



ASFPM FOUNDATION

ASSOCIATION OF STATE FLOODPLAIN MANAGERS, INC.

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Gilbert F. White 2010 Flood Policy Forum 2011 & 2013 State Symposia on Flood Risk Management Updated Annual Summary Report

Introduction

The March 2010 ASFPM Foundation Gilbert F. White National Flood Policy Forum was conducted at George Washington University, with the topic "Managing Flood Risks and Floodplain Resources". The Forum Action Agenda that arose from this Forum reflected the participants' recommendation that there is a need to capture flood risk indicators at the state, regional, and local levels of government to complement the national level indicators developed at the Forum.

Key Finding of 2010 Forum:

There is a need to develop "local" (local, regional, state) flood risk management indicators that complement those developed as "national" indicators at the Forum. The "local" and national indicators should be aligned, but need not overlap since perspectives will (and should) be different when one considers a national program or a local watershed.

In response, the ASFPM Foundation, in cooperation with ASFPM, annually has solicited proposals from the 30 State Chapters to co-sponsor this event with the Foundation every year. The premise for these events is to build upon the efforts of the 2010 Gilbert F. White National Flood Policy Forum in a State Symposia format, delivered at the state level, focused on state-specific issues and actions.

In 2011, the inaugural year for conducting State Symposia, four Chapters responded to a detailed request for proposals. Following review it was determined that two ASFPM chapters were best suited to host these inaugural symposia: the Indiana Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management (**IAFSM**), and the Colorado Association of Stormwater & Floodplain Managers (**CASFM**).

In 2013, two Chapters, the second year for conducting State Symposia, four Chapters responded to a detailed request for proposals. Following review it was determined that both ASFPM chapters were fully qualified to host these inaugural symposia: the Texas Floodplain Management Association (**TFMA**), and the Georgia

Association of Floodplain Management (**GAFM**).

Symposia Execution

Following the national forum model, each of the selected chapters prepared an invitational list of about 100-125 individuals from a variety of disciplines including floodplain and stormwater managers, transportation and development planners, elected officials, natural resource specialists, researchers, social science and/or



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public engagement specialists, and professionals from the insurance, real estate and other industries. Invitees were both from public and private sectors, NGOs, academia, "in-state" state and local officials, and federal officials with state or regional responsibilities. From those lists, a total of 80-100 attendees participated in each of the four Symposia to-date.

The State Symposia were held in the following locations and dates since inception:

- **2011 Symposia**
 - Indianapolis, Indiana on April 12, 2011 (**IAFSM**)
 - Boulder, Colorado on April 14, 2011 (**CASFM**)
- **2013 Symposia**
 - Austin, Texas on March 19, 2013 (**TFMA**)
 - Atlanta, Georgia on March 21, 2013 (**GAFM**)

Each Symposium included approximately 80-100 participants that met in plenary and then in 3 pre-assigned breakout groups. For each symposium the following itinerary was followed:

- *Welcome by local host and local issues presentation*
- *Orientation to the Day, Forum Topic and Process Overview*
- *Setting the Stage for Local Flood Mitigation Strategizing*
- *Summary of findings from National Forum*
- *Video replay of risk communication by Dr. Dennis Mileti from Forum*
- *Setting the Stage on Risk Management, including Natural and Beneficial Functions*
- *Group discussion on topics of interest in flood risk management*
- *Break out Session One: Identify flood risk indicators and dash boards*
 - *Group Report out*
- *Break out Session Two: Management strategies to move flood risk indicators*
 - *Group Report out*
- *Action Plan and Summary Close*

Symposia Observations and Discussion

All Symposia to-date focused heavily on indicators or data needs necessary to influence flood risk at the local and state levels. As expected, there were commonalities in the indicators proposed at the symposia with the national forum, although the emphasis and priority was certainly different. At the end of this document is a summary table that captures the key topics of each symposia, followed by which breakout groups engaged on this topic. This format is an attempt to capture the main issues, the commonality of concerns between breakout groups, and key or unique concepts that emerged.

What this observation suggests and amplifies is the essential disconnect that has evolved at the federal level related to floodplain programs and watershed programs



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An overarching observation independent of the design for this exercise was the general mood of the attendees.

Indiana (2011) has gone through a number of legislative and policy setbacks which essentially unraveled many key components of their state floodplain management program. In general people were initially a bit cautious, but through the course of the symposium one could sense the energy levels increasing within the Chapter leadership and others in the room to begin to address and tackle some of the recent slippages.

In contrast, **Colorado (2011)** just recently enacted some policy advancements and the general mood was upbeat. However during the day, recognition emerged that the group needed to remain vigilant to protect recent gains and that more policy work was needed to ultimately achieve a comprehensive flood risk management policy.

