

RESTORE Task Force: Watershed Planning and Mitigation Assistance

Summary

Recommendation

To allow specific funding and programmatic recommendations regarding CDBG-DR Allocations under Public Law 115-123 (currently anticipated to be \$1.214 billion) to be made directly to the Governor by the cooperating state agencies that are currently collaborating on the Louisiana Watershed-Based Floodplain Management Program.

General Program Areas to be Included in the Action Plan for Mitigation Funds:

- Monitoring, mapping and modeling watersheds
- Watershed-Based Projects and Programs
- Local Match for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
- Buyouts, Acquisition and Flood Easements
- Large Scale Projects or Programs

Recommendation Context

To address flood risk mitigation in the State of Louisiana and develop a coordinated approach to it, the Governor plans to issue an Executive Order directing the development and implementation of a statewide, watershed-based floodplain management program (herein referred to as the “Program”). This will be achieved through close collaboration and coordination of the Secretaries and Executive Directors of:

- Office of Community Development (OCD)
- Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD)
- Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA)
- Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP)
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF)

The five Cooperating Agencies have committed to developing and implementing the Program to further the development of context-appropriate, locally feasible strategies for pre- and post-disaster planning and recovery relative to flood and water events. In support of this mission, these cooperating agencies seek to direct funding towards reducing flood risk throughout the state. This will require working closely with and tapping the expertise of local governments, universities, the private sector and other stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive view of the issues and resources available and maximum utilization of the skills and talents within the state. The Cooperating Agencies will keep the RESTORE Task Force abreast of all recommendations to the Governor, and will continue to seek input from the Task Force.

Background

It is clear from events such as the Great Floods of 2016 that flood risk mitigation efforts need to address not only coastal, or surge, flooding, but also fluvial (river) and pluvial (surface) flooding. Additionally, floodplain management needs extend well beyond the 100-year floodplain. Projects, policies and programs within a watershed can expand, contract, exacerbate, or attenuate flood risk in other areas, and effective management of floodplains can break the cycle of damage and rebuild.

As part of the program development process, and through significant stakeholder, technical support and subject matter expert engagement, these Cooperating Agencies have developed and are implementing a multi-pronged Program, created from existing authorities and programs, and aimed at decreasing the instances of flooding, mitigating damages from flooding, and reducing the amount of time needed to recover from flooding.

Thus far, implementation and execution of the various initiatives associated with the Program have been accomplished using resources originating from each of the cooperating agencies and their respective flood related programs (NFIP, CDBG, HMGP, and Non-Structural). Through the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, Congress appropriated CDBG-DR funding specifically for mitigation activities. HUD has allocated \$1.214 billion out of a total \$15.935 billion in mitigation assistance to the State of Louisiana. This unprecedented level and use of CDBG-DR funding will allow these cooperating agencies to fund the regional projects and programs necessary to protect local communities from flooding and to minimize the effects of the disasters which are so common in Louisiana.

The Cooperating Agencies have developed a strategy for near-, mid-, and long-term approaches to use of the CDBG-DR mitigation assistance that seeks to leverage, coordinate and improve upon existing federal, state and local efforts in order to make the entire state a more resilient home for our residents. This effort is now ready to expand to include local governments and the private sector in identifying opportunities and challenges to make watershed-based floodplain management a reality across the entire state.

Initial Program Area Recommendations:

At this time, the Cooperating Agencies have recommended the following program and project areas for leveraging the CDBG-DR mitigation funds:

- **Monitoring, mapping and modeling watersheds:** Cogent and consistent access to accurate and updated maps, data and modeling will allow the state to develop an early flood warning system as well as Hydrologic and Hydraulic models capable of supporting the state, local governments and private industry decision-making.
- **Watershed-Based Projects and Programs:** The plan allocates a substantial percentage of the anticipated funds towards infrastructure improvements, to include waterway management and watershed improvements in the form of locally identified and professionally vetted projects that will have a watershed-wide impact. This would also include ecological restoration projects to enhance the storage capacity and ecosystem services of existing floodplains, floodways and waterways.
- **Local Match for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program:** The local HMGP cost-share requirement is 25% for both the March and August flood events. CDBG-DR funds can be used to pay for the local match and to provide the assistance needed for projects underfunded by HMGP.
- **Buyouts, Acquisition and Flood Easements:** Strategic land acquisition, headwater protection, buyouts, and flood easements for flood storage functions and/or voluntary buyouts of homes and properties in high-risk and/or severe repetitive loss areas.
- **Large-scale Programs and/or Projects (e.g., Comite River Diversion Canal, Red River Study, etc.):** The Cooperating Agencies are reviewing already-identified programs and projects that are consistent with the goals of the Program and the regulations surrounding the HUD CDBG-DR mitigation assistance that are consistent with the goals of the Program and the regulations surrounding the HUD CDBG-DR mitigation assistance. Complete clarity on HUD regulations will not be available until HUD publishes their Federal Register Notice, hopefully in the coming days or weeks.