

RECENT LOUISIANA EXPERIENCE WITH THE NFIP

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I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the State of Louisiana and Parish Governments I have assisted. In my testimony today I will briefly give an overview of the issues faced by communities in Louisiana as they cope with flood map development and appeals, levee certification and the special role of coastal restoration in flood protection. For Louisiana I believe there has never been a more critical need for expanding the working partnership between the State of Louisiana and the federal government. My recent experience includes serving as chairman of the Independent Technical Review committee of the joint FEMA/COE storm surge study that produced the current preliminary DFIRM maps for Louisiana and assisting in the preparation of DFIRM appeals for several communities including Morgan City, Cameron Parish, Terrebonne Parish, St. Tammany Parish, and Lafourche Parish.

Accuracy of FEMA Flood Map Modernization Process

The issuing of the preliminary DFIRMs over the last few years by FEMA has resulted in local governments individually respond to these new maps. Several deficiencies in the preliminary DFIRMs were noted in the community appeals including technical issues such as the accuracy of the topographic and bathymetric data, still water elevations, and wave heights used in developing the DFIRMs. Also of concern was the treatment of coastal landscape features and non-levee structures. The continued use of the WHAFIS wave model was also questioned. Finally, procedural issues were noted relating to how consistently the FEMA mapping guidelines were followed. Many, but not all, of these appeal issues are now being addressed by FEMA and new maps will be issued shortly.

Mechanisms for Dispute Resolution

Parishes throughout the state have had problems with trying to get FEMA to communicate with them during the preparation of the maps and with cooperating regarding the DFIRM appeal process. This is causing delays in many economic

development project, disaster recovery (public assistance projects in V-zones) and flood protection projects for these communities. Interpretation of the plain language of the FEMA regulations has been a continuing problem. The Louisiana congressional delegation has become involved and requested from the FEMA Administrator that FEMA start a series of meetings with the parishes. FEMA did this and has created a greatly improved process for resolving appeal issues.

Levee Inspection and Certification

Compounding the flood plain management problems the parishes must deal with is the issue of levee certification. This issue has resulted in the exclusion of formerly accredited levees in the new DFIRMs resulting in a radical change to the BFEs for many communities. However, dealing with levee certification is an issue that exceeds the capabilities and willingness of most of the communities to deal with. Congressional authorization for federal levees providing less than 100 year flood protection is a problem.

Coastal Restoration Projects and Coastal Non-Levee Structures

Coastal restoration projects are seen by both the federal government and the state as means for reducing the threat of hurricane flooding, however receiving credit for these projects by the Corps of Engineers has been a problem. Also, more clarification is also needed as to how to include coastal structures such as roadways, non-hurricane protection levees and non-certified levees in the map modernization process.

There are several programs within the National Flood Insurance Program that would benefit communities in Louisiana if a more coordinated state and federal cooperation were established. Communities should be assisted in developing the means to prepare LOMAs, LOMRs, CLOMRs, physical map revisions, and PALs. Furthermore, FEMA allows communities located in “sheltered waters” to receive special treatment in delineating the 100 year floodplain which includes most of coastal Louisiana. Implementing this designation needs to be addressed.

Therefore I am advocating that FEMA and the Corps of Engineers work with the State of Louisiana to develop the capability for the State to coordinate flood plain management activities, effectively take advantage of all of the opportunities within the NFIP including financial support, and take charge of future flood plain mapping. Foremost in accomplishing these objectives would be the establishment of a Cooperating Technical Partners (CTP) Program with Louisiana that would include ongoing map modernization.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make recommendations.