

FEMA Approves \$2.7 Million for Robinson Bayou Drainage Improvement Study

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PENSACOLA, Fla. — FEMA has approved a hazard mitigation grant of \$2,785,238 for the city of Panama City to examine a drainage improvement proposal for the Robinson Bayou Basin that will reduce water levels before, during and after rain events, and reduce downstream flood elevations.

FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) will fund the study, which will include surveying, engineering, design, permitting and bidding for the proposed work. Data collection will be gathered for validation of the Hydrologic and Hydraulic (H&H) modeling, establishing a baseline for permitting and conducting an environmental assessment. The H&H modeling will become the basis of design for the hydraulic modifications to the system used in permitting and is a requirement of the HMGP drainage project to show no adverse impacts.

Once approved, the project will include upstream restoration of approximately 309 acres of wetlands which include minor modifications to channels, grading and hydraulics. Modifications include the redirection of water flow into the wetlands and reshaping of degraded channel sections to reduce erosion and ease maintenance. Wetland areas will be graded and replanted with native wetland vegetation and every effort will be made to protect and preserve remaining native species.

Additionally, two downstream culverts will be resized or removed for better water flow from the basin and land will be purchased to provide further open space for infiltration, thus managing upstream flood levels without causing adverse impacts downstream.

The HMGP is an important source of federal disaster assistance. Program funding may become available after the president declares a major disaster, with a goal of strengthening communities by improving buildings and critical infrastructure. A



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2018 report by the National Institute of Building Sciences found that one dollar spent on hazard mitigation saves more than six dollars of recovery and rebuilding costs.

Generally, the HMGP may provide a state, tribe or territory with additional grants up to 15 percent of the total disaster grants awarded by FEMA for a federally declared disaster. States such as Florida that meet advanced mitigation planning criteria may qualify for a higher percentage.

Florida has a FEMA-approved Enhanced Mitigation Plan, making the state eligible for HMGP funding not to exceed 20 percent of the estimated total amount of grant money spent by FEMA in the Hurricane Michael disaster. From this amount, the HMGP reimburses the state up to 75 percent of eligible costs for hazard mitigation projects. The remaining amount comes from other sources such as state and local assets and a combination of cash and in-kind sources.

