

The Association of State Floodplain Managers

History and Accomplishments {November, 2003}

As with many organizations, the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) was formed to present a united front to “a common enemy”. In the early 1970's, the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) had both a positive and negative impact on state and local programs. The NFIP encouraged good floodplain management, something the states supported, but it was based on floodplain maps that often ignored or even violated state standards, thus not meeting the needs of locals.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's issuance of a policy on state reviews of flood insurance maps proved to be a catalyst. Five of the six states in Region V (Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin) had statutory authority that affected regulatory mapping. Several of them had floodplain management programs that pre-dated the NFIP. It appeared that the federal government was disregarding state law as well as overlooking important allies in working with local governments. In 1976, the NFIP Coordinating offices from the six states formed a loose association to deal with the NFIP.

From 1976 to 1982, the Association began to reposition its attention from reacting to NFIP efforts to outreach with others. Each year, the attendance at the annual meeting grew, as more states participated. Encouraged with funding support from the Federal Insurance Administration (FIA), the Association began a quarterly newsletter and became the voice of local and state floodplain managers with all pertinent Federal agencies, especially policy offices such as the Water Resources Council and The White House Office of Domestic Policy. During those years, the official organization of the Association took form with a constitution, membership dues, a Board of Directors, standing committees, a budget, and a logo. It became a tax exempt non-profit in 1988. State programs grew too, particularly after 1980 when FEMA's State Assistance Program began.

1982 was a watershed year. The annual conference held in Madison, Wisconsin was the first with a technical program oriented more toward training participants than reacting to federal programs. That year also saw the creation of the first state association in Arizona. Since 1982, this mostly volunteer organization has continually expanded in two important areas: Service to Members and Federal Relations. In the first area, a formal Washington presence was established, with the Association funding either a person or an organization to monitor developments and provide representation at important meetings. ASFPM was instrumental in heightening interest in reforming the National Flood Insurance Program in the late '80s. Over a six-year period, Congress frequently requested information from the Association while preparing legislation, which resulted in ultimate passage of the NFIP Reform Act of 1994. Rebecca Quinn, then the NFIP State Coordinator for Maryland, took the lead for the Association in these efforts, working with Executive Director Larson and Washington liaisons Martha Braddock, Merrie Inderfurth and others over the years.

The Association of State Floodplain Managers supports comprehensive non-structural and structural floodplain management to achieve wise use of the nation's floodplains and related water resources. The ASFPM believes that, through coordinated, well-informed efforts, the public and private sectors can:

- Reduce loss of human life and property damage resulting from flooding,
- Preserve the natural and cultural values of floodplains, and
- Avoid actions that exacerbate flooding.

The Association's capabilities advanced over the years as the office became more professional.

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ASFPM worked more and more with other national organizations, such as the Council of State Governments, the Coastal States Organization, the National Governors Association, the National Emergency Management Association, the National Wildlife Federation, the Association of State Wetland Managers and others. The focus was on common issues such as floodplain management, dam safety, disaster assistance, wetlands protection, coastal zone and multi-objective management, watershed management and river restoration and most recently, on No Adverse Impact (NAI).

Relations with federal agencies were also advanced by a growing interest in Congress in the Association's positions and suggestions. Numerous ASFPM suggestions have been incorporated into law or included in new federal programs, such as aspects of flood insurance to address repetitive losses, post-disaster mitigation funding, the Community Rating System, a national council on mapping standards and of course, the major increase in funding for Flood Map Modernization begun in FY'03.

During the turn of the Century, ASFPM launched a new initiative to move the nation to the next level in flood loss reduction and sustainable development. Labeled the "No Adverse Impact" initiative, it is designed to help communities understand that the basic national approaches will not reduce flood losses in their community – they must take the initiative to go beyond national minimums. We have outlined how communities can move from permitting a given structure to protect it from flooding to understanding how development impacts existing and future flood losses; then permitting that development with mitigation included to prevent future disasters. Workshops, brochures, Toolkits, legal research, legal papers, and other information on NAI are available on the website or from ASFPM.

ASFPM Members are or have been represented on these various national committees and work groups: NFIP Evaluation Steering Committee; Technical Mapping Advisory Council; Community Rating System Task Force; Pre-Disaster Mitigation Review panel; Multi-Hazard Mitigation Council (Advisory to FEMA); USGS Advisory Committee on Water Information (ACWI); Hydrology Subcommittee of Advisory Committee on Water Information; HAZUS (flood); Flood Insurance Producers National Committee (FIPNC); Interagency Committee on Dam Safety (ICODS); Heinz Center Coastal Study; Natural Hazards Center Advisory Committee, University of Colorado-Boulder; NSF project to outline a hazards curriculum for the nation's colleges; USGS, Nationwide streamgaging Task Force and its Partnership Cooperative Stream Gaging Program; ASFPM Foundation; FEMA's Community Compliance; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Risk and Uncertainty work group; and many others.

