Wetlands play a vital role in flood protection

Virginia experts tout the role of wetlands in flood protection as the climate changes

By Tamara Dietrich, reporter for the Daily Press in Virginia

Not long ago, wetlands were considered mere roadblocks to development — nuisances that had to be drained to be useful. But appreciation for these soggy, boggy areas has grown in recent years as their role in protecting against floods and in filtering pollutants is better understood.

In a new analysis by Environment Virginia, wetlands are described as both the "kidneys" of our national water system, cleaning out sediment and pollutants, and as "sponges" that soak up excess water during heavy rain events.

The short synopsis above is used with permission from the Daily Press. Read the full April 18 article, which touches on the value of soft shorelines, how salt marshes are resilient but threatened, and the safeguards in place to protect them, here.
Berginnis Contributes to APA’s “Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery Briefing Papers”

ASFPM Executive Director Chad Berginnis was invited last fall by the American Planning Association to participate in a briefing paper on disaster recovery.

The “Post-Disaster Recovery Briefing Papers” may be used alone or alongside “Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery: Next Generation.” These succinct, downloadable PDFs are ideal handouts for meetings with officials and the general public. The 12 papers are below.

Public Engagement in Recovery Planning
Measuring Success in Recovery
Planning Resilient Infrastructure
Affordable Housing
Economic Recovery for Manufacturing
Flood Insurance and Design Requirements
Planning for Recovery Management
Adopt a Pre-Event Recovery Ordinance
Financial Recovery
Green Infrastructure and Post-Disaster Recovery
Hazard Mitigation in Disaster Recovery
Visioning

Berginnis wrote the paper “Flood Insurance and Design Requirements,” and highlighted three key points:

1. Take the time and plan, not react, for a successful rebuilding approach to reduce current and future flood risk.
2. Ensure key post-disaster NFIP requirements are met.
3. Rebuild for long-term resilience. Incorporate a variety of measures to reduce future flood losses.

Regarding the project, he said, “It was fun as I had the liberty to reflect on my career in this field, and produce something that I hope is useful to planners and community officials.”

Deadline to comment on draft guidelines to implement President Obama’s new Executive Order 13690 and proposed Federal Flood Risk Management Standard is May 6, 2015. ASFPM is asking its membership to comment, voice questions or concerns, and/or provide suggestions of what you think might be a practical solution. To comment, go to the Federal Register and search for FEMA-2015-0006, and click on the blue "Comment Now!" button.

ASFPM Executive Director Chad Berginnis said, "If you simply agree with the new standard, you still need to comment. The federal government needs to hear the voice of floodplain managers loudly!"
Mr. Fowler goes to Washington

By David Fowler, ASFPM Watershed Pod facilitator and project manager for Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District

One of the things I have enjoyed the most about volunteering for ASFPM as a committee co-chair, board member, and watershed POD facilitator, is the opportunity to represent our organization at various venues at the local, regional or national level. It’s an honor, privilege and a heck of lot of fun.

In late March I was able to combine two of these opportunities in one visit to Washington, DC After spending four days at the Association of State Wetland Managers State/Tribal/Federal Coordination Meeting at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia as an ASFPM liaison, I spent the last day visiting with Wisconsin Congressional Delegation members, with the excellent assistance of Merrie Inderfurth, ASFPM’s legislative liaison.

In this capacity I represented ASFPM and the Wisconsin Association for Floodplain, Stormwater and Coastal Management. Even though it was my third visit to Congress, I relied heavily on Merrie’s guidance and expertise during and in preparation for the visits. Don’t go to the Hill without her.

The timing of the visit was fortunate. Congress was in recess, so several Wisconsin congressional staff members were more available than usual for appointments. Merrie was able to schedule five appointments on one day with: Chris Goldson, legislative assistant to Rep. Gwen Moore; Chris Grawien, legislative assistant to Rep. Glenn Grothman; Lauren Schroeder, legislative assistant to Rep. Paul Ryan; Tom Petri, legislative assistant to Sen. Ron Johnson; and Brian Conlan, legislative assistant to Sen. Tammy Baldwin. This made for a long, but rewarding day.

With Merrie’s assistance, I produced an information sheet about WAFSCM and ASFPM that included contact information, brief descriptions of the state chapter mission and purpose, and an agenda with Wisconsin and national issues for discussion during each visit. After providing a brief description of both organizations, we attempted to cover as many topics from the prepared agenda as possible. The following is a listing of topics.

National Policy Impacts to Wisconsin

- Federal Flood Risk Management Standard—this will protect taxpayer investments for federal actions;
- Technical Mapping Advisory Committee and floodplain mapping funding—communities need good flood maps to determine risk and take actions to reduce that risk;
- ASFPM’s Flood Mapping for the Nation;
- BW-12 and Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act implementation;
- Structures with first floor below Base Flood Elevation (100-year flood level);
- Community-based flood insurance;

Dave Fowler, ASFPM Watershed Pod facilitator and project manager for Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (middle), and Merrie Inderfurth, ASFPM’s legislative liaison (right), stopped in to discuss Wisconsin and national flood policy with Tom Petri, senior legislative assistant to Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI).
• Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program—support of FY16 budget request;
• National Dam and Levee Safety Committee and Program—established in the 2014 Water Resources Development Act; and
• Hurricane Sandy Recovery—utilize nature-based protection systems where possible to reduce cost and protect resources.

Wisconsin Issues
• Funding for State and County Emergency Management (Matching Funds) and Emergency Management Performance Grants;
• Funding for floodplain mapping—this is critical to Wisconsin communities;
• Implementation issues with National Preparedness Grant Program; and
• Increased accountability for local governments for NFIP regulatory implementation or lack of implementation/compliance.

Merrie suggested I add specific items to each appointment with the various committees and interests that each representative or senator had, which was very useful.

