



Multi-Agency Flood Mitigation Effort Transforms, Beautifies Missouri Community

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Wayne County, Missouri

Wayne County, MO - It's a long way from the terror of a flood to a happy park, but that's what's happening in Piedmont, Missouri where a cooperative effort is moving people out of harm's way and saving lives and taxpayer dollars.

Located in southeastern Missouri, Piedmont, is no stranger to flooding. The McKenzie Creek flows south, directly through the center of this small community before emptying into the Black River. In the last two decades, flood damages to residential and commercial properties, structures and contents, averaged \$584,000 annually, according to Federal records.



Devastating floods struck in 1982, 1983, 1993, 1995, and as recently as March 2008. Funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), and other sources has paid for clearing many structures out of the flood zone.

The agencies' voluntary home-buyout programs have enabled the City of Piedmont to transform lower-value, flood-prone properties into parks, ballfields, trails, and other community assets. More than 125 property owners have participated in the buyout program during the last two decades when floods struck again in March 2008.

"Earlier floods [since the buyouts] didn't have the power or force of this year's [flood]," said former Mayor Gaylon Watson after the March 2008 flooding, a long-time proponent of buyouts. "We'd be picking up bodies if the buyouts hadn't taken place."

"People would have died this year," agreed DeWayne Robertson, who moved from the flood zone with his elderly parents after the 1995 high-water event. "The water came up so fast."

Interest in the buyout program remains high, particularly when the McKenzie Creek overflows its banks. City Clerk Tammy Thurman said she had more than 70 inquiries on the program within days of this year's high-water event.

The real impetus for the buyout program began following the 1993 flood, one of the most devastating and significant disasters in the history of the Midwestern U.S. Just two years later, a flood of nearly the same magnitude struck again. A public meeting to initiate the voluntary buyout program was held in March 1995.

Over the years, City officials have become adept at bringing together stakeholders and program sponsors to mitigate flood damages while turning buyout properties into award-winning public space. Additionally, Piedmont officials have found funding, grants, and private donations to accomplish the transformation. The cost to the City's taxpayers has been less than 1 percent of the nearly \$4 million project.

FEMA's HMGP provides funding to the State as the program grantee. The State in turn provides funding to qualified local governments to purchase properties in the flood zone. Homeowners must voluntarily agree to sell their properties, and once the local jurisdiction takes title, all structures are razed and turned into limited-use public space.

In the first buyout program, covering the period 1997-1999, there were 56 property owners who volunteered for the program. FEMA contributed nearly 75 percent of the \$1.2 million cost; the State and CDBG funds paid the balance. In 2002, an additional 12 property owners took part in a second round of buyouts approved. FEMA paid \$325,625 of the \$434,155 cost.

Betty Nicks, a participant in the buyout, lived on Legion Drive with her sister, Barbara, who has a disability. "The church helped us move," Betty Nicks said. "They even helped her get in the car... [The process] went like clockwork."

Other agencies, notably the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Missouri Department of Conservation, State Emergency Management Agency, and Department of Economic Development, also played

important roles. The NRCS funded the acquisition of many of the properties.

As of October 2007, the City has purchased 126 properties, including three commercial buildings. In its place is the 50-acre McKenzie Creek Greenway, with two new parks, playground equipment, pavilions, restrooms, a Little League baseball field, a youth soccer field, benches, and picnic areas.

The centerpiece of the project is a mile-long, paved trail along the creek. A fishing pier is accessible to persons with disabilities. Stream banks have been stabilized and new grass and approximately 500 trees have been planted.

"I'm told all the time how pretty the city is," said Watson.

Piedmont's efforts have earned numerous awards, including the Missouri Treescape Citation of Merit; the Outstanding Supporting Organization Award by the State's Resource Conservation and Development agency; and a State proclamation recognizing Piedmont as a "Disaster Resistant Community."

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region VII**

State: **Missouri**

County: **Wayne County**

City/Community: **Piedmont**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts**

Activity/Project Start Date: **09/1997**

Activity/Project End Date: **05/2002**

Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**

Application/Project Number: **unknown**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Yes**

Federal Disaster #: **995 , 07/09/1993**

Federal Disaster Year: **1993**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

Tested By Federal Disaster #: **No Federal Disaster specified**

Year First Tested: **2008**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Yes**

Reference URLs

No URLs were submitted

Main Points

No Main Points were entered.



Handy Park



Park sign