The Association's services for members have also grown significantly. From four newsletters a year in 1982, publications now include twelve newsletters each year, an annual national Directory of Floodplain Managers, annual conference proceedings, a periodic comprehensive status report on state and local floodplain management in the nation, and numerous topical and technical reports. An Executive Office was established in 1996. The original staff of two has grown to six, who continue to rely heavily on the volunteer efforts of our members to accomplish our numerous activities.

The ASFPM annual conference now attracts 750 to 900 participants who come for the training, technical and policy updates, and invaluable networking with fellow professionals. Up to 70 exhibitors share their products and services with conference attendees and sponsorships from partner corporations generate significant additional funds for the coffers. The Association also produces a number of other conferences on special topics, such as community mitigation planning and implementation, arid regions flooding, coastal flooding, multi-objective management, river restoration, stormwater management, legal development issues affecting flooding, floodproofing, etc. In addition, periodic special interest seminars such as buy-out workshops address many important issues of the day.

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Other membership services include awards to recognize programs and persons who have done outstanding work in flood hazard management, a graduate fellowship award (FEMA funded) for pursuing advanced degree and research in floodplain management, and the Flood Hazard Fellowship Fund with monetary awards to pursue special projects.

The ASFPM Foundation was created in 1997 to “attract funds that support, through research and education, training and public awareness, projects and programs that will lead to the wise management of our nation’s floodplains.” Foundation donations to date have supported the development of the national professional certification program, No Adverse Impact publications and case studies, a college course on floodplain management and river systems, and a specialized flood property acquisitions conference. Chaired by Larry Olinger of Dewberry, the Board of Trustees is composed of a diverse group of professionals uniquely positioned to assist the Foundation in fundraising.

In 1999, the ASFPM Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM) Program was initiated. This program grew out of member interest, and was developed over a period of years by the ASFPM Professional Development Committee chaired by John Ivey of Halff Associates, working with a 10 member Certification Board of Regents (CBOR President is French Wetmore). The program has been supported by the following Federal partners: FEMA, USDA’s NRCS, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the NOAA Coastal Services Center. The goals of professional certification are to: 1) advance the knowledge of floodplain managers, 2) enhance the profession of floodplain management, and 3) provide a common basis for understanding floods and flood loss reduction approaches. The Certification program involves an exam of 120 questions to test knowledge of the applicant, then a Continuing Education Credit requirement every two years to maintain certification. Exams are given throughout the nation all year long, usually proctored by State Chapters or State NFIP Coordinators. State Chapters can develop their own program and/or a state specific exam to reflect their state’s standards and programs. There are 6 accredited State CFM Programs, with Oklahoma Chapter the first. The others are New Mexico, Texas, North Carolina, Illinois and Arkansas. There are over 1,00 CFMs in the nation, with the program growing by 40% each year.

In order to broaden public awareness and provide a stronger unified voice for local communities, the Association supports the creation of state floodplain management associations and encourages Chapter membership in ASFPM. Chapters provide an opportunity for local staff to meet and exchange with their peers, provide input to state programs and standards, and avail themselves of training and workshop opportunities to enhance professional knowledge and standing. Chapters also provide a vehicle for input to the national association and thus on national programs and policy that impact local communities. There are presently 17 Chapters – Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas. Additionally, a number of other states have formed associations and are working toward Chapter status.

Although ASFPM was originally an association of state officials, voting membership is open to all. Any member except federal employees can serve on the Board of Directors. Membership now stands at about 6,500. We have scores of Corporate and Agency partners who help make the Association stronger and more balanced. The Association also supports its state and regional chapters in a variety of ways.

The Association maintains a website www.floods.org which details Association activities, conference information, tools for reducing flood losses, goals and actions of the 14 policy committees, key policy papers, Congressional testimony, and other matters of interest to members and those concerned about flood loss prevention in the nation.

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ASFPM has come a long way from a loose association of six state offices to a national organization representing 6,500 floodplain managers at all levels of the public and private sectors. Instead of a "common enemy", we now have common goals and close ties with the federal agencies and other associations that impact floodplain management. Instead of focusing on a few government programs, our conferences, training, publications, and the nationally based efforts of our committees and officers now work toward mitigating flood losses in the nation and furthering the profession of floodplain management.