For Rep. Moore’s staff, we gave the background of FFRMS and discussed possible appropriations riders that might be added; urged support for mapping and PDM budget requests and explained WAFSCM and ASFPM’s support for them; shared examples in Wisconsin, like the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District’s multi-use project with NGOs (in her district); and talked about the MMSD’s Clean Waters/Clean Lakes initiative in Milwaukee.

For newly elected Rep. Grothman’s staff, we spent a little more time describing ASFPM and WAFSCM. We covered FFRMS, discussed TMAC, discussed support for map and PDM budget requests, and discussed the particular flood issues affecting Rep. Grothman's rural farm district.

For Rep. Ryan’s staff, because he is chairman of Ways and Means Committee, we discussed bills from last Congress giving tax credits for mitigation actions. Likely some will be reintroduced. We explained our interest in legislation to make grants for investment in non-structural mitigation that benefits an individual property owner, but benefits the public good, as not taxable income. We also highlighted areas (Racine, Kenosha and Janesville) that are subject to flooding in Rep. Ryan’s district and the successes in his district in recovery from the 2010 floods in his district.

For Sen. Johnson’s staff, we covered a lot of territory regarding flood issues in Wisconsin: effective disaster response and recovery, hazard mitigation in the context of the overall cost of flood disasters, and budget requests for floodplain mapping ($278 million) and Pre-Disaster Mitigation ($200 million). We stressed that any support the senator could express for mapping and pre-disaster mitigation funding would be appreciated. We also distributed and discussed the report produced by a task force of the American Society of Civil Engineers concerning lessons learned from recent flood disasters like Hurricane Katrina.

For Sen. Baldwin’s staff meeting, we were joined by Dave Conrad, who helped with our discussion of FFRMS. We covered a lot of the same ground as with Johnson’s staff. Baldwin’s staff indicated she had expressed support for the flood risk mapping and Pre-Disaster Mitigation budget requests. Merrie provided a letter drafted by the office of Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) for their use, and we also provided staff with a copy of the ASCE report.

I cannot say enough about these visits as a learning experience. They prove what a real opportunity ASFPM’s members can have regarding the national dialogue on national flood policy. I would urge you to take advantage of the resources ASFPM has in DC and the executive office in Madison to help make these visits productive.
Capitol Hill Briefing on Coastal Flooding deemed a Success

ASFPM teamed up with the American Meteorological Society Policy Program, Coastal States Organization, and Consortium for Ocean Leadership to offer a "Coastal Flooding: Science, Risk Communication, and Response" briefing March 11 at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center in DC.

Nearly 60 people attended the briefing, which explored the different types of flooding threatening coastal communities; risk communication strategies focusing on storm surge; and mitigation options that allow cities, counties, and states to lessen damages from recurrent flooding and extreme events like hurricanes.

Molly Mitchell from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (pictured left) discussed nuisance flooding and its impacts on coastal communities, with a focus on Virginia. She described factors that influence precipitation and tidal-driven flooding, and what factors mitigate or worsen flood damage. Mitchell also explained some of the impacts, such as road inundation and disruptions to business; wastewater overflows from reduced capacity of stormwater systems; shoreline erosion; and saltwater intrusion in drinking water and agricultural fields.

Jamie Rhome with the National Hurricane Center also presented at the briefing. He stressed that storm surge is the primary cause of fatalities during hurricanes, and demonstrated new experimental products the National Weather Service is developing to communicate storm surge risk to communities and emergency managers. These include new inundation maps that are clear and easy to understand, and a graphical storm surge watch/warning.

Kristin Baja from the Baltimore Office of Sustainability also took part in the briefing. She said nuisance flooding is a growing threat, and storm surge impacts are potentially catastrophic. Baja shared what Baltimore has done to protect citizens from flooding damage, including coordinating their disaster preparedness plan across all departments, engaging the community in activities like building emergency kits, exploring ways to make infrastructure more resilient, and taking a "whole block approach" to building resilience to weather and climate.

Click here to watch videos from the full presentation.

“The audience was incredibly diverse and, thanks to the involvement of the co-sponsoring organizations, included many people outside the traditional weather and climate community,” said Ya’el Seid-Green with the American Meteorological Society.

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USDA to provide $332 million to protect and restore agricultural working lands, grasslands and wetlands

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced March 31 that U.S. Department of Agriculture is making $332 million available in financial and technical assistance through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service will accept ACEP applications to help productive farm and ranch lands remain in agriculture, and to protect the nation’s critical wetlands and grasslands, home to diverse wildlife and plant species. Private landowners, tribes, and eligible entities encouraged to apply by May 15. Read the announcement here.
FEMA has a new webpage called "Hurricane Sandy NFIP Claims"

For National Flood Insurance Program policyholders who were affected by Hurricane Sandy, FEMA's deputy associate administrator for insurance recorded a short video that is available on FEMA's new claims resource page.

Bellomo leaves FEMA for Corps job

Doug Bellomo, who has worked at FEMA for 18 years, recently accepted a job with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Institute for Water Resources. Bellomo is the director of FEMA’s Risk Analysis Division. His last official day at FEMA will be May 13. Paul Huang, currently serving as the RAD deputy director, will be the acting director.

FEMA launches new feature to mobile app empowering users to follow weather alerts across the country

The new feature to FEMA’s free app will allow users to receive National Weather Service alerts for up to five locations across the nation. Users can check on severe weather happening anywhere they select in the country, even if the phone is not located in the area, making it easy to follow severe weather that may be threatening family and friends. Click here to read more and download the “Weather the Storm” app.

FEMA also launched its Coordinated Needs Management Strategy Tool

FEMA launched an enhanced Coordinated Needs Management Strategy (CNMS) tool. Enhancements allow for approved account users to submit and track mapping need requests through the CNMS Viewer. Visitors of the CNMS tool will have access to view validation status of flood studies and geographic locations of user-submitted requests.

