

## CHAPTER 8. Public Information

### 8.1 Analysis of Community Outreach and Communication

In 2009, Jersey County served as one of the national pilot communities to field test a proposed six-part approach for activities and credit under Activity 330. FEMA was in the process of evaluating and revising its approach to the 300 Series of Public Information activities and how activities under this series were credited. An initial assessment of the credited activities conducted in 2007 provided recommendations for areas of revision and additional attention. The pilot program was managed under contract to the consulting firm of Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide. The pilot program research involved in a number of telephone conferences, coupled with site visits by the consulting team. The consulting team from Ogilvy worked with Mike Prough and Cindy Cregmiles of the Jersey County and Brian Roberts and John Williams of Principia College.

The pilot project consisted of an extensive workbook to be completed by the local natural hazards mitigation team. The workbook covered community objectives and project scope, preliminary self-assessment, pilot refinement of objectives and scope, check-ins and log, and a “six-element approach”: outreach self-assessment, basic communications and outreach tools and channels, stakeholder engagement, outreach strategy and integrated plan, target audiences and special opportunities, and evaluation and program refinement. The primary purpose of the consultation was to evaluate the Ogilvy six-element proposal. The secondary purpose was to benefit Jersey County through participation in the six-element process.

The Jersey County team completed the workbook review by December 2009. The Jersey County report is included below. The Ogilvy team reported back: “Mike & Cindy—Bringing Jersey County from the brink of expulsion from the NFIP to a community in good standing using creative and effective approaches to flood plain management is a true success story. Clearly your energetic and committed leadership is making a difference.” The team also reported: “John & Brian—Your partnership with the County is a model for ways other communities can collaborate and a great way to combine classroom teaching with practical experience.” The Ogilvy team provided no further feedback to the substantive Jersey County self-report.

#### **Six-Element Approach**

*The following six documents are intended to facilitate feedback from communities on the proposed six-element approach for activities under Activity 330 (Outreach Projects). Throughout the pilot program, we encourage you to share your thoughts on how your community’s outreach activities fit (or not) into this six-element approach, the successes and challenges of the different elements, or any other reflections about this approach that may help inform the CRS manual revisions.*

## **Six-Element Approach: Element 1**

**Element 1- Outreach Self-Assessment:** This initial phase of the six element approach will help to identify a community's specific communications needs and goals around flood management. The assessment will include an evaluation of communications channels already available and in use (e.g., press releases, committees, social media, community events, listservs, Websites, etc.). The assessment findings will inform each community's outreach strategies and tactics and identify the organizations and community staff (e.g. PIOs) with whom CRS coordinators can collaborate.

### **Ongoing Comments and Thoughts:**

We support the inclusion of this element, but currently there is no motivation (CRS credit) to engage in this process. It is purely voluntary. This activity was not a burden. It helped us identify strengths and weaknesses of our current floodplain management efforts. This is a very good starting point for any community. Without assessment to measure effectiveness, the only basis for making a decision is whether we get credit for it, not whether it accomplishes objectives.

The process helped us document current practices and relationships and encourages us to further assess the impact of our work. We've attached our self-assessment to this document in order to provide some sense of the value of this process.

In terms of frequency, this is not something we think needs to be completed every year. One thought is that this could be completed once every five years when resubmitting our Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan to FEMA.

## **Six-Element Approach: Element 2**

**Element 2- Basic Communications and Outreach Tools and Channels:** Standard tools and channels will continue to be used to expand flood awareness, increase knowledge of flood risks, and share information about local floodplain management efforts. This element is similar to the currently credited OPC, OPF, and OPA elements of the Activity 330, but will also accommodate use of additional communications tactics that reach broad audiences, such as regularly updated websites and e-mail communications. While this element's outreach activities may be aimed at broadly increasing public flood awareness they are not necessarily integrated with a community's overall flood management strategy.

### **Ongoing Comments and Thoughts:**

Jersey County is a small rural county made up mostly of agricultural community. The floodplain consists largely of out of state and county leases. Standard tools are the brochures mailed out with the tax bills and mailed directly (in a separate mailing) to residents in the floodplain. The channels are the library and brochures in county government buildings.

The brochure is supposed to cover the ten elements required by CRS – local flood hazard, flood safety, flood insurance, etc. (see Activity 330 document). The elements in the 330 document seem relevant to us, but it is unfortunate that we don't refer to other hazards in these documents given that we are a multi-hazard community. This would eliminate the need for multiple mailings/brochures.

