National Flood Programs and Policies in Review 2007
Media Backgrounder

National Flood Programs and Policies in Review 2007 is the most recent in the Association of State Floodplain Managers' (ASFPM) periodic reviews of national floodplain management policy. Through these reports, ASFPM, the nation’s leading organized voice in this field, records important program and policy adjustments that are needed to improve floodplain management.

Over the last seven years — when the last ASFPM policy review was published — four trends have affected how the nation manages its flood risk and floodplain resources:

- **HAZARD RISK IS INCREASING** -- The growth of the U.S. population and its movement to coastal areas and the West is putting development pressure on areas that are susceptible to special types of flood hazards.
- **CHANGING CONDITIONS** -- A warming climate threatens to increase storm intensity, rising sea levels and more intense hurricanes, all of which will require more aggressive flood loss reduction action, especially when combined with increasingly intensive development in vulnerable coastal environments.
- **ATTENTION TO NATURAL HAZARDS WANING** -- The aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks has altered the national consciousness, priorities and hazards management approach, so that managing natural hazard events has suffered in the imbalance of resources such as funding, personnel allocation and focus.
- **TECHNOLOGY HELPS PREDICT WHERE IT WILL FLOOD, BUT NOT WHEN** -- Electronic communication has revolutionized the expectations of the public, both in terms of accessing information and the ability of technical staff and policymakers to convey complex information in visual formats.

National Flood Programs and Policies in Review 2007 contains more than 280 recommendations for improvements to initiatives nationwide. Most are targeted for action by federal agencies, Congress and the Administration, but many require action and cooperation at the state, local and individual levels. Some highlights are listed below.

**Federal agencies, the Administration and Congress should provide stronger leadership to better integrate programs at all levels of government.**

- Congress should enact a National Floodplain Management Policy. It should specify a goal of protecting, maintaining and restoring riverine and coastal areas to preserve their natural and beneficial resources for future generations.

- No federal program should allow or support, financially or technically, the transfer of flooding impacts from one entity to another or from present generations to future ones.

- FEMA should be restored to independent-agency status, with direct access to the President.

-more-

2809 Fish Hatchery Road, Madison, Wisconsin 53713 • 608.274.0123 • www.floods.org
Congress should amend the Disaster Relief Act to apportion the costs, roles and responsibilities of states and localities, the federal government and the public based on each entity’s risk.

A coordinated, multi-objective approach for all water resource activities, led by local and state governments, must be adopted.

The President should issue an Executive Order directing federal agencies to consider climate change, and adaptations to it, in all planning, permitting, design and construction.

A high-level federal coordinating mechanism must be established to ensure that all federal policies and programs look beyond economic development; balance environmental, economic and public safety concerns; and refine the methods to account for these factors.

The federal government should focus greater responsibility and authority for flood risk reduction and resource protection toward states, localities and individuals.

All taxpayer-funded flood disaster relief should be contingent on taking flood mitigation action wherever feasible — whether public or private. Federal monetary assistance for individuals following a flood should be based upon whether they had a flood insurance policy before the disaster, even if their property lies outside of a 100-year floodplain.

All federal disaster assistance programs should be based on the same sliding cost-sharing formula to provide incentives generating state and local actions. A minimum cost-share should be available to all, but the federal share would be increased for regions that engage in disaster-resistant activities beyond minimum criteria. Nonstructural mitigation projects would always receive a higher share of federal funding than structural projects.

Flood insurance and appropriate development standards should be mandatory for all homes and businesses in failure zones associated with dams, levees, diversions and reservoirs, with insurance rates based on the residual risk.

Specific problems in consistency, implementation, funding, coordination or similar deficiencies need to be remedied.

Technical assistance programs that provide precise technical input into overall state mitigation strategies should be expanded and receive increased, continuing support.

Congress should provide adequate funding for initiatives that support both floodplain management and the general well-being of the population: data collection; forecasting; geographic information systems; FEMA’s flood mapping program; the USGS streamgaging program; NOAA’s Integrated Ocean Observing System; and scientific research.

- more -
• National Flood Insurance Program regulations should be modified to require coastal structures be elevated above the minimum requirement by adding one to three feet (or more) of “freeboard” or additional structure elevation above the identified 100-year flood elevation.

• FEMA and the Department of Transportation should produce flood loss reduction guidelines and standards for the replacement of roads and bridges with federal disaster funds.

• No-build buffer zones should be identified in high hazard areas of the nation’s coast, similar to the no-build zones in riverine floodways.

Federal agencies, Congress and the Administration should investigate completely new approaches as alternatives to existing programs and policies.

• Consider shifting to a model where authority for flood risk management programs is delegated to the states, and incentives encourage state assumption of responsibility in return for expected reduced federal disaster expenditures.

###

The complete report is available online at www.floods.org. For more information, contact:

George Riedel, Deputy Executive Director, ASFPM: 608.274.0123, 573.819.5510 (cell) or george@floods.org

Sherry Syence, Syence Associates: 703.836.0682, 202.255.9457 (cell) or sherry@syence.biz