CNMS was created for FEMA to organize, store, and analyze flood hazard mapping needs information for communities. It is comprised of the processes and data used to identify and track the lifecycle of FEMA’s inventory of flood studies. This information is used to help inform mapping project planning and flood data model standardizes in flood map production.

View the links below to learn more about the updates to the CNMS tool:

Webpage on fema.gov
User training tutorial

If you have additional questions about the CNMS tool, contact the CDS Outreach Team at outreach@riskmapcds.com
From the Chair

William S. “Bill” Nechamen, CFM

The recent NFIP reform Acts actually did more than require increases in many flood insurance rates. The Acts also informed how flood mapping will be done in the future. Congress acknowledged that there remains a more to be done about flood risk and flood insurance. Perhaps this was a way of punting the problem downfield. There has certainly been a lot of commentary about the delay in getting some of the studies moving. However, the people involved in the legislated studies are taking their tasks very seriously.

Last month, I was honored to be asked to join a panel hosted by the National Research Council on the topic of community-based flood insurance. The study of voluntary community-based flood insurance options is required by Section 23 of the “Homeowners Flood Insurance Affordability Act of 2014.” The discussion was very open ended and included representatives from the Fort Bend, Texas Levee Improvement District, New York City Mayor’s Office, National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies, Bank of America and FEMA. The ad hoc committee of the NRC includes past ASFPM Chair Dr. Sally McConkey and two former members of FEMA’s leadership: David Maurstad and Dr. Sandra Knight.

The panel expressed no preconceived notions of the pros, cons, and possible configurations of community-based flood insurance. The concept would allow a community to cover full or partial flood insurance rates for the entire community. The rates would go up or down in accordance with actions the community is taking that results in higher or lower risk. The idea is that there would be a real financial incentive for a community to reduce risk. There are concerns as well. Would somebody who lives outside of the flood risk zones be willing to have some of their local tax dollars spent to cover the insurance for development that remains at risk? Could communities choose to subsidize flood insurance for unwise development? What is a community? Is it limited to the NFIP definition, or could it be a group of municipalities in a watershed, or a neighborhood within a large city? The panel’s report is due at the end of 2015.

This will be my final “Notes from the Chair.” It’s been a privilege working with Vice Chair Ceil Strauss the past two years, and I know that if she’s elected, will make a fine chair. The four years I’ve spent as vice chair and chair have been the most rewarding years of my career. I’ve gotten to know so many amazing people. I’ve learned that federal agency leadership and Congressional staff take ASFPM’s positions very seriously because of the thousands of professionals that comprise ASFPM and the common sense positions represented by ASFPM. I’ve been totally amazed at the hours and dedication of ASFPM staff and its volunteers.

I’m looking forward to having a lighter email, conference call and travel load. But I know I’ll also miss the constant flow of information and discussions that come my way. I’ve observed that past chairs never completely go away. But sometimes, they have a little more time.

Job Corner

Visit ASFPM Job Corner for more information and the most up-to-date job listings. Or post your own job opening. It’s completely free!
Region 9: Adjusting to Changing Risks

By Jeanne Ruefer, ASFPM’s Region 9 Director and a Project Management Professional at Tetra Tech in Nevada

Region 9 encompasses Arizona, California, Hawaii and Nevada, and several islands in the Pacific, including Guam, and American Samoa. The geography ranges from Pacific coast in California, tropical islands in Hawaii, high and low elevation desert in Arizona and Nevada, the Sierra Nevada, dense redwood forests, and some of the best wine grape growing valleys in the world in Napa-Sonoma. Region 9 is also home to more than 50 percent of the nation’s levee systems, many of them located in the Central Valley of California.

With all of this diverse geography, comes a very diverse collection of hazards. From sea level rise and changing hydrology due to climate change, to earthquakes, tsunamis, wildfire, the longest continuous volcanic eruption in the US, and of course, flooding. Region 9 states have a lot to manage. Now we have a four-year drought superimposed over the top of these hazards, which is the current focus of policy and political attention.

The Region 9 states are home to almost 50 million people. California alone has the eighth largest economy in the world, and grows 50 percent of the nation’s fruits, nuts and vegetables, much of it in the Central Valley. Arizona is not far behind with crops such as cotton and citrus. The water to irrigate this bounty is typically delivered as snow pack in the Sierra Nevada and the Rockies, and shunted around the western states via a series of canals and ditches. This year, the snow pack in the Sierra Nevada was non-existent, as the West experienced one of the driest and warmest winters on record. What precipitation did fall came as rain, and quickly ran off, leaving communities high and dry.

The governors of California and Nevada, two of the most drought-impacted states, have taken policy action just this month. California Gov. Jerry Brown has imposed a mandatory 25 percent reduction in urban water usage. In Nevada, Gov. Brian Sandoval created a Drought Forum, including members of the largest water purveyors and scientists to investigate the impacts and create a report with recommendations by the end of the calendar year. Of the two states, California is more impacted by the drought at this point, primarily because 80 percent of the water used in the state is for irrigated agriculture, which is not affected by the 25 percent reduction in use.

While drought remains the focus of California, northern Nevada and even Hawaii, Arizona and southern Nevada are about to enter fire season, followed by the summer monsoon season in July, which is when they experience their most severe flooding events. Especially during drought conditions, high intensity and short duration monsoon rainfall can have catastrophic impacts, quickly overwhelming flood management facilities. Every season is flood season in the West, even during a drought.
Region 10: Adjusting to Changing Standards

By Dave Carlton, ASFPM’s Region 10 Director and owner of dkcarlton & associates in Lake Forest Park, Washington

Region 10 is by far the largest of the 10 regions. It encompasses the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska. The geography ranges from temperate rainforest in Washington, desert in eastern Washington, eastern Oregon, and southern Idaho, to remote barrier islands in Alaska, and home to the home of Copper River Salmon. While Region 10 is the largest of regions geographically, we have only 84,000 of the 5,260,000 flood insurance policies currently in place across the country.

