Date: March 18, 2008

To: Ohio Congressional Delegation

From: Jerry Brems CFM, Legislative Committee Chair, Ohio Floodplain Management Association

RE: Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program Earmarks

Many members of the Ohio Floodplain Management Association (OFMA) have expressed their concern about the recently identified projects in the Joint Explanatory Statement (JES) specified for the Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program. These “earmark like” projects were included in the recently passed Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008. The OFMA Board of Directors unanimously voted to oppose project specific set-asides and to support the enforcement of the language in the JES. We note that language in the bill requires compliance with program rules and we strongly encourage efforts to ensure that the provisions of the bill requiring all projects funded with the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Fund comply with the criteria in Section 203(g) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act (Stafford Act). Additionally, OFMA strongly opposes any efforts to continue this practice in 2009 as it harms Ohio communities.

OFMA is concerned about the unprecedented scope of project specific set-asides (earmarks, Congressional directives, etc.) in competitive grant programs like PDM. Project specific set-asides of mitigation programs has been minimal in the past and FEMA internal project evaluation mechanisms are widely considered to be strong and well grounded in sound public policy.

Because there is nearly always more demand than there are funds allocated for hazard mitigation, these programs are either apportioned to all states based on specific formulas or triggers or are nationally competitive based on set criteria that every applicant must follow. This is a simple measure of fairness. Actions like project specific set-asides hurt every state, even those that are the recipients of such earmarks.

In 2008, Ohio had two such projects – totaling nearly $700,000 dollars. According to information provided by the Ohio Emergency Management Agency, neither of these projects went through the normal application process and therefore were impossible to evaluate whether they were even eligible. Yet there were eight projects forwarded to the national competition for $15 million. Over half of the PDM funding available in 2008 was earmarked. These earmarks will directly hurt the competitiveness of the eight projects where communities not only spent time, but also in some cases significant funds to develop project applications. When complete, competitive applications have been submitted by Ohio communities in the PDM program, they have had a very good success rate of being funded. Please do not let this program fall prey to an earmarking process that is both unfair and fiscally irresponsible.
OFMA's members include many local officials and other professionals who are involved in all aspects of floodplain management including hazard mitigation, and who are concerned about the long term objectives and success of the PDM program. We are expressing our firm support for any and all efforts to adhere to PDM program rules and regulations because of our great concern that set-asides could interfere with program integrity. Furthermore, we are requesting that you do all you can to ensure earmarking doesn’t happen in the future. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Jerry Brems CFM, Legislative Committee Chair
Ohio Floodplain Management Association