A May 2009 survey shows that residents are not paying attention to the mailings, particularly if they receive these at the same time of year every year. Periodic exit polls show that other vehicles (Jersey County Shopper) would provide a much more effective means of communicating information. CRS only provides credit for a news article. Our strong sense is that people would respond more favorably to ads in newspapers. Residents are used to receiving information in this form. CRS should provide credit for more diverse delivery vehicles such as ads in the local newspaper. We could easily take the aspects of the brochure and place it in a series of ads. This may also be more cost-effective than the regular mailings.

The county Health Department and the Jersey County Business Association have web pages with links to our comprehensive Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan, but this is not where residents would think to look for information on-line. We believe the county needs its own web page with a single portal. However, in a small rural county frequent updates of a web site and e-mail communications are not effective as we are still using the dial up method and most of the floodplain are seasonal residents who do not have Internet access. This speaks to the need for multiple means of delivering information. We should get credit for using other means.

Our County Board holds monthly public board meetings. These meetings are attended by the local media which in turn report to the public. Floodplain topics could be discussed at these meetings. However, points for such activities are currently not awarded.

Perhaps the best forms of communication is a site drive-thru and face-to-face contacts with residents either individually or at public meetings. Currently, points are not awarded for face-to-face contact. The most effective form of education would be articles in the free newspaper that is distributed to every household in the county. Credit is currently provided for placing flyers in local newspapers; however, if you choose this option you cannot receive credit for any other outreach programs. In our experience flyers in a newspaper are not an effective informational tool. They tend to fall out during delivery process or the resident pulls the inserts out of the newspaper for disposal before reading. The resident is more likely to see the article. If a community chooses to go beyond the “suggested” projects it should be credited too.

Our bottom line is that the means of conveying information that would be most effective in our community would not receive credit under current CRS guidelines.

### **Six-Element Approach: Element 3**

**Element 3- Stakeholder Engagement:** Strong internal and external relationships with those who are closest to or impacted by floodplain management decisions are critical to successful strategic communications. These relationships are an important piece of developing an effective, integrated community strategy that adds value to outreach efforts and advances local floodplain management objectives. This element encourages CRS communities to build relationships with internal (floodplain managers, engineers, PIOs, emergency managers, etc.) and external (local businesses, select homeowners, elected officials, community leaders, etc.) stakeholders to help make flood risk reduction awareness a priority.

### **Ongoing Comments and Thoughts:**

We like element three. It provides credit for relationships we consistently nurture. However, we would like to see credit provided for efforts to address the corollary impact of an actual natural disaster. In 2008, for instance, Jersey County experienced flooding that resulted in the county being declared a federal disaster area. In the aftermath of the flood, the Floodplain Manager’s Office worked closely with the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Jersey County Health Department to address septic systems in the floodplain that had been inundated by water. We worked with the county Health

Department to enforce existing ordinances governing septic systems. Counties should get credit for such activity. The Corps of Engineers backed our efforts. Indeed, our work encouraged the Corps to implement such regulations on all Corps properties. Such after-incident relationships can complement the round of activities.

We have also worked to establish an ongoing relationship with Principia College. The institution has provided assistance with our Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan (problem identification, strategies pertaining to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation). This type of relationship does not receive appropriate credit by CRS. Counties should be credited for such relationships. Colleges and universities as well as civic organizations provide valuable resources. In our instance, this relationship has been crucial. In particular, our experience suggests that credit for relationships that are consistently maintained. Ongoing relationships require a significant time investment. .

In terms of routine stakeholder engagement, the Jersey County Engineer has worked very closely with the Co. Floodplain Manager. He performs site elevation and prepares elevation certificates upon request. He will also address on site questions from the public. The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has a stake in this public information campaign. The more aware citizens are that they need to abide by laws governing aspects such as road closures, the easier it is for IDOT to perform their work. There may be issues with roads that are not visibly apparent to citizens (conditions under road, etc.). This becomes a communication issue.

The ESDA Coordinator is a mandated part-time position that plays a key role in the event of an actual incident. However, there has been very little communication between the ESDA Coordinator and the Floodplain Manager. We would like to see CRS clarify the type of communication it expects the Floodplain Manager to maintain with the ESDA Coordinator as well as and the responsibilities of the ESDA coordinator to floodplain management efforts.

