



Illinois' Winning Formula in Floodplain Management

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

State-wide, Illinois



The State of Illinois – After many Illinois river communities experienced the devastation of the Great Midwest Flood of 1993, it became obvious that floodplains are easily reclaimed by rivers following severe weather events. With a combined formula to enforce local floodplain regulations and return the floodplain to its rightful owner, the State of Illinois has succeeded in reducing damage from the most frequent cause of disaster declarations in Illinois.

Flooding has been a constant drain on emergency response and recovery resources. Illinois geography includes 900 rivers and waterways with a combined length of 13,200 miles and the State is bordered by 880 miles of the Mississippi, Wabash and Ohio Rivers. The State's mitigation initiatives have resulted in the purchase of over 3,500 flood-prone structures and some adjacent vacant lots (as of July 2002). Communities benefit when these parcels are returned to their natural functions. Using voluntary acquisition grant programs, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) staff has approved and administered more than \$100 million in project activities including flood mitigation, ice storm preparedness and wind-resistant construction.

IEMA and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources/Office of Water Resources (IDNR/OWR) are aggressively pursuing the reduction of flooded properties, having proactively completed a detailed analysis of the National Flood Insurance Program repetitive loss structure inventory. More than 30 percent of these properties have already been removed from this list through voluntary buyouts.

The recipe for reducing flood damage can be attributed to a two-fold approach of eliminating existing flood problems and local officials controlling new development in the floodplain, according to Paul Osman, Floodplain Management Program Coordinator, IDNR/OWR.

The success of the acquisition and floodplain management programs along the Illinois and Sangamon Rivers became evident during a recent flood event in the spring of 2002. The Sangamon River reached 10 feet over flood stage and the Illinois River topped at 15 feet over flood stage. County Emergency Managers and Local Floodplain Administrators reported if the buyouts had not taken place, many more houses would have been inundated with floodwaters. Horton remarked that at the confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers in the City of Grafton, an estimated 200 additional people would have faced the trauma of cleaning up had not 88 structures been removed from the floodplain by a successful buyout project. When you are committed to the challenge of reducing persistent flood damage, it requires a staff with creativity and determination, according to Horton. "To be successful, you have to think outside of the box, have a can-do work ethic and avoid getting discouraged," said Horton. "Thinking creatively means keeping a positive attitude and strategizing to look at challenges in new ways to assist communities within the limits of the law."

After the 1993 floods and subsequent acquisition program, IEMA organized the Interagency Mitigation Advisory Group (IMAG) to facilitate the implementation of various mitigation programs. In addition to IEMA, the group is composed of a variety of agencies, including the IDNR/OWR, Illinois Historic Preservation, Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, FEMA, and the American Red Cross, with staff who can provide expertise in acquisition and elevation projects.

"With the IMAG we can bring in all the agencies involved in the mitigation conversation," explained former State Hazard Mitigation Officer Jan Horton. "Together we conduct reviews, research and evaluations, and make prioritizations and recommendations."

In addition to the creation and use of the strong partnerships developed in the IMAG, Horton attributes the success of the State's acquisition program to several factors: support from the Governor's Office, close relationship with FEMA, appraisal review process at the State level to ensure reliability and consistency, dedicated State staff and involved local officials.

Acquisitions are a very visible and tangible example of success. "We've made a dent in getting people out of the way of floodwaters. The more houses we buy out in an acquisition program, the more the river can do what it wants and flooding becomes a non-event," said Bob Sherman, IEMA Mitigation Planner.

In working toward the goal of damage prevention and the decrease of subsequent recovery dollars, in that one area of risk called the floodplain, IEMA is leading the way in making Illinois a better place.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **State-wide**

FEMA Region: **Region V**

State: **Illinois**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public/Private Partnership**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts; Floodplain Management**

Activity/Project Start Date: **01/1994**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

Funding Source: **Private funds**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Yes**

Federal Disaster #: **997 , 07/09/1993**

Federal Disaster Year: **1993**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

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

Year First Tested: **2002**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.floodsmart.gov/>

Reference URL 2: <http://www.state.il.us/iema/>

Main Points

- Flooding has been a constant drain on emergency response and recovery resources.
- The Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) has approved and administered more than \$100 million in project activities including flood mitigation, ice storm preparedness, and wind resistant construction.
- The success of acquisition and floodplain management programs along the Illinois and Sangamon Rivers became evident during a flood event in the spring of 2002.



Flooding in the Spring of 2002



This park used to be where flood-prone homes once stood