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Guidelines for Identifying Provisionally Accredited Levees FEMA's Procedure Memo 43

Contributed by Craig Kennedy, Michael Baker, Jr., Inc.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) issued Procedure Memorandum No. 43 (PM 43), *Guidelines for Identifying Provisionally Accredited Levees*, on September 26, 2006. PM 43 provides guidance on showing flood hazards for areas behind levees on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) and clarifies procedures and timelines for levee documentation.

On August 22, 2005, FEMA reiterated its commitment to consider levee construction, strength, ongoing maintenance and other factors during the agency's ongoing flood mapping modernization efforts. In 1986, through Section 65.10 of Title 44 of the Code of Federal Regulations, FEMA was directed to review levee accreditation criteria, determine the risk of flooding behind levees, and depict these flood risks on flood hazard maps.

"When levees fail, they fail catastrophically. The flooding may be much more intense and damaging than if the levee was not there," said David Maurstad, FEMA's Mitigation Director and Federal Insurance Administrator. "No levee system will provide full protection from floods. Levees are designed to provide a specific level of protection, and they can be overtopped in larger flood events. People need to be aware of the risks they face living behind levees - including levees credited as providing protection from the one percent annual chance flood."

Many of the nation's levees were first put in place by farmers to protect agricultural areas from frequent flooding. They date back as much as 150 years. But in that time, land use has changed and development has taken place where these farms were once located. And levees can decay over time. Accurate mapping of the risks of flooding behind levees depends on knowing the condition and level of protection the levees actually provide.

FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are working together to make sure that flood hazard maps clearly reflect the flood protection capabilities of levees, and that the maps accurately represent the flood risks posed to areas situated behind them. Levee owners - usually States, communities,

or in some cases private individuals or organizations - are responsible for assuring that the levees they own are maintained to their design. In order to be considered creditable flood protection structures on FEMA's flood maps, levee owners must provide documentation to show that the levee meets design, operation and maintenance standards for protection against the "one-percent-annual chance" flood.

If the levee meets the criteria, the map will show the area behind the levee as protected from the on-percent-annual chance flood and mapped as a moderate risk zone. But if it does not, the map will show the area as a high-risk zone, or Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA), and most mortgage holders within that area will be required to purchase flood insurance.

Based on feedback from numerous communities, states and other stakeholders, FEMA learned that it may be difficult for levee owners to produce the required information because documentation is not always immediately available and, in some cases, additional assessment may be required. Inability to provide full documentation immediately does not mean that the levee no longer provides the level of protection to which it was designed. But neither does it mean that flood hazard maps can fully credit the levee with providing protection against the one-percent-annual-chance flood.

FEMA announced that it clarified procedures and timelines for levee documentation, while keeping the map modernization effort on track. For eligible levees, levee owners have 24 months to gather information on the extent to which a levee meets current flood protection standards. In the interim, areas behind the levee are mapped as moderate risk areas, and the levee itself is noted to be a Provisionally Accredited Levee.

"The new guidance accommodates the needs of local officials, levee owners and the public - while still acknowledging and communicating flood risks," Maurstad said. "It provides a realistic timeline for levee documentation and at the same time alerts the public to the levees' provisional status and associated risks. The clarification provides a sound mechanism for dealing with levees under review. And it clearly indicates the continuing risk. A note on the map will explain that the levee is only provisionally - temporarily - accredited. And all flood hazard maps contain a note for areas behind levees pointing

out that levees can be overtopped and strongly encouraging flood insurance protection and adherence to evacuation procedures."

The flood map modernization initiative is a five-year, \$1 billion effort to modernize and digitize the nation's flood hazard maps. Communities use this information for land-use planning, floodplain management, and flood insurance rating purposes. The current goal is to map the areas where 92 percent of America's population lives, covering 65 percent of the land area in the United States. The focus is on improving the flood hazard data level of detail in communities at greatest flood risk. The maps provide reliable, up-to-date flood data, using the latest mapping technology. The maps indicate areas at high risk of flooding, known as special flood hazard areas, as well as areas at low to moderate risk. In special flood hazard areas, flood insurance is a requirement for federally backed mortgages.

To learn more, visit:
www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/lv_intro.shtm

Map Mod Feedback Sought

FEMA's Flood Map Modernization program is a multi-year effort to make floodplain maps more reliable, more available, and easier to use and update. Over the next five years, many communities will be getting new Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Most of these will be digital maps that can be incorporated into a Geographic Information System (GIS). The updated data and the maps will be accessible to all through a web based portal called the Mapping Information Platform (MIP) on FEMA's website (<https://hazards.fema.gov/wps/portal>). The MIP also has a wide range of products and services being provided for mapping partners and contractors as well as end users of the maps.



