

# 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.

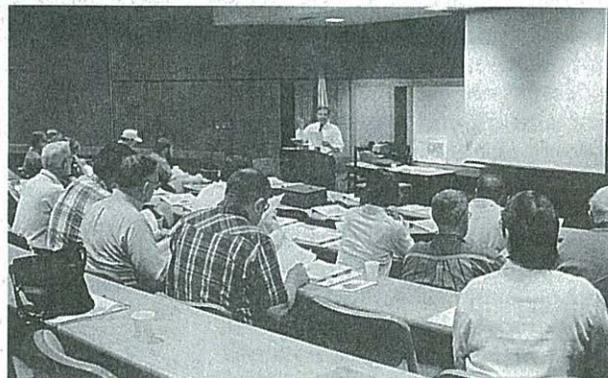
Speaking at the ASFPM Annual Conference, JoAnn Howard, Director of the Federal Insurance Agency, indicated that FIA will be accountable for flood insurance premiums and ensure that every penny is spent wisely. She also advocated a healthy respect for intelligent land use and emphasized the need to build 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.

## Come to OFMA Conference Sept. 16-18

The Oklahoma Floodplain Managers Association announces the OFMA Eighth Annual Fall Training Conference at Shangri-La at Grand Lake September 16-18.

According to Neill Pulliam, Jr., OFMA secretary, OFMA members and staff of communities participating in the National Flood Insurance Program are invited to attend the conference entitled "Unified Pre-Hazard Mitigation Opportunities." Pulliam said informative sessions will feature key speakers representing private, local, state and federal interests. Emphasis will be on reducing losses in future disasters through zoning, flood proofing and removal of flood-prone structures.

Participants will have an opportunity to qualify as a Certified Flood-

plain Manager. To date, OFMA has approved 44 applicants as Certified Floodplain Managers.

In addition to seminars, the conference will offer a cookout September 16, awards breakfast September 17 and entertainment aboard the Cherokee Queen the evening of September 17.

Registration by the August 15 deadline costs \$125 for OFMA members, \$135 for non-members, an additional \$10 for registrations after deadline.

Hotel accommodations are not included in registration fees, but may be arranged by calling Shangri-La at 1-800-331-4060.

For more information on registration or the conference, please call Carolyn Schultz at 918-669-4919 or Neill Pulliam at 918-491-9995. □

## Don't Drive Through Water

A recipient of Subaru's *Drive* magazine, upset by an article depicting a vehicle fording a river, wrote a letter to the editor that appeared in the Summer 1998 edition.

He wrote, "Crossing flooded streambeds costs hundreds of lives each year. People have no conception of the power of moving water and the force it exerts against a car when it gets in above the floorboards. First, the previously air-filled car floats slightly, since it weighs less than the water it is displacing. Next, the driver loses traction, then the car goes wherever the water wants to take it. Usually, the engine stalls, so the driver becomes helpless.

"The weight of the water prevents the passengers from opening the doors. If the car has electric windows, well, by now the electrical system is shorted out and those don't work either. Safety glass makes it even harder to break out a window or windshield and escape a vehicle that has now become a deathtrap.

"States mount massive education programs to try and prevent drivers from doing exactly what your article depicts. Your magazine is for Subaru owners, not professional drivers or stunt men. Worst of all, you work for a company which markets its vehicles primarily on their outstanding safety features. Please include a warning in the next issue and make every effort possible to prevent readers of your magazine from attempting this stunt."

The editor of *Drive* responds: "Rather than try to paddle out of this one, I'll let your well written letter do the talking! Thank you for your explanation and warning to *Drive* readers."

## Never Underestimate the River

Undoubtedly home owners at Twin Lakes near Crescent chose the banks of the Cimarron River for the scenic beauty of the site, heedless of potential danger.



On March 18, the rain swollen river cut away 100 feet of bank, plunging five homes, including this one, into the river. Owners were denied flood insurance claims because gages measuring flow on the Cimarron indicated the river did not reach flood stage.



As many homes as possible were moved; only those which could not be moved or whose owners could not be contacted were lost to the river. Residents and heavy machinery worked through the night to move homes from harm's way.

## Tulsa to be "Disaster Resistant"

On June 3, Federal Emergency Management (FEMA) Director James L. Witt named the City of Tulsa as one of 50 cities and counties in the nation to participate in Project Impact, a new federal initiative to reduce disaster costs.

"Natural disasters cost this country too much in dollars, infrastructure loss and in ...emotional and community well-being," Director Witt explained. "We must put an end to the damage-repair-damage-repair cycle. Project Impact represents a new vision for the way America deals with disasters."

Project Impact will challenge communities across the nation to build local partnerships, assess vulnerabilities to natural hazards and implement actions that protect families, businesses and communities by preparing for and reducing the damaging effects of natural disasters. In each of the 50 "disaster resistant" communities, a local coalition of government leaders, representatives of business and individuals will be asked to provide funding, in-kind services, technical support and labor to undertake disaster-resistant activities. FEMA will provide administrative support through technical assistance and funds.