Like Region 9, we have a very diverse collection of hazards being addressed by Risk MAP including not just floods, but also earthquakes, tsunamis, wildfires, dam failures, levees and volcanoes. Each of these risks have been addressed by one or more Risk MAP projects in Region 10. For instance, in Ocean Shores, Washington we are now home to the first example of vertical evacuation to address the risk from a tsunami.

Economically we are home to Nike, Amazon, Costco, Microsoft, Starbucks, Expedia, T-Mobile, Zillow, Nautilus, Alaska Air, and of course my favorite, Fremont Brewing, just one example of the many fine microbreweries scattered across all four states. To complement all the breweries, we also grow more hops than the rest of the nation combined, and are famous for Washington apples, Idaho potatoes and Alaska salmon.

The Puget Sound region of Washington has for several years been implementing the requirements of a Biological Opinion issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service to protect endangered salmon from the impacts of unwise development in the region’s floodplains. In essence, all 122 impacted communities are now required to implement higher floodplain management standards, especially when it comes to where new development is sited. In addition, changes were implemented in the 2014 CRS Manual to reflect requirements in the opinion to raise the profile of the beneficial functions undisturbed floodplains can provide. We expect that a final opinion will be issued by NMFS this summer to protect endangered salmon in most of Oregon. This opinion is anticipated to also have stringent standards for new floodplain development, additional mapping standards, and requirements for mitigation when any habitat is damaged within the floodplain.

A few years ago The Nature Conservancy launched an innovative initiative called Floodplains by Design to work with communities throughout Washington to promote better and more thoughtful management of our floodplains. In addition, they have been successful in creating an annual $50 million grant program funded by the Washington Legislature to remove at-risk structures and restore damaged habitat. Several projects have been funded, constructed and already proven their worth in recent floods.
Policy Matters!

Larry Larson, PE, CFM
Director Emeritus – Senior Policy Advisor, ASFPM

In the last 45+ years, has the nation made progress in nonstructural mitigation? Let me start by separating mitigation of new development from flooding and mitigation of existing development. There are leaders in some federal agencies who believe the only mitigation carried out in the nation is done by the federal government. Perhaps that is because the only mitigation federal programs deal with is mitigation grant programs to mitigate flooding to existing development, usually post disaster.

However, most mitigation is done at the local and state level through land use regulation (where development is built), and standards and building codes (how it is built). Estimates indicate compliance with NFIP building standards save more than $1.5 billion per year in flood damages, which ultimately reduce property losses, human suffering and taxpayer funding for disaster costs. Interestingly, many states and communities have stronger land use regulations than the federal minimum standards in the NFIP. For example, more than 60 percent of the nation’s population lives in a community or state where first floor elevations of new buildings must be elevated 1-4 feet above the 1 percent chance flood level, or base flood elevation, whereas the NFIP standard is at BFE.

Has nonstructural mitigation of existing development improved or not in these four decades? During the 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s, the federal flood mitigation that was happening was essentially all structural, done by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and out West, the Bureau of Reclamation. It was comprised of levees and dams—an era when we thought we could control Mother Nature with engineering. The NFIP did some nonstructural flood mitigation in the 1970s using an acquisition program under the NFIP, Section 1362. It was cumbersome, fund limited and not well known, but it did some acquisitions of high risk properties.

In the 1974 Water Resources Development Act PL 93-251 (WRDA) in Section 73, Congress required the Corps to include an analysis of nonstructural measures:

“In the survey, planning, or design by any Federal agency of any project involving flood protection, consideration shall be given to nonstructural alternatives to prevent or reduce flood damages including, but not limited to, floodproofing of structures; floodplain regulation; acquisition of flood plain lands for recreational, fish and wildlife, and other public purposes; and relocation with a view toward formulating the most economically, socially, and environmentally acceptable means of reducing or preventing flood damages.”

Interestingly, WRDA authorized two cutting edge nonstructural projects; the Charles River, Massachusetts acquisition of wetlands to prevent future development and runoff, and Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin acquisition of 140 homes that were moved to high land in the community. Only a limited number of nonstructural projects have been done by the Corps since then. While a number of Corps field staff attempt to consider nonstructural, the guidance and rules make it very difficult, so relatively few are implemented. The Corps reported that there are currently 117 on-going projects happening, with 25 completed.

The most significant nonstructural federal mitigation program is the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program authorized in 1988, but not really utilized until after the Great Midwest floods of 1993, where FEMA acquired and relocated almost 20,000 buildings out of the floodplain. That program has now mitigated more than 35,000 buildings, either through acquisition/relocation or elevation. FEMA has a couple other grant programs to mitigate flooding on existing buildings: the Pre-Disaster Mitigation and the NFIP Flood Mitigation Assistance Program.
PDM was initially funded at a level to be effective, but has seen very little funding over the past five years or so, although the President’s FY16 proposed budget request of $200 million is a useful and promising figure. All the FEMA mitigation programs are cost shared at 75/25 fed/non-fed.

The above description of FEMA nonstructural sounds promising until we realize that last year FEMA made an internal decision to open HMGP and PDM grants to major structural projects—a major setback for nonstructural. For most disasters, the HMGP has limited funding, and much less is available through PDM on an annual basis. Funding of one major levee construction or rebuilding would suck up that funding in a minute, taking away funding for any nonstructural measures. Some say there has been no rush of applications for structural projects using FMA, but we know it could take several years to even prepare an application for a major structural project, so they will come. Also, most state mitigation programs staff know that often the conversation about nonstructural options only occurs when they can say that structural mitigation alternatives are off the table.