County Board members are part time and rely solely on the Floodplain Manager to handle problems. The County does not have a full time Administrator to oversee and advise or motivate other offices or stakeholders as to their duties. However, their support is gained when objectives for floodplain management are requested (ex: septic system). Finally, the County Sheriff's office is stretched thin. Flood risk reduction is not their priority.

#### **Six-Element Approach: Element 4**

**Element 4- Outreach Strategy and Integrated Plan:** In Element 4, communities will develop integrated communications plans that incorporate measureable objectives, well-articulated strategies, and locally-appropriate tactics and activities. This is similar to CRS' current public information program strategy (OPS) as the plan will guide outreach activities. Cohesive plans will incorporate communications into all aspects of flood awareness, mitigation, and management.

#### **Ongoing Comments and Thoughts:**

This is a very important element. It makes perfect sense to have an integrated strategy. We are a diverse community. We have rural areas without phone service or Internet access. We have seasonal residents. These different constituencies require a different communications approach.

One question is whether we can receive credit for a plan that is integrated into a larger natural hazards information campaign? It seems as if we should receive credit for this. This makes more sense to us than developing a comprehensive plan just for floods and then one for all other hazards.

CRS needs to be aware that the successful adoption and implementation of a public outreach plan is subject to available resources. We can only execute what we've been given the resources (human/financial) to execute.

## **Six-Element Approach: Element 5**

**Element 5- Target Audiences and Special Opportunities:** Because no two communities are alike and come in so many types and sizes, they all have unique populations that need special attention (e.g., V Zone residents, non-English speakers, contractors, driver's education students), present unique opportunities for outreach due to local floodplain management programs (e.g., levees, flood control planning, particularly hazardous areas, repetitive loss areas), or are impacted by circumstances that need special attention (post-flood recovery, new FIRMs). This element encourages communities to identify their unique communications needs (with information gathered through their self-assessment and, possibly, their strategy development) and focus outreach efforts in these areas.

### **Ongoing Comments and Thoughts:**

We are very supportive of this element because it recognizes that there is not a one-size fits all approach. As we stated earlier, the activities we deem most effective are not awarded credit. Currently no motivation to consider unique needs. The only motivation is to implement the status quo – which is not effective. There needs to be recognition, however, that to target unique communities requires resources (time, money, etc.) that may not be readily available. Is there any way CRS could promote more grant programs to support such activities?

We have a unique situation in that most of the county's floodplain sites are not inhabited full time. This requires us to rely on the US Army Corps of Engineers to help enforce our regulations and ordinances through their leases.

Because of the flood disaster of 2008, the geographical area has changed considerably, and Jersey County needs new technical information for the GIS mapping such as flyovers. To target the needs of unique communities, we need such information. Available funding for these activities is scarce.

Our audience is best targeted by on site visits where information can be relayed on a one-on-one basis. Currently, we are not awarded any points for this form of communication. Our floodplain manager carries literature in his vehicle to hand out to citizens. Again, we don't receive any points for this.

We receive credit for keeping brochures in the local library; however this is not an effective method of communication. Our general advice is that this strategy has limitations for unincorporated county residents as you must purchase an annual library card and many cannot afford to do so. Such individuals would not think of going to a library for floodplain information, they would call the office first.

## **Six-Element Approach: Element 6**

**Element 6- Evaluation and Program Refinement:** Regular evaluation of outreach efforts is important to informing and building upon communications and outreach efforts. This element has two parts. The first is conducting regular evaluations of a CRS community’s communications programs and strategies to determine appropriateness, strengths and weakness of tactics, and changes in priorities. The second is taking steps to refine programs and strategies to reflect lessons learned from the evaluation. These regular evaluations will not only facilitate the development of more robust strategic outreach, but will also encourage communities to keep tabs on their overall performance.

**Ongoing Comments and Thoughts:**

Our small county government does not have the staffing to do regular evaluations due to lack of funding. This is one of the reasons the smaller municipalities (Grafton, Jerseyville, Elsah) do not volunteer to become a part of CRS. They view the increased paper work as too burdensome. CRS should take a closer look at re-evaluating how the point system is calculated for smaller communities versus larger ones. We have the determination and ideas; however we do not have the resources or support of as many stakeholders as a larger county. Therefore, despite considerable work on our part, it is very challenging to achieve our goal of a lower class rating. To the extent we’ve engaged in evaluation, we’ve relied on studies conducted by Principia College faculty and students.

Because of time and lack of manpower, is there a way CRS could provide some external evaluation based on reports we could generate.

