

THE FLOOD CURRENT

National Floodplain Managers Effective in Promoting Safety

by Ken Morris, Oklahoma NFIP Coordinator

My responsibilities as secretary of the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) have kept me extremely busy this spring. I've traveled to Tampa, Florida, for a meeting involving the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and National Emergency Managers Association (NEMA.) Then, I flew to San Antonio, Texas, to plan development of the ASFPM certification program and, finally, I attended a meeting of our Administrative Council in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, to make preparations for ASFPM's 22nd Annual Meeting in Milwaukee, held in May.

The Tampa trip allowed the ASFPM Executive Board and others to voice their concerns directly to Mike Armstrong, FEMA's Associate Director of Mitigation, and other agency staff members. Major topics included the public assistance eligibility of non-participating NFIP communities and FEMA's ongoing efforts to update and modernize flood insurance rate maps. As many of you know, some areas of Oklahoma are represented by floodplain maps which date back to 1980, or even earlier. Since that time, intense development in many watersheds has increased stormwater runoff, or communities have annexed or deannexed lands that contained flood hazard areas. Unfortunately, revising these maps is a costly and time-intensive procedure and FEMA has been allocated insufficient funds to pursue a coordinated update effort. Nevertheless, FEMA officials have pledged to make mapping a priority. I strongly encourage Oklahoma community floodplain managers to contact FEMA's regional office in Denton if your community's flood map shows incorrect flood hazard areas. Be prepared to supply FEMA with detailed information about the stream reach, length of stream affected and why the area needs a restudy. If annexations were involved, FEMA will also require a copy of those ordinances.

At the ASFPM meetings in Texas, the Professional Development Committee continued to refine the floodplain managers certification program. The first pilot exam was administered during the Association's Milwaukee meeting in May. Participant comments will allow the Certification Board of Regents to fine tune the program so it is fully operational by next year's annual conference in Portland, Oregon, or possibly sooner. The Professional Development Committee is comprised of Diane Calhoun, Joe Remondini, Pat Hoggard, Larry Larson, Bill Lesser, Bill Tingle, Wally Wilson and I and co-chairs Roy Sedwick and John Ivey. Oklahoma's certification program, developed by the OFMA under the leadership of co-chair T.J. Davis, has already certified 44 floodplain managers.

Speaking at the ASFPM Annual Conference, JoAnn Howard, Director of the Federal Insurance Agency, indicated that FIA will be accountable for flood insurance premiums and ensure that every penny is spent wisely. She also advocated a healthy respect for intelligent land use and emphasized the need to build wisely. Howard stressed the many benefits of the National Flood Insurance Program and encouraged communities to enforce local ordinances so that they can maintain their eligibility in the program. Larry Larson, ASFPM Executive Director, echoed Howard's comments regarding community compliance. He pointed out that many floodplain violations occur due to ignorance or inadequate training of community officials and local floodplain administrators. Despite this, Larson emphasized that when adequate training is finally supplied to these officials, program probation and suspension are in order for willful and/or repeat

violators. His bottom line message -- NFIP communities should enforce their local ordinances.

I also recently attended the State Coordinator's and State Hazard Mitigation Officers' Workshop at the Emergency Management Institute in Emmitsburg, Maryland. In addition to obtaining valuable information on the latest emergency/floodplain management issues, the workshop allowed participants to voice their concerns about federal flood programs and visit with high-level FEMA staff, including Mike Armstrong, Associate Director of Mitigation. Some of the more interesting subjects included introduction of software that assists floodplain/emergency managers in determining if a structure has been substantially damaged and state management of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), a designation which allows qualified states to dramatically decrease the time frame required for mitigation project approval.

Oklahoma Floodplain Management Association members, please reserve September 16-18, 1998, for the Eighth Annual OFMA Annual Conference/Workshop to be held at Shangri-La Lodge, on Grand Lake. The theme is "Unified Pre-Disaster Mitigation Opportunities." The meeting will feature a certification training session and exam. Also, we will discuss potential establishment of a state mitigation revolving fund.

Finally, on June 3, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., the City of Tulsa was named by FEMA Director James Lee Witt one of the 50 national Project Impact communities. (See the related article in this issue.) The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management will work closely with Tulsa on this unique effort between government and the private sector to develop "disaster resistant" communities. □



Ken Morris of the OWRB instructs Floodplain Administrators at Workshop held in Midwest City May 5.