What do we see as the future for nonstructural, nature-based systems for flood mitigation of existing buildings? Personally, I am not terribly optimistic. Nonstructural alternatives require the community and individual property owners to “stop and think” before madly rushing into recovery and rebuilding. If they have not considered the options before the disaster strikes, they will grab the option that least disrupts their lives and tax base, and that gets the federal taxpayer to take the lead for implementation and gets the feds sucked into long-term flood protection for the community. Full risk rates for flood insurance show owners the true risk of where and how they built, but it also gets them to push for solutions like levees, since we have perverse national policies that pretend there is no residual risk behind a levee. After all, neither flood insurance nor floodplain regulations are required behind a levee built to a moderate flood risk (i.e. the 1 percent chance flood). So it’s little wonder that people don’t think there’s much of a flood risk.

To increase use of the long-term nonstructural mitigation options will take leadership at the local and state level. It seems clear Congress will not provide that leadership, and federal agencies have a mixed to poor record. A number of communities are providing that leadership, and we at ASFPM will continue to promote policies and programs that support nonstructural, in an effort to achieve a balance and reduce future flood losses and taxpayer costs.

ASFPM and the American Planning Association have teamed up to host a FREE “Planning Information Exchange” webinar called, ”The Role of Hazard Mitigation in Post-Disaster Recovery.” It will be held from 3-4 p.m. CDT on May 6. Learn more and register at: http://bit.ly/1FRXbhX
Interesting tidbits from ASFPM chapter newsletters

The Illinois Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management bestowed a lifetime achievement award to Sally McConkey, ASFPM’s past board chair, at its annual conference this year. According to the newsletter, this award is the IAFSM’s highest honor, and is reserved for outstanding longtime floodplain managers. The announcement read, “Sally started her first job in watershed management over 30 years ago. The past 23 years of her career have been dedicated to various aspects of project management for floodplain and watershed projects with the Illinois State Water Survey, including: Manager of Floodplain Information Services, Project Coordinator for the Fox River Watershed Investigation, Map Modernization, FEMA Cooperating Partner and MT2 Reviews. Additionally Sally has held a board or committee position with either IAFSM or ASFPM since 1995.” A hearty congratulations to her!

The North Carolina Association of Floodplain Managers reported in its spring 2015 newsletter that the theme for their annual conference (being held this month) is, “Mitigation Starts with Yourself-ie.” It’s a cute theme, but also, truer words were never spoken. The newsletter announcement asks members to post a selfie with a flood mitigation project on Facebook or Twitter using the hashtag #NCAFPM2015. “Show your support and enthusiasm for flood mitigation.” Drew Blackwell Tweeted this photo (left) and wrote, “Hey @NCAFPM ‘Mitigation Starts with Yourself-ie.’ @CityofWS Flood Mitigation Project property acquisition #ncafpm2015.”

The Kansas Association for Floodplain Management webpage includes a link to the Kansas Department of Agriculture’s Floodplain Management newsletter. KDA’s April 2015 Floodplain Tips includes a great piece on “How to Hire a Surveyor.” It has lots of tips for how property owners can be smart consumers when looking into hiring a surveyor for a Letter of Map Amendment or Elevation Certificate.

Considering a Career in Floodplain Management?

Want a challenging career that is in demand? Floodplain management is an emerging career option to consider. Few fields cover a broader range of disciplines. The Master of Infrastructure Planning & Management at the University of Washington now offers a degree option in floodplain management, allowing students to earn their master’s with a focus on the study of coastal and riverine floodplain management. This 45-credit degree program lasts 18 months and launches with its first student cohort in summer 2015. But the deadline to apply is May 22. Learn more about the program, curriculum, faculty and the capstone project for students to gain real-world experience here.
What’s happening around the nation?

A collection of the most viewed stories on our Facebook page

Colorado

Who knew rain barrels could stir up so much controversy? A bill that would allow Colorado residents to legally put out rain barrels to catch water dripping from their roofs boiled down to a debate over precedent and "common sense" in the statehouse March 20. Read the full article here.

Louisiana

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is proposing to reduce flooding in southwestern Louisiana with a $1.8 billion plan that would include voluntarily raising or buying homes in flood-prone areas, building walls or berms around some businesses, and restoring or protecting 24.3 square miles of wetland habitat in Cameron, Calcasieu and Vermilion parishes. Note that levees aren’t mentioned at all. Read full article here.

The Nation

The Washington Post led with the following in an article titled, “Rise in government insurance rates to mirror rising waters, flood debt.” – "At her small beach house that sits in a flood zone, Nancy Loft-Powers worries. The prospect of rising water, she said, isn’t what bothers her. It’s the expected rise in the cost of her $7,500 yearly flood insurance."

The Nature of Cities organization features a monthly Global Roundtable. Recently the topic was daylighting. The subject line was, “Daylighting and restoring urban streams, ponds and wetlands can provide huge ecological and social benefits. Are such restorations ‘worth it?’ What are the pitfalls? How can we demonstrate these benefits and elevate them in the public discourse so that urban wetlands become urban planning priorities.” Read what the experts said here.

Texas

Dumpsters always have the right of way, right? This video was posted by a WFAA-TV viewer, who filmed a dumpster floating down the road and slamming into a car during an April 13 flash flood in Denton, Texas. You can read “Heavy rains bring flooding to parts of North Texas” in this WFAA-TV story here.
From the Director’s Desk

Chad Berginnis, CFM
Executive Director, ASFPM

For the last few columns, I have discussed the need for and benefits of Executive Order 13690 and the new Federal Flood Risk Management Standard. As I am writing this column, a FEMA appropriations hearing was just held in Congress and the concerns expressed by members of Congress were disappointing – largely based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the standard and how it would be applied, as well as a good dose of fearmongering. As has been the case since the introduction of EO 13690, there is a need for policy makers to hear the experienced voices of floodplain managers who actually deal with federally funded, financed and undertaken actions and Executive Order 11988. By the time this edition of News & Views is published, you will have little more than a week to submit comments on the draft Implementation Guidelines for all federal agencies to follow.