**Preliminary Self-Assessment**

*This preliminary assessment is the starting point for the CRS Public Information pilot project. Please fill it out to inform our first meeting. Your answers will guide the project objectives and strategy. As part of the project you will also be asked to review a broader Self Assessment being developed as the starting point for participation in CRS as a whole.*

**The Flood Hazard**

1. The major flood related threat we need to educate residents about or focus public outreach on is: riverine flooding and flash flooding

2. Other issues of concern include: *(e.g., issues related to flood control structures, drainage concerns, seasonal flooding, species habitat, new development)*: Seasonal flooding; storm water management (drainage); health (septic systems susceptible to flooding, water borne diseases); new development

3. Current or upcoming floodplain management initiatives include: Mitigation (structure elevations, relocations, buyouts); health (flood proofing of septic systems); storm water management (new ordinance being developed as of 9/15/09)

**Resident and Business Basics**  
 Jurisdiction(s) addressed: Jersey Co.  
 Unincorporated  
 Population: 22,000  
 Structures in SFHA: 538  
 Structures outside SFHA: 9711  
 NFIP policies in force: 134  
 % of SFHA properties with flood insurance: 24%  
 Repetitive loss properties: 236  
 Businesses subject to flooding: 4  
 Major employers subject to flooding

## **The Key Players**

4. The key individuals / departments within my organization that are important in designing and undertaking a public information effort include: (Mike Prough) Jersey County Floodplain Coordinator and Jersey Code Administrator; (Theresa Macias) Jersey County Health Department; (Alan Gilmore) President, Jersey County Business Association; (Pam Heitzig) Jersey County Board Chairman; (Brian Roberts, John Williams ) Political Science Department, Principia College

5. The other organizations/individuals that should have a key role in designing and undertaking a public information effort include: (Larry Mead) ESDA Coordinator; Mayors of the various municipalities in the county (Jerseyville, Grafton, Elsay, etc.); (Jennifer Russell) University of Illinois Extension Office; Local media outlets (Jersey County Journal, WBGZ, WJBM, Jersey County Shopper); Soil and Water Conservation District

6. Other organizations we need to reach out to for support include: Mayors of the various municipalities in the county (Jerseyville, Grafton, Elsay, etc.); (Jennifer Russell) University of Illinois Extension Office; Local media outlets (Jersey County Journal, WBGZ, WJBM, WJBZ, Jersey County Shopper); Lewis and Clark Community College; Local 100 Community School District; QEM and other fire districts; Rotary Club and other service clubs  
Red Cross

7. Organizations we've worked with successfully in the past include: Jersey County Health Department; Principia College (political science department professors and students)

## **Audiences**

8. Given our population characteristics, the cultural, age, income, language or literacy factors to take into account include:

- Literacy concerns – some segments of the county's population might have challenges reading press releases and brochures or completing written surveys;
- Senior citizens who tend to rely on more traditional means of communication (mailings, notices in papers)
- Significant number of community members in this bedroom community that spend time commuting, traveling to various events in the county and therefore have less time to pay attention to information in paper or to direct mail, etc.; Most citizens obtain information only in a time of need, i.e. when purchasing a homeowner insurance policy, they will listen to their agent or take time to read a brochure or when purchasing a car, they will read up on the model's statistics.
- Ten percent of the county lives in poverty and the unemployment rate (as of September 2009) is unemployed
- Media market – Jersey County is part of a larger media market (St. Louis), but the St. Louis media is not the most effective way to reach a Jersey County audience

9. Specific neighborhoods or areas of the community, if any, that may require special focus include:

- Certain Corps of Engineers lease properties (Shady Oaks, Coon Creek, Beltrees Road)
- Privately owned ground in the floodplain where residence lease (ex: cabin sites at Nutwood Bridge)

- Spankey
- Grafton (deserving of special focus because of its population size [725 in a county of 22,000] and its susceptibility to riverine flooding)
- Village of Elsay, while smaller than Grafton, is also more susceptible to riverine flooding (note: neither Grafton nor Elsay are part of the CRS)

## **Current Outreach Materials and Activities**

10. Current public information/outreach efforts include:

- Annual outreach program mailer to floodplain residents and county residents
- Jersey County Floodplain Open House for new digital maps
- Annual outreach program: “Vendors Flood Insurance Rate Map Information” (Jersey County Floodplain Coordinator and Building Permit Administrator’s office)
- Jersey County Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan posted on web page of County Health Department and linked to by the Jersey County Business Association web page
- Information contained in occasional newsletters of the Jersey County Business Association
- Periodic surveys of county resident knowledge of and interest in natural hazard mitigation (conducted and analyzed by Principia College students and political science faculty members)

