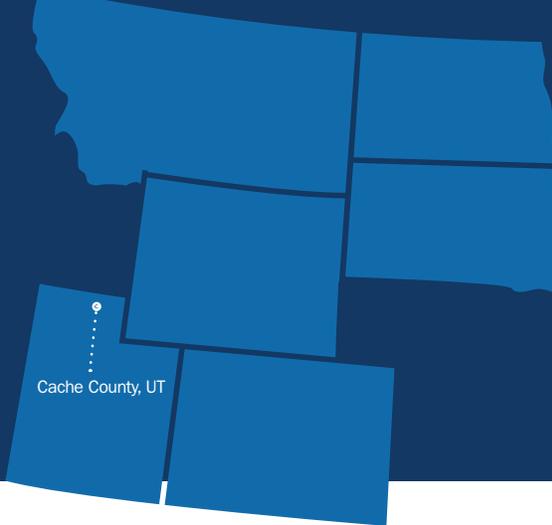


Region VIII

The Value of Listening in Cache County, UT



THE CHALLENGE

After a past flood mapping project did not produce desired outcomes, the relationship between FEMA and Cache County, Utah, became strained. Four years later, when it came time to begin a new Risk Mapping, Assessment and Planning (Risk MAP) project in the county, both the FEMA Region VIII office and the State Division of Emergency Management office wanted to strengthen the relationship with the community, develop a collaborative partnership to foster trust and, ultimately, achieve positive results that would lead to mitigation actions.

In order to improve its relationship with Cache County, FEMA regional staff and the State began to reach out to the communities and local officials before the Discovery phase began. This proactive outreach established opportunities to listen to the communities' floodplain priorities and created a stronger, more effective relationship.

THE SOLUTION

In coordination with the State, the Region held multiple discussions with the communities months in advance of the first formal Discovery Meeting. The initial discussions began with small group introductions with key county officials in order to discuss potential risks and learn about the needs of the communities. With these introductory meetings, the State and FEMA regional staff established a partnership with the communities that was critical to the project's success.

The county's newly completed hazard mitigation plan, led by the Bear River Association of Governments (BRAG), gave FEMA Region VIII a unique opportunity to meet with community members, discuss the content of the plan, and provide feedback. During two days of meetings, the Region facilitated two in-person morning sessions with the community. During these meetings, FEMA regional staff and State and County representatives spoke with officials from 15 of Cache County's 20 communities (including the unincorporated county) about their individual mitigation needs. By helping the communities address desired actions outlined in the plan — most focused on writing or passing ordinances — county officials and community members began to view FEMA's representatives as partners in addressing local concerns and meeting goals.

Included in the GIS report was an explanation of additional flood recovery data, including Flood Depth Grids and Areas of Expanded Flood Risk, and how property owners should take the information into account.



THE OUTCOME

By listening to the communities' priorities and goals related to Risk MAP and mitigation long before the official Discovery Meeting, Region VIII was able to establish a baseline for communicating with the communities. When the Discovery phase begins, the Region will have established a strong relationship with the State and community officials that promises to result in productive conversation about new mitigation opportunities and actions. Success in Cache County would not be possible without support from the Utah Cooperating Technical Partners and BRAG, who acted as local champions and leveraged existing community relationships that brought credibility and the local perspective to the Region's efforts.

Thanks to this partnership, several mitigation activities were completed across the county, including the completion of a Water Recycling Program; rebuilding the Floodplain Ordinance in Hyrum; improvement of the sewer system and other water projects in Wellsville; and implementation of a monthly planning association meeting between all city planners in the county.

THE BENEFIT

Cache County leadership and stakeholders have a greater level of respect for and trust in FEMA as a result of the Region's proactive communication. After participating in the process, Cache County communities appreciate the value of collaborating with FEMA and its partners. This improved rapport will allow for more meaningful conversations when the formal Discovery phase begins. The benefit of increased trust can also be seen through Cache County's request that the Region provide community-level ordinance trainings in 2016, which shows the communities' desire to strengthen the ongoing relationship. Ultimately, the mitigation projects and Risk MAP process undertaken by the county and FEMA has resulted in a stronger, safer and more resilient Cache County.

