

Flood Mitigation Focus Group
July 30, 2014

Summary of Responses & Input

Participants: A full list of attendees is included in this report. In general, the focus group participants represented city & county public works and planning staff; state level staff; agriculture interests; property owners; local college students; conservation interests; civic organizations; development interests; and elected officials.

Focus group participants were provided with worksheets and asked to provide their feedback for the draft goal and objectives presented. Feedback was requested on overall reactions, thoughts, ideas, suggested action steps, and questions relating to each of the objectives. The written responses from each participant were recorded as raw data into one document, and a summary of the major themes discussed is provided below.

Framework for goals and objectives:

- Education / Communication
- Policy
- Practices
- Measure / Monitor

Goal:

Protect human life, property, and surface water systems that could be damaged by flood events in the Indian Creek Watershed.

Objective 1: Communicate accurate information about flood risk to watershed residents and stakeholders.

Draft Action Steps:

- *Raise awareness about watershed connections*
- *Provide information about specific actions*
- *Forum to convey flood prone areas & to receive flood impact reports*
- *Training opportunities for public sector staff & agricultural producers*

Feedback from participants:

Target Audiences: There were many comments on the specific audiences that need to be reached by educational efforts.

- School-age children and their parents (4 responses)
- City Council / Board of Supervisors / policy makers in general (3 responses)
- Realtors (2 responses)
- Developers
- Non-farming landowners
- Elderly landowners
- Service groups
- Floodplain residents
- Homeowners
- Garden centers

Communication / education strategies:

- Events / information to communicate about flood-prone areas and risks (7 responses)
- Social media (5 responses)
- Marketing campaign – simple, standardized messages - such as for “You Pick Two” conservation practices or the economic effects of flood damage (4 responses)
- Website (eg post USACE information, FAQs) (4 responses)
- Recognizing farmers / homeowners / business owners who are doing the right thing / ambassadors (3 responses)
- CCB, city PSAs (3 responses)
- Field days to teach about practices, for homeowners, farmers, businesses, public sector employees (3 responses)
- “peer to peer” (2 responses)
- WFAN events (2 responses)
- Signage (now entering the watershed) (2 responses)
- Point of sale notices (2 responses)
- Newspaper articles (2 responses)
- Newsletters (2 responses)
- Watershed 101 for residents (2 responses)
- After Action Report to compare rainfall / runoff & damages
- City Council work sessions to educate about watershed issues
- One-on-one meetings with farmers to ‘sell practices’
- Inserts in utility billings
- Regular opinion surveys of watershed residents, landowners
- Demonstration projects
- Recreation as an educational opportunity
- Education on runoff reduction
- River clean-ups as education / partner with local business
- Raise awareness about hazard mitigation

Floodplain Maps:

- Communities may consider using USACE revised flood frequency / mapping products (2 responses)
- More, better, updated maps (2 responses)
- Update FIRM maps

Objective 2: Develop or update policies to better manage stormwater and floodplain areas.

Draft Action Steps:

- *Encourage participation in the Community Rating System (CRS)*
- *Coordinate with Linn County Multi-jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Planning process to align mitigation strategies*
- *Promote protection of a greenbelt along stream corridor*

Feedback from Participants:

Specific Policy / Regulations: Many comments were received with specific policy recommendations.

- Restrict development in floodplain (8 responses)
- Topsoil requirement for new development (4 responses)
- Restrict fill in floodplain (2 responses)
- Change to a 0.2% (500-year) regulatory floodplain (2 responses)
- Seek higher CRS designation (2 responses)
- Allow natural drainage in street right-of-way (2 responses)
- More retention / detention for development
- Post-construction stormwater ordinance
- Reduce road width
- Cap-and-trade system for run-off on a site-by-site basis
- Don't allow sawed tree trunks / limbs to be dumped in creek
- Preserve overbank flow paths in subdivisions / basins, such as through grading ordinance
- Restriction on farming to the edge of a waterway
- Do not allow connection of gutter downspout to storm sewer
- Promote infiltration / storage in the planning stages of development

Objective 3: Implement practices to decrease runoff from urban and rural areas.