We are encouraging you individually and collectively (through your ASFPM chapter or your community) to submit common sense, constructive comments to the Federal Register so federal agencies have a solid set of implementation guidelines as they begin the process of incorporating the new standard into their programs and actions. THANK YOU to those of you who have already done so. I was just browsing through the 82 comments submitted so far and am thrilled to see several submitted by you – working floodplain managers including many from CFMs. Whatever your viewpoint, you have the experience and background to provide meaningful comments on this issue. What strikes me is the really in-depth comments from floodplain managers who are quite detailed about the “nuts and bolts” of the guidance. I’ve also seen floodplain managers making excellent recommendations, as well as asking appropriate questions.

Comments on the draft Implementation Guidelines can be submitted through May 6. If you would like to comment, go to the Federal Register and search for FEMA-2015-0006, and click on the blue "Comment Now!" button.

What’s next?

It seems the number one question people are asking is how the new standard will specifically apply to a federal program. That is exactly what the next steps in this process are all about. I have explained to many ASFPM members that it is difficult at this time for agencies to outline exactly how the new standard would apply to their programs or actions. Agencies were prohibited from “implementing” the standard by Congress until they get public input (which is what is occurring now) and to me, an agency putting too much effort into determining how the standard will apply might draw an accusation of “implementing” the standard. Rather, the closure of the comment period kicks off a series of actions:

1. Agencies will submit their Implementation Plan to the White House within 30 days of the close of the public comment period. The Implementation Plan will detail which policies, procedures, and/or regulations they plan to update along with the timeline and public engagement that may be necessary.
2. The Mitigation Federal Leadership Group (MitFLG) will receive the public comments after the close of the public comment period, and they will work to revise the Implementation Guidelines based on the input received. MitFLG will then provide recommendations to the Water Resource Council, which will finalize and issue the Implementation Guidelines.
3. Agencies will revise policies, procedures, and/or regulations as necessary to implement the new EO/FFFRMS and engage the public as required.

The bottom line is that the close of the public comment period for the draft Implementation Guidelines is really just the beginning of the implementation of the FFRMS. In fact, the new standards don’t become effective until
agencies actually revise their policies/procedures/regulations, and in most cases that will require a whole new round of public comment on how specifically the FFRMS will apply to various programs.

I have mentioned before, but it is worth mentioning again – agencies have been implementing and revising their procedures for complying with Executive Order 11988 and the original flood risk management standard for decades. The most recent effort I can recall is when HUD undertook an update of their procedures beginning in 2011 with a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and concluding in 2013 with the issuance of a Final Rule. If you really want to understand the flexibility that agencies have in using the Implementation Guidelines, I urge you to review the public record on HUD’s action. ASFPM provided four pages of public comments and while we didn’t agree with every decision HUD ultimately made, their decision making acknowledged different approaches to actions that result in new construction versus existing development, sensitivity to low-income and financing programs, and tried to balance efficient implementation of the EO requirements and the goals of the EO. HUD used the Interagency Guidelines to develop specific procedures and policies unique to their own programmatic needs.

In closing, the May 6 deadline really signals the beginning of a process, not the end. ASFPM will continue to provide input as agencies begin to contemplate the FFRMS and bring the practical experience of floodplain managers to bear as we strive to provide thoughtful and meaningful comments.

Your partner in loss reduction,

Chad

**Louisiana CPRA Releases Flood Risk and Resilience Viewer**

The Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority recently launched a new “Flood Risk and Resilience Viewer,” which displays information on coastal land change, flood risk, and impacts to communities. This online-tool provides residents with access to the state’s best information about how Louisiana’s coast may change in the future, as well as resources to make communities and properties safer. The viewer uses data produced for the 2012 Coastal Master Plan and shows land loss and flood risk across the coast for the current day, as well as 50 years into the future. Also displayed are the 2012 Coastal Master Plan protection and restoration projects that provide land building and risk reduction benefits across the coast. This information can be used by state agencies, coastal stakeholders, and community advocates in coastal planning and hazard mitigation efforts. In addition, a variety of resources are provided to enable homeowners and business owners to take steps towards reducing their flood risk.
Status of ASFPM’s Mentoring Program

The ASFPM state mentoring program is moving right along! ASFPM Executive Director Chad Berginnis said, “The program is being designed and written by former state floodplain managers. The mentoring program is being developed to assist state floodplain management program staff who seek to improve their competency on technical aspects of running a state floodplain management program, professional development, and program development. The current focus is piloting two more of the “state floodplain manager one-on-one” modules at the ASFPM conference in Atlanta and standing up the mentoring website later this year. A mentoring work session was held at the executive office in mid-April. Pictured above is the group, from left: ASFPM Executive Director Chad Berginnis; Cindy Crecelius, former Ohio state floodplain manager and principal of CC Consults; George Riedel, former Missouri state floodplain manager and now with Baker International; and Al Goodman, former Mississippi state floodplain manager and now principal of AWG Consulting.

Navigating the Crazy Social Media World, Tip No. 2

By Michele Mihalovich, ASFPM’s public information officer

I mentioned in the last newsletter that this social media tip would focus on posting in LinkedIn and Twitter, but Twitter is very complex, so I will write about LinkedIn next time.

Twitter’s big claim to fame is its 140 character restriction. And you probably were never aware how “wordy” you are until you try to post a tweet in Twitter. And according to Scott Levy, who wrote the book Tweet Naked, even 140 characters is too many. He says all the really cool kids are using 125 characters or LESS to tweet. He writes that “short, punchy tweets will grab your followers' attention rather than getting lost in their feeds. The more characters left, the easier it is for people to retweet and add their own comment as well.”