11. These materials/activities focus on: Flood insurance, mandatory purchase of flood insurance, flood safety and health, benefits of open space preservation, property protection measures, beneficial floodplain functions, a map of the local flood hazard, floodplain development permit requirements, drainage system maintenance, building practices, general hazard mitigation efforts, county departments to contact in case of needs, special permitting (floodplain permits)

12. Their effectiveness is assumed to be (excellent, good, fair, little impact) as measured by: In May 2009, Principia College students conducted a survey of more than 200 Jersey County residents on the topic of public information pertaining to natural hazards mitigation. Residents had difficulty recalling even the receipt of information contained in the tax mailings. They expressed a strong preference for receiving information from sources such as the Jersey County Shopper. Our conclusion about the mailers, therefore, is that they are having little impact. Very few citizens obtain information by walking-in to the county government offices.

## **Proposed Materials and Activities**

13. We most need to help residents and business owners:

- Know their flood risk
- Protect residents from the flood risk
- How individuals can insure for the flood risk
- Support action to prevent future problems

- Relate the importance of “selling” flood insurance, in particular, training the agents on how to process ICC claims, as many do not know the procedure
- Realize the importance of classroom education in local schools
- Better utilize information in their source of communication outlet

14. Looking at the 10 CRS topics, the following are most important to us from a public information/outreach perspective (circle, comment or rank):

- The local flood hazard (6)
- Flood safety (4)
- Flood insurance (5)
- Property protection measures (1)
- The natural and beneficial functions of the local floodplain (9)
- A map of the flood hazard (6)
- The flood warning system (8)
- Floodplain permit requirements (2)
- Substantial improvement and substantial damage requirements (3)
- Drainage system maintenance (7)

15. Other topics of importance: building codes

### **Media Assessment**

16. Media outlets that could be particularly important to us include: Jersey County Journal, WBGZ, WJBM, WJBZ, Jersey County Shopper

17. Our web site could be enhanced through: actually having a web site with a single county portal

### **The Bottom Line**

18. Subject to further discussion, the top priority for improving public information and outreach to improve floodplain management and reduce the risks and consequences of flooding should be:

We need a comprehensive public education campaign based initially on traditional sources of communication (newspapers, Jersey County Business Association newsletters). Working through these outlets, we can work to make county residents more aware of floodplain management efforts. This is the first step. Once visibility is raised, we could then broaden our campaign to newer forms of communication (county government web page). The use of a web page, however, would need to be regularly reinforced through the more traditional measures we have identified. Currently, we are conducting public information and outreach in ways that satisfy certain CRS criteria (information housed in library), but that are not the most effective means of communicating with the public.

19. We can achieve our objectives if we: listen to how the public prefers to receive their information. We have some better sense of this from a 2009 survey of Jersey County residents. It would also be helpful to have a coherent campaign with consistent “branding.” We need some simple ways in which residents can understand the concept of “mitigation.”

## Public Information Strategy

A public information program strategy is a document that receives CRS credit. It is a review of local conditions, local public information needs, and a recommended action plan of activities. A strategy consists of the following parts.

- The local flood hazard.
- The property protection measures appropriate for a specific hazard.
- Flood safety measures appropriate for the local situation.
- The public information activities currently being implemented within the community including those by non-government agencies.
- Goals for the community's public information program

**CRS credit:** The Community Rating System provides 100 points for a public information program strategy. Although not discussed before the exercises, the CRS provides the most credit for direct mailings to floodplain residents. Credit also favors newsletters, website and libraries. Fewer points are given for other media, such as presentations at meetings and booths at shopping malls because they reach fewer people.

Successful hazard mitigation program involves both the public and private sectors. Public information activities advise property owners, renters, businesses, and local officials about hazards and ways to protect people and property from these hazards. These activities can motivate people to take the steps necessary to protect themselves and others.

This chapter starts with activities that reach out to people and tell them to be advised of the hazard and some of the things they can do. It then covers additional sources of information for those who want to learn more.

## 8.2. Outreach Projects

Technical assistance and library resources are not of much use if no one knows they exist. An outreach project can remedy this. Sending notices to property owners can help introduce the idea of property protection and identify sources of assistance.

