Midwest Flood Conference Spurs Formation of a Quad Cities Flood Alliance

Gathering at the first Quad Cities Flood Alliance meeting Nov. 29. Photo by Anthony Heddlesten.

Sometimes a conference convenes, but not much comes of it. That was not the case after River Action’s 11th annual Upper Mississippi River Conference held in October.

About 175 turned out for that conference, which included presentations from ASFPM’s Executive Director Chad Berginnis, and long-time ASFPM member Gerry Galloway, a civil engineering professor from the University of Maryland.

The conference focused on agriculture, manufacturing, navigation, tourism, the environment and flood resiliency and control in the upper Mississippi watershed. And while it was held in the Quad Cities area (Davenport and Bettendorf, Iowa; Rock Island and Moline, Illinois), registration was open to anyone concerned about these issues. The target audience drew from the five Upper Mississippi River border states (Illinois, Iowa Minnesota, Missouri and Wisconsin). Engineers, environmental scientists, public works and city administrators, floodplain managers and other river stakeholders attended.

The conference included a workshop discussing the formation of a regional flood resiliency alliance for the Quad Cities area. Inspired to keep the effort going, River Action sent invitations to workshop attendees and other potential alliance members asking them to meet Nov. 29 in Riverdale, Iowa to discuss forming a flood coalition, reviewing FEMA’s 10-step plan for forming a successful regional coalition, and introducing its Community Rating System.

Of course, forming a coalition could help identify and remediate or mitigate flood hazard areas and take actions or create policies that improve CRS ratings and qualify for reduced flood insurance rates. But other benefits include:

- Knowing interagency counterparts before the hectic times of a disaster—pre-flood conference calls across the area can pay dividends in calming fears and securing resources.
• Utilizing other communities as resources to fight floods as a group instead of separate communities—cities upstream where the flood has already passed may have resources they no longer need and can pass them downstream to communities in need.
• Leveraging the combined power of the alliance to secure grant funding for flood preparation, flood mitigation, prevention, etc.

The turnout was amazing! “And I was very impressed... with the general desire to learn more and improve the region in terms of floodplain management,” said Anthony Heddlesten, a water resource planner with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Rock Island, Illinois.

He listed some meeting highlights:

• We did a brief highlight reel on what a flood alliance is and why it's valuable;
• The Bi-State Regional Commission presented on a transportation resiliency project (a planning effort, not a construction effort); and
• Discussed what sort of presentations might be of interest for future meetings (tentatively, the plan is to meet quarterly as a group, with our next meeting to be held in late February or early March). Some possibilities include the National Weather Service Quad Cities spring flood predictions; USACE on its spring flood preparations; and bringing in a “Floodplain Management 101” speaker to help get everyone speaking the same language.

Heddlesten said later alliance meetings could feature a presentation on how to join CRS and a roundtable discussion with cities and counties in the region that have already joined to see what they’ve done and how it can be replicated by other communities and counties.

Interested in USACE’s “How-to-start-a-flood-alliance Guide?”

Contact:

Anthony Heddlesten, PE, CFM
Water Resource Planner
Plan Formulation Branch
Regional Planning &
Environmental Division - North
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Clock Tower Building
P.O. Box 2004
Rock Island, IL 61204
Office: (309) 794-5886
Mobile: (309) 429-0348

Attendees: USACE, a local farmer, local residents in the floodplain, Bi-State Regional Commission, Nahant Marsh (wildlife area in Davenport), Rapids City, IL, Panorama Park, IA (mayor), Illinois State Water Survey, Davenport (floodplain manager and clean water manager), Water Coalition/AMSC, retired CFM, U.S. Rep, Dave Loebsack staff, Rock Island, IL, local Realtor, Coal Valley, IL, American Rivers, retired USACE & USFWS employees who are active in the community in other roles now, River Action, Moline, IL, East Moline, IL, Davenport Riverfront Commission, Illinois DNR-OWR, NWS - Quad Cities, Bettendorf, IA and Muscatine, IA.