Statement on Hazard Mitigation Programs in the FY 2013 Budget
Including the Proposed Elimination of the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program

Madison, WI – On February 13th, the Obama Administration released its proposed 2013 budget for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. That budget is a mixed bag for hazard mitigation programs including additional significant cuts to flood mapping, elimination of FEMA’s only all hazards pre-disaster mitigation program, and increases in grants for some flood mitigation programs. Overall, however, the budget reflects a continued downward trend in the focus on hazard mitigation programs.

Disasters in 2011 were record setting, with fourteen events in the United States estimated to have caused over $1 billion in damage. Four of those were flood events and more of them involving significant flooding. This is the continuance of a trend that has been occurring for over a decade. Flood damages have jumped from $6 billion per year in the 1990s to nearly $10 billion per year in the 2000s. Unfortunately the trend has been moving in the opposite direction with investment in hazard mitigation programs that assist communities to become more resilient following disasters.

Flood Hazard Mapping
Flood hazard mapping is the foundational piece of hazard mitigation. Not only does it provide data for hazard mitigation plans and projects but it also provides data for the general public to understand flood risks, and information for the implementation of local land use and building codes. With the changing nature of flood risks and the significant backlog of needed mapping (some areas of the country still have flood maps over 30 years old and some have never been mapped and/or lack engineering data), the reduction in flood mapping funds from $220 million in 2010 to $89 million proposed in 2013 will only delay our identification and understanding of the risk faced by many Americans.

Also, there are demands by the public and Congress that flood mapping be made more accurate especially in areas protected by levees. FEMA’s ambitious new flood mapping program, Risk MAP may now be significantly less effective should these cuts go into effect. While the Association of State Floodplain Managers acknowledges all budgets in the Federal government will likely be reduced to some extent, the disproportionate reduction in flood mapping funds makes little sense for a hazard that is the most frequent and one of the most costly in the United States. Mapping should be funded at earlier levels of $200 million per year because communities need these maps to know where their risks are so they can take action to mitigate their risks. Given budgetary constraints, ASFPM recommends minimally funding mapping at the FY ’12 level of $97 million since the mapping budget already absorbed a 34% cut in FY ’12.

Dedicated to reducing flood risk and losses in the nation.
Elimination of Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM)
Even more perplexing is the proposed elimination of the Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program. This program has resulted in numerous successes such as over 18,000 communities having developed and adopted hazard mitigation plans, all-hazard “sticks and bricks” mitigation projects that have permanently reduced future risk by getting existing, at-risk development out of harm’s way. It allowed states which didn’t have frequent disasters to tap into hazard mitigation resources to reduce their risks too. PDM is the pre-disaster complement to the more well known Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) that is triggered only after a Federal disaster declaration.

Many states have relied on PDM to support development and maintenance of hazard mitigation plans, so ASFPM is very concerned about the effect of the elimination of PDM on hazard mitigation planning especially when it is unclear where future funds will come from to encourage and assist communities and States in updating mitigation plans.

PDM, which provides resources before an event happens as opposed to afterwards, is widely considered to be a successful program despite acknowledged problems with timely obligation of funds. ASFPM recommends that the Administration could and should look to models which would delegate the program to states to ensure obligation of funds will happen much faster. Studies have shown that investments in FEMA’s hazard mitigation programs yield on average $4 in benefits for every $1 invested. Also, these programs are cost shared with states and communities ensuring that they, too, are investing in their future resilience from hazards. ASFPM further recommends retention of the program at least at the minimal FY ‘12 funding level of $36 million.

Creation of new NPGP
ASFPM also cautions the Administration to thoughtfully proceed with the creation of a large multi-purpose grant program which folds together 16 grant programs ranging in focus from terrorism preparedness to natural hazard mitigation. Inclusion of mitigation as an eligible activity is the rationale for elimination of PDM. However, the “vision” document for this program clearly shows priorities are focused on funding activities that are not mitigation, and under the proposed framework mitigation priorities will, in reality, be all but impossible to fund. Ultimately the National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP) and National Preparedness Goal are aimed at readiness, not mitigation. While mitigation is a component of readiness (as it is a component of response and recovery) readiness is not a substitute for mitigation.

ASFPM recommends that implementation of a new NPGP be delayed to allow for consultation with stakeholder groups. As presently envisioned, the program is likely to result in neglect of key functions of mitigation and resilience.

Increase in Funding for Mitigation Grants of the National Flood Insurance Program
ASFPM does commend the administration for increasing its investment in flood mitigation programs – from a funding level of $60 million in FY ’12 to proposed FY ‘13 funding of $120 million. These programs are largely, but not entirely, focused on properties which file repetitive flood loss claims.