Outreach projects are the first step in the process of orienting property owners to property protection and assisting them in designing and implementing a project. They are designed to encourage people to seek out more information in order to take steps to protect themselves and their properties.

**Direct mailings:** The most effective types of outreach projects are mailed or distributed to everyone in the community or, in the case of floods, to floodplain property owners.

Research has proven that outreach projects work. However, awareness of the hazard is not enough; people need to be told what they can do about the hazard, so projects should include information on safety, health and property protection measures. Research has also shown that a properly run local information program is more effective than national advertising or publicity campaigns. Therefore, outreach projects should be locally designed and tailored to meet local conditions.

**News media:** Local newspapers can be strong allies in efforts to inform the public. Press releases and story ideas may be all that's needed to whet their interest. After a tornado in another community, people and the media become interested in their tornado hazard and how to protect themselves and their property. Local radio stations and cable TV channels can also help. These media offer interview formats and cable may be willing to broadcast videos on the hazards.

**Other approaches:** Examples of other approaches include:

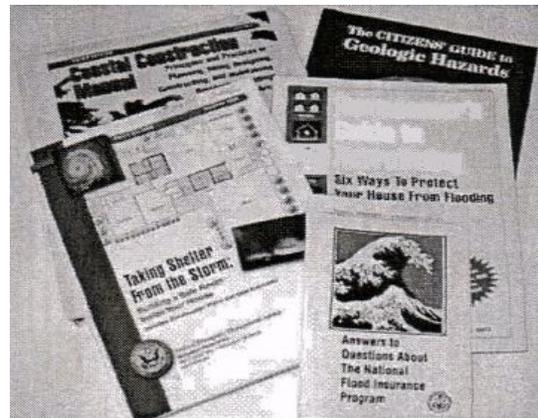
Presentations at meetings of neighborhood, civic or business groups, Displays in public buildings. Signs in parks, along trails and on waterfronts that explain the natural features (such as the river) and their relation to hazards (such as floods), Brochures available in municipal buildings and libraries, and Special meetings such as flood proofing open houses.

**Local implementation:** Jersey County uses the tax parcel mailer to contact the flood property owners. We also use the local papers and radio stations to keep people informed.

## Library

The community library is an obvious place for residents to seek information on hazards, hazard protection, and protecting natural resources. Books and pamphlets on hazard mitigation can be given to libraries, many of them obtained free from state and federal agencies. Libraries also have their own public information campaigns with displays, lectures, and other projects, which can augment the activities of the local government.

**There are many hazard protection references that can be put in libraries**



**Local implementation:** The Jersey County Library has a variety of references on natural hazards. The CRS checks our floodplain reference section on an annual basis and Jersey County is working on a multi county web site with SIU and Lewis & Clark Community College.

**CRS credit:** The Community Rating System provides up to 30 points for having a variety of flood references in the local public library and up to 36 more for similar material on municipal web sites.

### 8.3. Real Estate Disclosure

Many times after a flood or other natural disaster, people say they would have taken steps to protect themselves if only they had known they had purchased a property exposed to a hazard. Three regulations, one federal and two state, require that a potential buyer of a parcel be told of their exposure to a hazard.

*Federal law:* Federally regulated lending institutions must advise applicants for a mortgage or other loan that is to be secured by an insurable building that the property is in a floodplain as shown on the Flood Insurance Rate Map.

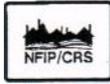
Flood insurance is required for buildings located within the base floodplain if the mortgage or loan is federally insured. However, because this requirement has to be met only 10 days before closing, often the applicant is already committed to purchasing the property when he or she first learns of the flood hazard.

*Residential Real Property Disclosure Act:* This law requires a seller to tell a potential buyer:

- If the seller is aware of any flooding or basement leakage problem
- If the property is located in a floodplain or if the seller has flood insurance
- If the seller is aware of a radon problem
- If the seller is aware of any mine subsidence or earth stability defects on the premises
- If the seller is aware of any structural defects

This State law is not wholly reliable because the seller must be aware of a problem and willing to state it on the disclosure form. Due to the sporadic occurrence of flood events, a property owner may legitimately not be aware of potential flooding problems with a property being sold or purchased. Practices by local real estate boards can overcome the deficiencies of these laws and advise newcomers about the hazard earlier. They may also encourage disclosure of past flooding or sewer problems, regardless of whether the property is in a mapped floodplain.

