure, compatibility with GIS software, projection and datum information and related technical questions.

If you have digital data, this is a great (and free) resource to help you make the most of these fine, space-age products.

You can call the help line at (617) 354-2614, or fax them at (617) 868-6855 (Attn: FEMA Support). Their e-mail address is fema@hdm.com.

Dam Safety Joins Our Happy Family

It's official! After years of intense negotiations and all-night bargaining sessions (fueled by pizza), we have persuaded the friendly folks in the Dam Safety program to hitch their education and outreach efforts to our wagon. In other words, the old Dam Safety newsletter will now be integrated with our modest efforts.

To celebrate their coming on board, we will debut a new name for this newsletter in the next issue. And no, we will not just add "Dam Safety" to "Floodplain-Shoreland". No decision has been made, but the word "water" is likely to figure prominently.

So now that we're one mega-conglomerate, who are these newcomers? In a word, engineers. But they're good engineers; friendly, helpful, loyal, eager to please – a dam owners best friend.

These folks are conveniently located at customer service centers around the state. Part of their job is to inspect dams, write repair orders and monitor dam operations. But they don't just tell people what to fix, they offer advice on how to fix it and what resources are available to fix it. It's a service that many concerned dam owners find invaluable.

They also issue permits and approvals for new dams, facilitate dam transfers, explain operation and water level requirements, provide dam abandonment and removal assistance, and respond to dam emergencies and failures.

The job these skilled engineers do is critical for protecting life, property and natural resources in Wisconsin. There are over 3800 dams in the state, over 1100 of which are classified as large dams, meaning they are over six feet high and impound more than 50 acre feet of water. A dam failure not only threatens homes, businesses and public facilities such as bridges or sewage treatment plants, it can destroy fish spawning habitat, wetlands, streambanks and other critical resources.

The county contact list on the following pages has been freshly updated. Please contact the WMS for permit activities such as new dams, transfers or water levels. Contact the local engineer for inspection issues or repair/reconstruction activities.

Dam Safety Staff Addresses Y2K Issue

According to the DNR staff astrologer, the new millennium should arrive around midnight on December 31, 1999. It was also predicted that computer systems could be affected by the switch to the big "00." But when asked if this momentous event would have any effect on dam operations or safety, this venerable soothsayer was clueless.

Due to this shocking lack of knowledge about the state's 3800 dams, the Department's competent and concerned Dam Safety staff have decided to share the following information with our audience.

First, we are taking this issue very seriously. Dam operations and dam failures are a critical public safety function and any possible threat to the safe operations of dams must be addressed. It should be noted that most state dams are not at risk; they are manually controlled or have no operational functions. The dams that do have computer-controlled functions are well maintained, regularly inspected and have adequate back-up systems.

The other good news is that we have winter here. It is typically very cold on January 1st, there is mucho snow and rivers are at low flow. But we must always be ready for a January thaw.

Regardless, dam owners should take note of whether their dam has any of the following features: automatic gate operators, dial systems or data collection systems; high water alarms; turbine generator units; back-up power generators; or any other computer-controlled systems.

If your dam has these features, please check with the manufacturer to see if the system is Y2K compliant; if not, have a manual back-up in place.

Dam owners should know the number of the emergency government director. Be aware of what critical structures (houses, hospitals, stores, bridges) are downstream of the dam. If a failure occurs, contact the state emergency warning center at 1-800-943-0003. Give the location of the dam, an assessment of the problem and a contact number. By calling that number, you are also triggering the DNR's Dam Safety response team. Remember, your vigilance and prompt action will help us better protect the lives and property of people who live and recreate in Wisconsin.

New FEMA Elevation Certificate Debuts

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has released a new Elevation Certificate that must be used for rating and issuing all flood insurance policies after January 1, 2000.

The new form is the product of years of work by surveyors, local officials, insurance agents, FEMA and other insurance officials. The goal was to develop a more useful and effective tool for ensuring that new structures are properly elevated, for determining flood insurance rates, and to support a request for a LOMA or LOMR.

The biggest improvement is in the Building Elevation Information section. The new form includes diagrams of nine different building foundation construction techniques and how to obtain the necessary elevation information. This will simplify the insurance agents job in determining lowest floor elevations for setting insurance rates. It will also make it easier to monitor development for compliance with state and federal floodplain management standards.

All Wisconsin communities in the Community Rating System (CRS) must use the new form to record the elevation of all buildings that are new or substantially damaged or improved. Other communities are not required to use this form, but all communities are obligated to record and document proposed and finished lowest floor and adjacent grade elevations in order to comply with Wisconsin floodplain management standards. You can record the information on the permit or on a separate document, the choice is yours.

FEMA will be presenting classes on the new Elevation Certificate in Wisconsin next year. Rich Slevin from the Chicago office will be hosting half-day training sessions similar to the flood insurance courses he regularly puts on for insurance agents and lenders. For more information, please contact the NFIP's Telephone Response Center (1-800-427-4661) for more information.

If you would like to use the new Elevation Certificate, a copy of a software program will be available free of charge by calling (317) 848-2898, sending a e-mail to wtrakimas@iso.com or faxing a request to (317) 848-3578.

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"Floodplain-Shoreland Management Notes" is published by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Bureau of Watershed Management. Our purpose is to inform local zoning officials and others concerned about state and federal floodplain management and flood insurance issues, shoreland and wetland management, and dam safety issues. Comments or contributions are welcome. Contact Gary Heinrichs, Editor, at the above address, or call (608) 266-3093.

Contacts: Gary Heinrichs, 266-3093, John Hagengruber 267-7571, or Bob Watson, 266-8037 (floodplain); Toni Herkert, 266-0161, or Joe King, 266-9492 (shoreland & wetland); Meg Galloway, 266-7014 or Bill Sturtevant, 266-8033 (dam safety)

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