To help manage the scaled down post, the first thing I like to do is shorten a link I’m planning on sharing. I use bitly.com, but others, such as TinyURL.com or Ow.ly work just fine.

Here’s what a shortening site can do. Below is the full link from a FEMA blog post:


Here’s what it looks like AFTER bitly shortened it: http://1.usa.gov/1yWnhJ
We went from 148 characters just in a LINK, which is too many to even use in a Twitter post, to only 24 characters. Now you have enough room to tell people why they should click on the link.

Unlike Facebook, when you post a link to Twitter, it doesn’t load images. You have to do that yourself, and you WILL want to because humans are naturally drawn to compelling images. You’ll notice a little camera icon in the “What’s happening?” bar. Click on it to add a photo, but keep in mind that the recommended photo dimensions should be 1024 px by 512 px, or an aspect ratio: 2:1. Click here to read best practices for Twitter images. If your image is too big, it won’t show up with the tweet. Users will have to click on the “View photo” link to open up the photo, which is defeating the purpose of drawing them to your post with an image. Here is another great resource for sizing photos for multiple social media sites.

Developing a “shorthand” on Twitter will just come naturally after a while. Try not to throw all grammar rules out the window. Users still need to understand what it is you’re trying to say. Some tricks are using the “&” for “and,” or “4” instead of “four.” The words “the” or “that” are rarely needed. The terms “floodplain managers” or “floodplain management” REALLY sucks up the character count. But if I type FPM instead, most of my followers know what I’m talking about.

Here are some other best practices tips:

Don’t #overuse #hashtags #in #your #tweets. Limit yourself to 1-3 hashtags per tweet. In fact, I really am anti-hashtag. The only time I use them is during our national conference, or a huge natural disaster event like #HurricaneSandy or #NepalEarthquake. The hashtag at last year’s conference in Seattle was #ASFPM2014, and this year it’s going to be #ASFPM2015. It’s a great way for people following the conference to see what’s going on and stay connected. And somewhat along those same lines, at least a couple times a day I do a search on the word “flood” in Twitter to see if there’s anything happening worldwide that I’d like to share with our followers. I get a lot more results than I would if I’d used #flood. Not everyone will agree with this practice, but no one has ever complained to me that they couldn’t understand my tweet because it was cluttered with hashtags. Here’s an excellent example of a horrible tweet: $BSGM on a #tear #VOLUME and #PRICE #ALERT #up 90% 2 #weeks #future of #heart #health #medicalnews #RT #biosigtech. Did you understand this at all?!? I didn’t think so. A good rule of thumb – use hashtags sparingly, especially if it’s going to garble the message.

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**ASFPM needs your items for Silent and Live Auctions at our National Conference**

Silent and live auctions are held annually at the ASFPM national conference. Each year attendees at the conference have the opportunity to bid on valuable goods and services donated by local businesses, ASFPM chapters, corporate sponsors, and individuals. All proceeds from the auctions go to the ASFPM Foundation, created in 1997, to support research and education that promote wise and sustainable floodplain management.

**When, where and how you can bid and buy?**

The next auctions will be held at our national conference in Atlanta, May 31-June 5.

**How to make your tax-deductible donation?**

Provide the following information to Luci Sherwood, our silent auction coordinator:

- Description of item (and number of each unit donated if applicable),
- Fair market value (minimum value $25 and include any shipping costs separately),
- Company or affiliation,
- Your phone, email, and address,
- When and how the item will available for table placement,
- Name and address for acknowledgement letter if applicable.

Shipping and delivery information is here.

**Here are a few of the 2015 auction donations to date:** One week timeshare in Sedona, Arizona; Wine, cheese, and cracker baskets; Jewelry; State-themed gift baskets; Gourmet chocolates; Four Atlanta Braves tickets for June 5; Restaurant gift cards nears the Hyatt Regency.
Mitigation on my Mind!
ASFPM’s 39th Annual National Conference, May 31-June 5, 2015

If you’ve already booked your hotel rooms for ASFPM’s national conference at a hotel other than the Hyatt Regency Atlanta, you might want to cancel those reservations.

Deadline for guests who reserve their hotel room in ASFPM’s contracted hotel block at the Hyatt Regency Atlanta by May 8 receive significant perks:

- complimentary in-room Internet and 500 bonus Hyatt Gold Passport points, and
- will be entered into a drawing to receive a complimentary suite upgrade with access to the Regency Club for the duration of your stay. The Hyatt Regency will also hold daily drawings (Monday - Thursday of the conference) for prizes, including 10,000 Gold Passport points, $500 American Express gift card, complimentary dinner for two, and waived incidental charges of up to $500!

ASFPM has contracted with the Hyatt Regency Atlanta and negotiated superb room rates. Group rates, available to all conference participants, begin at $170. We have additionally secured a block of Federal Per Diem rate rooms available ONLY to government employees, beginning at $135.

To ensure your reservation qualifies for the ASFPM rate and perks, we urge you to use the online booking system below.

Hyatt Regency Atlanta Online Booking System

You will be prompted to select "attendee" or "government" on the landing page. Please be sure to choose the appropriate selection.
ASFPM Foundation organized two Flood Risk Symposia this year and are already producing tangible results

The ASFPM Foundation has a strong presence in national discussions about flood risk. Over the past decade, the foundation has sponsored four “Gilbert F. White National Flood Policy Forums,” where groups of 100 national and international experts and leaders convened in Washington, DC. These forums have focused on reducing flood losses, managing flood risks and floodplain resources, and the future of floodplain management. The goal of each forum was to facilitate discussion on flood risk, establish priorities for improving policy and program implementation, and to formulate recommendations and directions for the future.

Based on the success of the national forums, the foundation began promoting similar meetings at the state level. Over the past few years, Flood Risk Symposia have been held in Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, and Texas. Arizona and Illinois hosted the 2015 symposia. In addition to productive discussions, there is a strong emphasis on proposed action items and how to measure progress in flood risk management at the community level.