Some of the FEMA provided products and services on the MIP may need end user training and require enhancements to fully meet user requirements. Accordingly, FEMA has contracted with Apttis Inc. (formerly SETA Corp.), a firm providing systems engineering and technical assistance services, to assess the effectiveness of the Map Mod

program's products and services from the perspective of the end users and obtain necessary feedback to be utilized for ongoing program improvement.

Apttis Inc. is seeking volunteers who have received new maps and DFIRMs to help FEMA in this effort. Persons interested in participation in this effort should contact Rahul Johri at Rahul.Johri@apptis.com or call 703-821-5513.

Apttis will select a representative sample of the volunteers and e-mail them a copy of the user feedback questions. Subsequently, a telephone interview will be scheduled at the volunteer's convenience. It is expected that the interview will take 10 – 15 minutes.

If you are interested in assisting FEMA in improving its Map Modernization products and services, please consider volunteering for this end user feedback effort and contact Rahul Johri at Rahul.Johri@apptis.com or call 703-821-5513.

2007 MnAFPM Conference Planned November 14 -16 in Saint Cloud

The 2007 Annual Conference of the Minnesota Association of Floodplain Managers (MnAFPM) is scheduled to be held in St. Cloud on November 14-16, 2007. The conference planning committee is open to new members. Please contact the Conference Committee Chair, Aaron Buesing at: Aaron.w.buesing@mvp02.usace.army.mil if interested in joining the committee.

Mark your calendars! 2007 Spring Luncheon: Levees & Floodplains

MnAFPM and the St. Paul Post of the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME) are co-hosting a luncheon on May 23, 2007. The luncheon will be held at the Officer's Club at Fort Snelling.

Registration and mingling will begin at 11:30 with a buffet-style lunch commencing at noon. Details on guest speakers and registration fees will be published next month. Hope to see you there!

In theory there is no difference between theory and practice, but in practice there is. *Yogi Berra*

Minnesota Map Modernization Business Plan Update

The Minnesota Map Modernization Business Plan was published in January 2004 and was made available on the MnDNR website at http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/waters/watermgmt_section/floodplain/FEMAMapModPlan2004.pdf.

Minor modifications were made to this plan in early 2005 and 2006. Significant modifications have been made to the Business Plan in December 2006 to reflect FEMA's mid-course adjustments to the Multi-Hazard Flood Map Modernization National Milestones and the progress to date in implementing the Map Modernization Program in Minnesota. This article represents a brief review of the latest changes.

The four priorities of the Business Plan currently are:

- Completion of existing remapping projects.
- Mapping of CTP counties.
- Mapping of major watercourses and the counties along them.
- Produce DFIRM's for counties without Q3 data (replacing the original objective to remap repetitive loss areas).

Although the metrics indicate that Minnesota meets many of the Map Modernization objectives (see table below), an overview of the detailed data indicates that 40% (36 of 87) of Minnesota counties will not receive any updated floodplain mapping.

Two problems were encountered while implementing the 2004 business plan. These were:

1. Available FEMA funding for Minnesota was inadequate to implement the 2004 Plan and has since decreased.
2. Plans to use existing data available from the USACE, NRCS, watershed districts, counties, and cities have been complicated by FEMA's Data Capture Standards.

Progress has been made, however, in spite of the difficulties, particularly in meeting the first two Business Plan priorities. Three counties have released final DFIRMs, four counties have released preliminary DFIRMs, and 12 counties are on track to release preliminary DFIRMs this year. Counties that will be included in FY 2007 and FY 2008 are:

FY07	FY08
Benton	Aitkin
Blue Earth	Anoka
Douglas	Carlton
McLeod	Chisago
Mahnomen	Crow Wing
Marshall	Dodge
MilleLacs	Freeborn
Mower	Kittson
Nobles	Pine
Norman	Polk
Rice	Waseca
Roseau	Wilkin
Stearns	Wright
Steele	
Todd	

The updated Business Plan will be placed on the DNR website after the review by FEMA and the MN CPT Executive Committee is complete.

Business Plan Metrics

Area and Population Mapped	Original Map Mod Metrics	Mid-Course Correction	Dec 2006 MN Business Plan
% of land area of continental US with DFIRM	100%	65%	
% of US population with DFIRM	100%	92%	83% of Minnesota Pop.
Miles and Population meeting 2005 Floodplain Boundary Standard			
% of mapped stream miles meeting FPBS	57%	75%	82% of MN Streams
% of population with maps meeting FPBS	32%	80%	
Miles and Population with Validated, New, or Updated Engineering Analysis			
% of stream miles with validated data	22%	30%	25% of MN Streams
% of population with validated data	15%	40%	