ASFPM Region 3 Director Annual Report

Annual Conference-Atlanta, Georgia

John Gysling, Regional Director
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Region 3 Report 2014-2015
(Washington D.C., DE, MD, PA, WV and VA)

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REGIONAL OVERVIEW

States in the region are busy assimilating new mapping products and reviewing new flood ordinances. Many of the ordinances include higher regulatory standards as the concept of freeboard is gaining wider acceptance. Many of our states have been beneficiaries of new coastal maps. States are seeking, and in cases achieving, greater cooperation with federal and regional organizations through partnerships like Silver Jackets. States are providing tools to communicate flood risks and mapping products. In addition, states are providing training courses to floodplain managers at home. The overall need is continued support and funding from federal sources for new mapping products and climate adaptation. To support our requests, states must continue to demonstrate effectiveness of the dollars spent.

District of Columbia

Problems:

The District of Columbia is at risk of flooding and will face extreme consequences if preventative measures and better coordination among key stakeholders are not in place. The effects of climate change, sea level rise, and more intense and frequent storm surges will increase riverine and interior flooding in the vulnerable areas of the District. The District is at risk for multiple types of flooding, all of which have the potential for severe property damage and safety concerns for the community-at-large.

Needs:

The District needs a dedicated program to manage these flood risks and create comprehensive plans and measures to mitigate flood hazards of these vulnerable areas during times of severe flood incidents. Flood risk is a shared responsibility among the entire District community, which includes federal, and regional agencies, individuals, and businesses. Establishing a comprehensive flood risk management program in the District will enable
better coordination among District agencies and others stakeholders. A well-coordinated program will not only maintain compliance with the NFIP, but also allow the District to be resilient and bounce back from a flood disaster such as Hurricane Sandy.

Opportunities:

Creating the comprehensive flood risk management program for the District will help coordinate all the necessary agencies in the event of the District decides to join the Community Rating System in the near future. The District is undertaking climate adaptation planning, which will incorporate future climate projections in flood risks mitigation measure. The District currently has strong professional connections with regional and federal government, as well as private and public organizations, to create comprehensive flood risk alleviation plans. The program could also be used to expand the mission and effectiveness of the recent established DC Silver Jackets team. The DC Silver Jackets, composed of District, federal, and regional organizations, is dedicated to working collaboratively in developing and implementing solutions to flood hazards by combining available agency resources, which include funding, programs and technical expertise.

Delaware

Federal fiscal year began Oct. 1, 2014 without guidance for CAP-SSSE applications or funding. Funds are typically awarded in the May of the following year. Delaware has shifted its Period of Performance to follow Delaware’s fiscal year calendar, which is July 1–June 30. Without funding for up to seven months of the fiscal year, it is difficult to manage training and outreach.

DNREC was successful in getting all but one community to adopt a compliant ordinance prior to the maps becoming effective. Of the 49 participating communities, 40 communities chose to adopt some type of freeboard ranging from 12 inches to 36 inches.

CAP-SSSE – Federal fiscal year started Oct. 1, 2014. There is still no guidance out or funds available. We typically receive funds in May. Hence Delaware has shifted our Period of Performance to follow Delaware fiscal year, which is July 1-June 30. It makes it difficult to manage training, outreach, etc. with no funds for seven months.
Delaware Silver Jackets Team has now met twice. Major SJ issues include improving federal/state coordination of floodplain mapping activities, and seeking improved coordination where federal activities (i.e. USACE flood abatement projects) result in changes/reduction to water surface elevations or changes to the floodplain boundary. Better processes for federal/state/local CLOMR/LOMR submittals have been identified as an issue.

Delaware Gov. Markell has signed State Executive Order 41, which requires state projects to avoid floodplains and areas that are subject to increased future flood risk due to sea level rise. To support this requirement, the Delaware DNREC has developed future floodplain maps for areas subject to sea level rise, and guidance to help state agencies site projects outside of these high future risk areas, or design them to be resilient to this future risk (generally EO 41 requires design to current 1 percent water level plus anticipated sea level rise increases plus 18 inches of freeboard).

Delaware had all three counties receive revised Flood Insurance Rate Maps over the last year. Kent County went effective July 7, 2014, New Castle County Feb. 4, 2015, and Sussex County March 16, 2015. As communities updated their floodplain ordinances last year, the Delaware DNREC promoted voluntary higher regulatory standards. Many communities chose to adopt many higher standards for the first time.