**Local implementation:** Jersey County has used work shops to educate bankers, realtors about flood plain regulations.

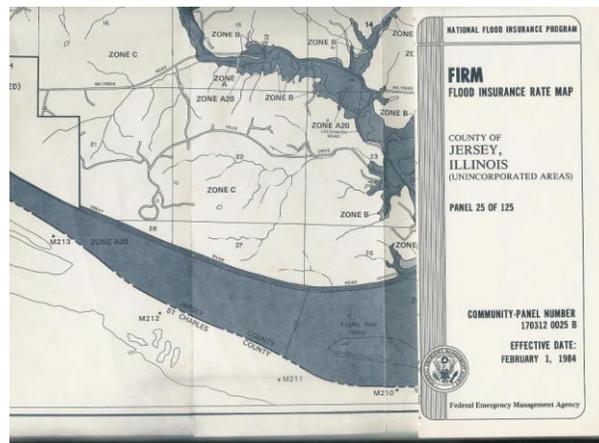


**CRS credit:** Communities would receive 10 points for the two state laws. Up to 46 more points are available if real estate agents implemented a program that checked the FIRMs before a property was listed and provided the flood hazard information to house hunters. Ten points would be provided if local real estate agents gave out brochures that advised people to check out a property's hazards before they commit to a purchase.

## 8.4. Technical Assistance

**Hazard information:** Many benefits stem from providing map information to inquirers. Residents and business owners that are aware of the potential hazards can take steps to avoid problems and/or reduce their exposure to flooding. Real estate agents and house hunters can find out if a property is flood prone and whether flood insurance may be required.

Communities can easily provide map information from FEMA's Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) and Insurance Studies. They may also assist residents in requests for map amendments and revisions when they are needed to show that a building is outside the mapped floodplain.



Communities often supplement what is shown on the FIRM with maps that complement and clarify the FIRM and information on additional hazards, flooding outside mapped areas and zoning. When the map information is provided, community staff can explain insurance, property protection measures and mitigation options that are available to property owners. They should also remind inquirers that being outside the mapped floodplain is no guarantee that a property will never get wet.

**Property protection assistance:** While general information provided by outreach projects or the library helps, most property owners do not feel ready to retrofit their buildings without more specific guidance. Local building department staffs are experts in construction. They can provide free advice, not necessarily to design a protection measure, but to steer the owner onto the right track.

Building or public works department staff can provide the following types of assistance:

- Visit properties and offer protection suggestions

- Recommend or identify qualified or licensed contractors
- Inspect homes for anchoring of roofing and the home to the foundation
- Provide advice on protecting windows and garage doors from high winds
- Explain when building permits are needed for home improvements

**Local Implementation:** The Jersey County Health Department provides technical guidance related to septic system failure and well contamination. The Jersey County Floodplain Coordinator works with the local government officials as well as with the Health Department and public when someone inquires about properties located in the floodplain. The Floodplain Coordinator also provides technical assistance and mitigation techniques.

**CRS credit:** The Community Rating System provides 140 points for providing map information to inquirers. The community must keep the maps up to date. Up to 71 points are available for providing one-on-one flood protection assistance to residents and business and making site visits. Both services must be publicized.

## **8.5. Public Information Program Strategy**

### *Brochures, Newsletters and Website*

To encourage participation by area landowners, informational brochures have been developed for distribution throughout the watershed. GRLT publishes its own brochure about the Piasa Creek Watershed Project (PCWP). This brochure provides an overview of what a watershed is and basic facts regarding the Piasa Creek Watershed. The publication continues by illustrating the various problems associated by different types of erosion along with the tools GRLT uses to solve those particular problems. The brochure is distributed at Soil & Water Conservation Districts and USDA Service Centers, county courthouses, and libraries in the PCWP three county regions.

GRLT distributes a newsletter twice a year to approximately 2,500 residents of the region. Updates on the Piasa Creek Watershed Project are included in each issue.

The Piasa Creek Watershed Project is highlighted on the GRLT website, showing maps and an assortment of projects and updates on the effort. The website is [www.greatriverslandtrust.com](http://www.greatriverslandtrust.com).

### *Tours*

As various projects are completed, such as stream buffers, sediment basins, riffle pools, etc., tours will be arranged for area landowners to further encourage their participation by viewing successfully completed projects. On June 14, 2002, GRLT together with the PC-WET program hosted a driving tour of the major projects in the Piasa Creek Watershed Project. The trip began at Lewis & Clark Community College and drove along the sites of various projects that have been implemented or are in the planning stages. Along the way, PC-WET participants performed water quality tests along certain areas of the creek. The tour proved to be a hands-on approach to learning about how various tools can be utilized to prevent sediment reduction in the Piasa Creek Watershed.