Draft Action Steps

- *Reduce then maintain stream discharge to targeted levels*
- *Treat runoff from the initial 1.25" rainfall event in urban areas*
- *Promote conservation easements as a mitigation tool*
- *Encourage all landowners to adopt two conservation practices*
- *Retrofit infrastructure to increase detention & infiltration*

Feedback from Participants:

Specific Practices: Many ideas for specific practices were suggested.

- Greenbelt (8 responses)
- Native vegetation / conservation landscaping (4 responses)
- Rainwater harvesting / rain barrels (4 responses)
- Rain gardens (4 responses)
- Permeable paving (3 responses)
- Buffer strips (3 responses)
- Wetlands – in floodplains; for sediment trapping (3 responses)
- Bioswales (2 responses)
- Retention ponds (2 responses)
- Drain tile (2 responses)
- CRP (2 responses)
- Promote infiltration practices / retrofits (2 responses)
- Stream restoration
- Protect undeveloped floodplain areas
- Native landscaping

- Dam / reservoir above County Home Road
- Dam removal
- Buyouts
- Check dams
- Reintroduce beavers
- Increase organic content of soil
- Identify specific projects that could be candidates for Haz Mit Grant Program

Funding for Practice Implementation

- Cost-share / financial incentives for practices; sponsored by cities / county (6 responses)
- Tax incentive program – or water fund - to develop a mechanism to pool funds for investing in conservation (3 responses)
- Seed money to promote BMPs
- Need sustainable funding to support BMP implementation
- Fee structure for new development, to help fund conservation practices
- Stormwater fund
- Stormwater fee discounts for BMP adoption

Objective 4: Develop a process and procedures to monitor and measure progress toward the objectives stated in the plan and to update the plan every 5 years.

Draft Action Steps:

- *Update inundation models every 5 years*
- *Long-term flow and water quality monitoring*
- *Track implementation of BMPs*
- *Track public sector costs responding to / recovering from flood events*

Feedback from Participants:

Specific Monitoring / Measuring

- Survey areas of stream every 5 yrs to understand how it changes over time such as by erosion / RASCAL (3 responses)
- Update inundation models every 5 years (2 responses)
- Continue to use college students for monitoring (2 responses)
- Dense array of stream gages / sensors
- Coordinate IOWATER volunteers
- More money for water quality monitoring

Planning Objectives

- Track use of BMPs / wetlands, develop uniform reporting system (5 responses)
- Track public sector costs (5 responses)
- Develop goals & schedules & benchmarks / measurable milestones for implementation (3 responses)
- Retain and treat 1.25” (2 responses)
- Track damage costs to private property (2 responses)

- Track progress
- Reduce / maintain stream discharge
- Track environmental costs
- Develop a HUC-12 focused planning approach
- Set goals for each community for reporting BMP implementation
- Develop watershed-specific land use plans
- Develop regional land use plans
- Focus regional buyout planning
- Need to set habitat protection goals
- Need to set a goal of 'decrease flooding damages
- Include planning for transportation during flood events
- Monitor repetitive loss
- Provide opportunities to suggest new mitigation alternatives
- Coordinate hazard mitigation planning & watershed planning

Future Research / Analysis

- Evaluate risks of future consequences on today's policies
- Current FIRM maps are based on old data that needs to be updated
- Put a value on development of greenbelt
- Learn / study which practices work and which don't
- Water quality concerns associated with flood waters
- Measure the ratio of rainfall to rain runoff to see how it has changed
- Damage costs may increase even after preventative measures are taken; need to show what impacts could have been without those preventative measures

Additional Feedback From Participants

Overall Challenges

- Retrofit of urban areas is a challenge
- Tracking BMP adoption seems like a difficult task
- People are not fully informed about risk
- Need more involvement from more stakeholders
- Greenbelt is a good idea but it can split up a community
- Difficult to make a significant impact to the large events, so focus on smaller events
- Will be difficult to set targets for stream discharge, especially in rural areas

General

- Need better flood warning systems and communications / flood status – risk metric (4 responses)
- Hire a dedicated watershed project coordinator
- New department in city to oversee the watershed plan
- Nutrient reduction strategy should be mandatory not voluntary
- Who specifically will be in charge of continuing the plan – ECICOG?
- Just do it now!
- Elect people to local office who favor storm water management practices
- Make it stop raining so much