

Regional Flood Mitigation Assistance Program Serving the Southern Tier Central Region

*By Janet Thigpen, Flood Mitigation Specialist, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Development Board
Reprinted from NYS Floodplain and Stormwater Managers Association News, Spring 2001*

Heavy rainfall and a sudden snowmelt in January 1996 caused an estimated \$33 million of damages throughout Chemung, Schuyler, and Steuben Counties. The flooding impacted more than one hundred and seventy-five businesses and only the exceptional efforts of the area's emergency response crews prevented loss of life. As the flood waters receded, the Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Development Board, working with each county's emergency management office, completed a regional assessment of damages and evaluated ways to provide assistance to local governments for flood recovery and mitigation.

Utilizing a regional approach and with strong support from county leaders, the regional planning board was able to secure a grant from the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration to fund creation of a Flood Mitigation Specialist position. The resulting program provided flood mitigation assistance to local governments, businesses, residents, and organizations. Following the initial flood recovery period, this successful program has continued with additional funding from the Economic Development Administration (Economic Adjustment Special Need grants), National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Flood Mitigation Assistance planning grants, and local sources.

The Flood Assistance Program focuses on long-term flood mitigation through specific projects, strategic planning, and public education. A full-time Flood Mitigation Specialist provides leadership, technical expertise, grants writing assistance, and educational resources for a broad spectrum of flood damage reduction activities, including:

- floodplain management (based on NFIP floodplain development requirements),
- property protection (acquisition, floodproofing, etc.),
- on-site stormwater management and erosion control,
- regional stormwater management,
- wetland creation and protection,
- structural flood control projects,
- drainage system maintenance,
- stream restoration (using applied fluvial geomorphology),
- stream corridor management,
- watershed planning,
- flood mitigation planning,
- flood warning and response,
- Community Rating System (for reduced flood insurance premiums), and
- public information about flood hazards and mitigation measures.

Specific accomplishments include:

- Wrote and assisted with 13 successful grant applications totaling almost \$2 million.
- Facilitated the preparation of 11 Flood Mitigation Action Plans encompassing 29 municipalities. All have been approved by FEMA, enabling municipalities to qualify for Flood Mitigation Assistance project funding.
- Assists with activities and documentation to improve NFIP Community Rating System credit for the Town of Ashland, Town of Big Flats, Town of Chemung, City of Corning, City of Elmira, Town of Elmira, Town of Erwin, Town of Horseheads, Village of Horseheads, Town of Southport, and Village of Wellsburg. This program provides a discount on all flood insurance premiums in municipalities that undertake *and document* flood mitigation activities beyond the minimum requirements for the National Flood Insurance Program.
- Prepared and distributed a Draft Model Ordinance for Stormwater Management and Erosion Control. Drafted stormwater management provisions for inclusion in local zoning and subdivision regulations.
- Worked with the Town of Elmira to devise a policy for the use of regional detention facilities to manage increased stormwater volume from private development. Drafted a local law that enables developers to direct increased runoff into a Town-built structure if they pay a utilization fee to the Town.
- Chairs the Town of Erwin Project Impact Flood/Flash Flood Subcommittee.
- Assisting with preparation of a Wetland Strategic Plan for the Chemung Basin and a Watershed Plan for the Seeley Creek Watershed.
- Provides technical support for the flood warning and response activities of the Chemung Basin Flood Warning Service. This volunteer organization provides flood warnings and other information to the county Emergency Management Offices. They own and operate an automated network of river gauges, rain gauges, and climate stations, which supplements the information available from other sources.
- Drafted educational fact sheets about private stream crossings, meandering streams, and groundwater flooding problems.

For additional information about this regional flood mitigation assistance program, contact Janet Thigpen, (607)737-5271.