Report on 2015 Arizona Flood Risk Symposium, written by Shannon Summers

In February of this year, the Arizona Floodplain Management Association, in coordination with the ASFPM Foundation, hosted a one-day symposium at the Allen Readiness Center in Phoenix to discuss the many concerns about flooding in Arizona.

Our goal was to assemble a diverse group of individuals who would contribute toward productive discussions and potential solutions. Invitees included community staff responsible for managing floodplains within their cities and towns, emergency managers, scientists from the meteorology, engineering, geology and water resources fields, representatives from real estate and insurance, and elected officials who are expected to fully comprehend the flooding issues in their communities. Media and outreach specialists who can craft clear and concise messages for the public, and representatives from FEMA were also invited.

The purpose of the symposium was not only to generate ideas and solutions from within our group of professionals and jurisdiction representatives, but also to understand and include the many challenges and multifaceted interests of all other potential stakeholders as well. Only by working in serious partnerships with all stakeholders do we stand a chance of being successful in managing our floodplains effectively.

Our four plenary speakers touched on this critical need for partnerships throughout their presentations.
Beth Zimmerman, FEMA headquarters, spoke of the necessity for not only resilience, but planning for what takes place after an event. That kind of planning requires not only a multi-jurisdictional approach, which we are accustomed to, but a multi-faceted approach that brings varied groups to the table such as the real estate and development community, utility stakeholders and environmental sustainability groups.

Bill Wiley of Maricopa County touched on the need to develop partnerships that we may not have considered in the past and to search creatively for solutions that will stand the test of time. As Bill pointed out, our future challenges are likely to be a combination of increased population/urban growth, less precipitation but possibly higher intensity storms and, as always, limited resources. He stressed that our keys for success lie in planning for this “new reality,” engaging in proactive maintenance, leveraging technology, using outreach and partnerships and exploring multi-use opportunities.

In the next presentation, “Beyond the Special Flood Hazard Area,” Jon Fuller of J.E. Fuller Hydrology & Geomorphology did a skillful job of illustrating the fact that we cannot consider floodplain management from a singular cause and effect. He made a strong case for FEMA and our arid western communities to actively map and regulate the serious riverine erosion hazards that many of us have already experienced in our communities. Jon also pointed out the potential impact that future development will have on our watersheds and the ever changing regulatory framework that we work within, such as the recent Executive Order 13690 (Jan 2015) and the impact that these changes may have on how we approach floodplain management. He summarized with the very real risks of subsidence, wildfires and debris flows and their subsequent effects on floodplain management.

Daniel Henz, Maricopa County, gave us a recap of the historic rainfall events of the 2014 monsoon season during which the Phoenix metro area experienced rainfall intensities and totals that eclipsed previous records. Dan stopped short of making any predictions, but made it clear that we could be experiencing a new normal and the ways in which we prepare for the future are critical to our communities.

In summary, it is clear that as the professionals who are considered “experts” in this field, we need to continue to reach outside of our comfort zone and have sustainable floodplain management conversations with a very diverse group of stakeholders to achieve the goal of protecting our communities from flood related risk. As you are going about your work day, take a moment to think about collaboration, partnering and sharing resources. Who can you work with? How can you make sure that all stakeholders are being supported? In addition to your projects and programs being successful, how can you develop a program to enhance and showcase other community interests as well?

Report on 2015 Illinois Flood Risk Symposium, written by Loren Wobig

The recent Illinois Flood Risk Symposium, held in Chicago, is a prime example of the kind of successful professional endeavors made possible by the collaborated efforts of many Illinois Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management volunteers (under great volunteer leadership of Amanda Flegel).

The symposium brought together 90 individuals from academia, non-government organizations, insurance industry, real estate industry, state elected office, consulting engineering, and local, state and federal government to focus on urban flood risk. These attendees wrestled with how to identify urban flood risk, how to reduce urban flood risk and how to pay for urban flood risk reduction in topic specific workgroups and as a collective.
A number of excellent insights and ideas were generated by this collaboration and will be shared in an Illinois Flood Risk Symposium Report. The success of this symposium will likely be used as a catalyst for future floodplain and stormwater management IAFSM symposia.

The attributes of the IAFSM volunteer members noted above continue to drive new and exciting opportunities in the association, including the opportunity to be active on a Rapid Assessment Flood Team, or participate in a discussion related to the advancement of stormwater utilities in Illinois, or inspire our youth to learn more about floodplain and stormwater management. The association is alive and well with dedicated leadership and volunteers – use it, grow with it, and enjoy it.

Looking for training opportunities to earn CECs for your CFM? If so, be sure to check out our web calendar, which already has several training opportunities listed for 2015! Search the calendar by state using the directions below, or use the category drop down menu.

http://www.floods.org/n-calendar/calendar.asp

➢ Go to the calendar and click on the search feature icon at the top of the calendar. Type your state’s initials in parenthesis (for example “(WI)” into the search field and it will pull all the events (training, conferences, etc.) that are currently listed on the calendar for your state. What a great way to find upcoming training for CECs! The only events without a state listed in the event title are EMI courses which are all held in Emmitsburg, Md.
ASFPM Editorial Guidelines

ASFPM accepts and welcomes articles from our members and partners. “The Insider” and “News & Views” have a style format, and if necessary, we reserve the right to edit submitted articles for space, grammar, punctuation, spelling, potential libel and clarity. If we make substantive changes, we will email the article back to you for your approval before using. We encourage you to include art with your article in the form of photos, illustrations, charts and graphs. Please include a description of the art, along with the full name of who created the art. If the art is not yours originally, you must include expressed, written consent granting ASFPM permission to use the art in our publications. If you have any questions, please contact Michele Mihalovich at editor@floods.org.

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