Subject: Restore FEMA's Flood Mapping Budget!

Dear Senator:

The number one natural hazard in the Nation in terms of property loss and damage is flooding, and it is one of the leading causes of deaths from natural disasters. This past decade, flood losses averaged over $10 billion each year. Yet even in light of this threat, flood mapping funds are being slashed. In FY10, flood mapping appropriations from Congress equaled $220 million. In 2012, the House is proposing $103 million and the Senate $93 million. This is neither acceptable, nor responsible given the losses the Nation continues to experience.

Current and accurate mapping is the only way to identify in advance the areas of greatest flood risk for short term emergency preparedness and long term planning to reduce flood risk to new and existing development. Local officials rely on these maps to steer new development from harm’s way, to help identify effective mitigation actions to reduce future damage and to respond to flood events in ways that reduce loss of life and property. Consider how many lives may have been lost in this year’s tropical storms and hurricanes had densely populated areas, such as Manhattan, not had the flood risk data to perform targeted evacuation. The Nation simply cannot afford to reduce investments in the improved safety and economic stability that the flood mapping investments produce.

ASFPM calls on the Congress and Administration to restore flood mapping funds. Why is this important?

- Extreme flood events continue to occur and at a more frequent pace – our Nation’s flood mapping must be updated to accurately show this risk. Events to date in 2011 have resulted in four multi-state, multi-billion dollar flood events. Flooding on the Mississippi River, Missouri River, and from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee have reminded us again that flooding occurs not only in mapped flood hazard areas, but also in areas behind levees, downstream of dams, and in areas beyond the areas designated on maps as being subject to flooding. Few of these residual risk areas are mapped and even for mapped flood hazard areas, the maps need to be updated.

Flood risk is not static. Since the 100-year flood level is statistically computed using existing data from past events, as more data comes in, the level of the 100-year flood will change (especially if a large flood hits, as has happened in 2011). As more data are collected, or when a river basin is altered in a way that affects the flow of water in the river, the frequency of flooding is re-evaluated. Record floods that in the past were only seen once per century could soon be seen every other decade or more. Flood risk data must be continually updated.

- FEMA’s Risk MAP program is taking advantage of current science, technology and providing the right data. For many years, FEMA flood maps and mapping program have been criticized for being outdated, not being able
to convey overall flood risk, and having minimal outreach efforts. FEMA’s current Risk MAP program is the agency’s best effort to date to address all of these issues to provide timely information that will lead to actions by communities and individuals to reduce flood risk. FEMA’s most recent satisfaction survey information shows that local officials who have participated in a Risk MAP project are more likely to take mitigation actions than those who have not.

- **Flood mapping is the foundation on which floodplain management, flood hazard mitigation and flood insurance is built, and also provides the data necessary for emergency actions like evacuation.** Among many impacts, inaccurate flood maps can result in: Mis-rating flood insurance policies, costing some people more than they should be paying and allowing some people to pay less than they should; new homes and businesses being built too low in very high risk areas, putting people and property at risk; inability to take effective emergency management actions (identify evacuation routes, site key critical infrastructure, etc.).

- **Accurate and current flood mapping along with FEMA’s Risk MAP program can lead to reduced strain on the National Debt and Disaster Relief Fund.** Accurately identified flood hazards along with risk assessments and outreach will lead to an increased awareness of individual and community risk to flooding. The increased awareness will provide the incentive to reduce the risk via mitigation actions. Research shows that an investment in mitigation has 4 to 1 return. The Federal government’s sound investment in flood mapping will reduce the need to expend dollars from the Disaster Relief Fund and not increase the National Debt for rebuilding following future disasters.

Flooding affects families, businesses, and communities, many of which find it difficult, if not impossible, to recover after a significant flood event. Moreover, the flood threat is changing. As the Nation is experiencing more extreme weather events, floods once deemed infrequent are happening much more often. The fact is that flood risk changes over time. If timely, accurate flood mapping is not done, it is impossible to determine the flood risk so that property owners can protect their investment and safety. The FEMA Flood Mapping Program has been and continues to lead our national effort in developing basic flood risk data that can be used by all to take actions and reduce flood damages.

For additional information please contact Larry Larson, ASFPM Executive Director at larry@floods.org, or Merrie Inderfurth, Washington Liaison at merrie.inderfurth@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Sally McConkey, Chair
ASFPM