As an example, prior to these changes about 20 percent of Delaware communities required freeboard above the 1 percent flood level. Now about 80 percent of Delaware communities require at least 1 foot of freeboard, and many require 18 inches.

The new maps that went into effect in Delaware were the subject of several appeals and concerns that were raised over the revised coastal study. The three most common concerns were:

- Preliminary maps that showed barrier island oceanfront land removed from AO or VE zones and put in zone X. In nearly all cases, historical evidence showed that this land is flood-prone

- Concern over a general reduction in VE zone elevations along the oceanfront of about 1-3 feet from the previous study. Communities expressed concerns that the new VE zone BFEs are too low, have been exceeded in the past, and submitted repetitive loss data to prove this point. One of the appeals related to this issue remains unresolved.
• Concerns about how to properly account for USACE storm damage reduction (engineered beach/dune systems) in the mapping. The Guidelines for Study Contractors appears to give significant latitude to how these projects are modelled, and evidence was provided to show that topography/different modelling assumptions will yield significantly different results in the map products. This issue has been referred to the ASFPM Coastal Issues Committee as an issue needing additional research.

Pennsylvania

1. Pennsylvania continues to provide technical assistance to municipalities relative to the ordinance update process for Flood Map Modernization. In 2014-15 The Department of Community & Economic Development assisted more than 400 municipalities in drafting and adopting compliant ordinances in the last year.
2. DCED in partnership with FEMA Region III conducted 15 “Duties of a Flood Plain Administrator” courses over the last year. In addition, an L273 course was conducted in Lawrence County in October 2014.
3. Lack of dedicated staff at the state level continues to be an issue.

Maryland

1. Mapping: Maryland Department of the Environment continues to provide information to the public on the DFIRM mapping effort in Maryland through its Flood Risk Application tool on www.mdfloodmaps.com. Users can access preliminary and effective FIRMs, download HEC-RAS models, view bridge and culvert data used for modeling, and also view the hydrology data. They can also create a map of their property that could support things like LOMA-OAS requests.

   We’re currently looking to expand the tool to include HAZUS data, and blend it with mitigation opportunities to give the full picture of building community resiliency.

2. Regulations: Communities are updating their floodplain management ordinances as new maps are released using the MD Model Floodplain Management Ordinance that's been reviewed by FEMA. The model ordinance contains many higher regulatory standards, including a 2-foot freeboard, Coastal A Zone provisions (V Zone standards), elevating subdivision access roads above the BFE, limiting critical and essential facilities in the
floodplain, etc. Nearly all communities in Maryland are adopting a 2-foot freeboard. One county, St. Mary's County, adopted a 3-foot freeboard.

One of the additional products we created with the model ordinance is the model resource, so the user can see exactly where all the language comes from, and also determine if it’s a higher regulatory standard, for which the community could get CRS credit. It can be downloaded here.

3. Training: MDE has been successful in offering one-day or half-day floodplain management workshops that involve a hands-on floodplain permitting exercises. Students are paired together. One who has experience, and the other who has less experience. Together they work through a series of questions using permit-related information given to them, including copies of FIRMs and floodplain ordinances. It's been a welcome change from standard PowerPoint presentations.

A big challenge for us is balancing our current workload while still being responsive to all the stakeholders we support.

Fortunately, we have some great partnerships in place with other state agencies, including the Maryland Emergency Management Agency and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. We also have a unique arrangement with a quasi-state agency, the Maryland Environmental Service, to assist us with map outreach and technical assistance.

Virginia

No report as of 4/24/15. Report will be forwarded when received.

West Virginia

1. Mapping: WV has been ongoing in its efforts to get more Advisory Flood Heights for the WV Flood Hazard Determination Tool. Planning on having seven more counties completed by this time next year, bringing the total to 28 of 55 counties completed. www.mapwv.gov/flood NEEDS MORE FUNDING!

2. Training: Training in WV has always been of highest importance. We have completed two L-273 classes within the year and five one-day “Basics of Floodplain Management” classes. We also have six one-hour webinars throughout the year contracted out. Continuing training activities such as these continues to be a huge success in WV.
3. Regulations: this upcoming year we hope to focus more on conducting more CAVs and CACs to assist communities in current revisions of their regulations. Time can be an issue as we focus so much on training.