For **Texas (2013)**, the general mood is “we don’t want policy set in Washington, DC that will impact us here, without our say in things”. In general, Texas wants full control over decisions made that may impact floodplain management activities. Texas either leads the nation or is near the top in several disaster-related data categories, and is very active in developing its flood risk indicators for its state. Texas also struggles with a difficult balance between drought and flood events, making it difficult policy-wise to get traction for flood-related activities. Public education is also a key needed component. TFMA developed 8 strategic actions to be implemented following the Symposia to keep the momentum going on actions. A separate, 13-page Texas Symposia Proceedings was prepared by TFMA leadership for reference.

In **Georgia (2013)**, there is significant concern over how coastal floodplain management activities are evolved, as impacts from hurricane activity and related disasters really drive policy there. Similar to Texas, public education and local leadership involvement were key areas identified during the sessions. A specific set of 20 follow-up action items was developed by local leadership, which will drive further discussions by GAFM with state and regional floodplain management partners. A separate, 58-page Georgia Symposia Proceedings was prepared by GAFM leadership for reference.

Observation 1: Watershed vs. Floodplain

Perhaps the most significant overarching observations contrasting the National Forum to the State Symposia related to the differing focus between a national look and a local or state look at flood risk. In all States, there was general consensus that flood risk was increasing. In both States, flood risk outside the mapped floodplain (special flood hazard area) was a key concern in terms of flood risk management. There is a sense within these States that where there is a mapped floodplain, the hazard has been somewhat identified and there are rules in place that might help mitigate the risk, hence there is less concern about flood risk. This notable difference in focus between a national view and the State and local view is noteworthy, and suggests the following outcomes.



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- Floodplain mapping, floodplain regulation, and floodplain mitigation opportunities seemingly are foundational to managing local risk - at least for flooding up to and including the 1% annual chance flood. There is a general sense that the risk in the mapped floodplains is known and generally managed within current mainstream regulatory frameworks, which has reduced damages but not eliminated them.
- In contrast, there is more flood risk concern on other areas of the watershed. This may in part be due to lack of hazard identification, rules, and incentives or drivers for mitigation.

It should be noted that none of the four States, at the time of their Symposia, had a large population subject to catastrophic risk from a major flooding source such as that faced by some coastal communities, or communities primarily protected by levees or dams (e.g. New Orleans, Charleston, Sacramento).

What this observation suggests and amplifies is the essential disconnect that has evolved at the federal level related to floodplain programs and watershed programs that essentially evolved in stovepipes, but these differences essentially are meaningless for the state or local implementer. Actions of the EPA to be more inclusive of flood risk in their programs the past 2-3 years is a definite step towards aligning the Federal role with local realities.

Observation 2: Risk Communication

At each Symposium, Dr. Dennis Mileti's presentation on flood risk communication from the Forum was shown on video. Each Symposia group was taken by the message and there was strong recognition that messaging for behavioral change vs. education is essential. There was discussion that there is some basic messaging in place that needs to be branded state-wide. In each Symposia however (and similar to the Forum), groups quickly retreated to an education based approach in their risk communication and outreach vs. a behavior modification approach as proposed by Mileti. Ironically, this observation proves Mileti's point and demonstrates that to shift risk communication approaches requires more than education - people need to be shown how it can be done. It also demonstrates just how quickly this approach can be derailed, because of the natural inclination of scientists and engineers to "lead with logic" vs. embracing a more marketing based approach. There is a clear need to assemble a working group to frame approaches and produce products that go beyond any single agency in order to move this approach forward. Perhaps this should become an elevated focus of the ASFPM via a broad working group. It is essential that the leadership of this group maintain a high degree of focus discerning the differences between education and behavior change based approaches.

Observation 3: Essential Data

The most common similarity between the Forum and State Symposia was the call for basic data and metrics to support management decisions and to track change. At the four Symposia, each of the breakout groups commented extensively on this need.



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Historically the nation has tracked factors such as flood damage, flood insurance claims, and other outcome based metrics. Unfortunately these types of data do little to define and manage a problem. The challenge addressed at both the Forum and Symposia was *managing flood risk*. They recognized the need for essential forward-looking data to project trends and support management decisions was universally described.

Examples of data needs included:

- Structures in floodplains
- Structure at risk outside of mapped floodplains
- Land use change
- Inventory and tracking of floodplain natural and beneficial functions
- Agronomic impacts including soil loss
- Other

Efforts of FEMA via Risk MAP, including experimentation with new ways to portray risk and the inclusion of vulnerability assessments, are important steps towards addressing some of these data needs. Efforts of the USACE Flood Risk Management Program likewise are establishing a framework for managing risk, but this program as well would benefit from essential inventories.