## ***Press***

Piasa Creek Watershed Project has been publicized by various press releases since the project's beginning in 2000. These press releases have been in newspaper publications such as the St. Louis Post Dispatch, the Alton Telegraph, and the Illinois Business Journal. The project has also been featured in public radio announcements on WBGZ. Making the public more aware of this important project has made public acceptance of PWCP a reality. The following reflects in more detail some of the press releases during recent years.

- Illinois Business Journal (2001) – “Piasa Creek Watershed Project to have Benefits for All”
- Alton Telegraph (2002) – “Decision May Help River, Water Plant”
- St. Louis Post Dispatch (August 8, 2002) – “Organization Will Restore Lake at Boy Scout Camp”
- St. Louis Post Dispatch (September 5, 2002) – “Boy Scout Board OK’s Plans to Develop Lake”
- St. Louis Post Dispatch (November, 2002) – “Piasa Watershed May Get Federal Fund Boost”
- Alton Telegraph (February 11, 2003) – “ Council recommends Catholic Charities Lease”
- Alton Telegraph (February 11, 2003) – “After years of planning, road project to begin”
- Alton Telegraph (October 3, 2003) – “Deal will preserve Scout camp in Godfrey: Conservation group plans to restore 15 acres at Camp Warren Levis”
- St. Louis Post-Dispatch (October 29, 2003) – “Joint project will restore use of silted-up lake at Scouts’ Camp Warren Levis near Godfrey”
- Alton Telegraph (October 30, 2003) – “Open house Sunday at Camp Warren Levis”

## ***Awards***

Piasa Creek Watershed Project was selected as a finalist for the 16th Annual Governor’s Pollution Prevention Awards hosted by the Illinois Waste Management and Research Center (WMRC). The Governor’s Pollution Prevention Awards annually honor Illinois companies and organizations that are making efforts to reduce their environmental impact and improve their economic viability. The award ceremony was held on October 18, 2002 in Champaign, Illinois. GRLT’s Alley Ringhausen and Amanda Langford attended the event as well as Mark Johnson from IAW.

## ***Piasa Creek Watershed Education Team Project***

The Piasa Creek Watershed Education Team Project (PCWET) is an academic environmental education project that allows middle school students to better understand the importance of water

quality to their community and fosters a sense of stewardship for their watershed.

Twenty public and parochial middle schools and two public high schools are currently participating in the project. It utilizes the watershed as an outdoor classroom for over one thousand students in the three southwestern Illinois counties. Through a comprehensive watershed monitoring program, involving the latest educational technology, the students collect baseline data for the determination of long-term changes in the physical, chemical and biological parameters of the watershed. The parameters include flow rates, sedimentation loads, temperature, depth, pH, dissolved oxygen, phosphates, nitrates, hardness, BOD, fecal coli form and macro invertebrate indices.

## **8.6. Review and Progress**

Jersey County uses public information programs and workshops to make people aware of local hazards to protect health, life and safety issues.

Jersey County is entering the Community Rating System by using the public information campaign to earn nearly 500 points.

The Outreach Projects at the Library and future website will be able to reach others in the community.

## **8.7. Recommendations**

1. The following topics should be covered in public information activities.
  - How the area is exposed to natural hazards
  - What people should do to protect themselves and their health
  - What people can do to protect their property
  - What government agencies are doing and how they can help
2. Sample articles, with illustrations, on these topics should be prepared and distributed to all interested parties, such as public information offices, webmasters, permit offices, reception desks, and neighborhood organizations.
3. The following media should be used to convey these messages. They are listed in priority order as recommended by the Mitigation Planning Committee.
  - Articles in newsletters and mass mailings
  - Websites
  - Newspaper articles
  - Educational programs in schools
  - Library references
  - Handouts, protection guides
  - Technical advice and visits by staff

4. Each County office and municipality should review their current public information activities and incorporate the messages in them, where appropriate.
5. The County should provide an order form for local libraries to order free state and federal hazard mitigation publications.
6. Community websites should include information and links to other sites to cover as many topics as possible. It should also include a system for users to determine the flood hazard for their properties.
7. Jersey County community leaders develop and implement a comprehensive program of public information and education with regard to hazard mitigation.