In the preparatory workshops prior to the 2010 Forum, a participant commenting on the similarities between floodplain natural and beneficial functions policy today and wetland policy of 30-years ago noted that both require essential inventories to gain policy traction, and that the wetlands inventory of the 80's proved to be foundational to framing the problem the nation faced with wetlands. What this comment demonstrates is that policy and management decisions often rely on sound data, and until we invest in these essential data we will not have a true management strategy.

Observation 4: Natural and Beneficial functions

Natural and beneficial functions of floodplains are recognized as being essential to a comprehensive floodplain management and flood risk management framework. There is strong support and appreciation for the need for these functions *at a personal level*. Unfortunately there were few participants at the four Symposia that expressed that managing these functions was a priority of their job, with the exception of NGO or policy advocates that have a mission of promoting these functions. This observation admittedly was framed by omission and is worth further examination, but it essentially suggests that, on the ground, state and local managers predominantly view their role as being oriented towards public safety and not necessarily inclusive of natural floodplain functions.

This suggests in part that if natural and beneficial functions are not explicit in the programs being delivered, that very little consideration of natural and beneficial floodplain functions will actually occur.



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Observation 5: State and Local Policy Leadership

The policy discussion format at each Symposia provides an opportunity for the leaders of ASFPM State Chapters to tackle and engage their members on the policy issues of today. At each Symposia, both in session and in summations, State Chapter follow-up and engagement was mentioned on several occasions, and reinforced as an ongoing, future task to be tackled. ASFPM is grappling with how to best support chapters to provide both member education and policy leadership. The Chapters have naturally gravitated towards member education, and policy leadership is inconsistent between chapters and fleeting within chapters.

Symposia Conclusions

ASFPM Foundation members and participating Symposia Chapter leaders to-date all agree that the initiative to bring the National Forum policy dialogues to state and local audiences continues to succeed in its objectives to:

- 1) Engage Chapter members;
- 2) Explore differences in scope and focus; and,
- 3) Discuss issues at the state and local level, and plan out potential future actions.

In many respects, the State Symposia all have exceeded expectations by additionally providing a much-needed venue for spontaneous and organic networking, relationship-building, and exploration of new approaches among participants.

Symposia Actions Moving Forward

Future Symposia

Other State Chapters continue to be interested in hosting additional Symposia to focus the dialogue, issues, and actions at the state, regional, and local levels.

ASFPM Foundation leaders share this interest and continue to promote for funding to continue the State Flood Risk Symposia initiative on an annual basis.

- ❖ **For 2013-14**, the ASFPM Foundation has approved funding for one State Symposia, and this has been approved by the Foundation Board. In June 2013, applications were sent to State Chapters for consideration, and the Florida Floodplain Managers Association (**FFMA**) was awarded the next State Symposia. This event will be held on August 21, 2014, in Tampa, Florida at the University of South Florida's Patel College of Global Sustainability. Planning for the event started in August 2013 and continues as of the preparation of this summary report



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- ❖ **For 2014-15**, the ASFPM Foundation has budgeted for at least one State Symposia, pending final Board approval. As of June 2014, applications for the 2014-15 State Symposia have been sent to State Chapter leadership for consideration in hosting the next round. It is anticipated that 1-3 State Chapters will be applying for this next round of State Symposia, which is to be held in early to mid-2015.

ASFPM State Symposia Working Group

Regarding Observation 5 above, following the 2013 Symposia in Texas and Georgia, the two State groups agreed that capitalizing on the momentum gained from the two 2013 Symposia was a priority. Furthermore, it was noted that CASFM held a recent Colorado Flood Forum following the 2013 catastrophic flooding in Colorado that represented a strong follow-up to the 2011 State Symposia effort. As such, the ASFPM State Symposia Working Group was formed in early 2014. The purpose and mission of this group is to promote further dialogue and actions from the State Symposia efforts in each of the states. As more states complete Symposia, their efforts and leadership will be added to the efforts of this Symposia Workgroup. The group meets at least quarterly, including a face-to-face meeting annually at the ASFPM Conference, to discuss topics of shared interest, lessons learned, actions being promoted locally by each group in their respective States, and is to become a “think-tank” for promoting actions at the State level as an outcome from their respective State Symposia.

The first meeting of this Workgroup was held in early May 2014, with a brief face-to-face meeting that followed at 2014 ASFPM Conference in Seattle. As work products and actions are defined by this Workgroup, additional details will be added in subsequent annual revisions to this summary report.

Symposia Proceedings

Separate Symposia Proceedings have been prepared for the 2013 Texas and 2013 Georgia State Symposia and are available online.