Region 1 Annual Status Report

MELINDA HOPKINS, CFM, REGION 1 DIRECTOR
Introduction

Region 1 includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Except for Vermont, all New England states are susceptible to coastal flooding. As such, Region 1 holds approximately 38% of the flood insurance policies in the nation. The region is home to over 225 Certified Floodplain Managers (as of March 2022), and the number continues to increase as exams are offered annually in the Northeast.

ASFPM chapters in Region 1 include the Massachusetts Association of Floodplain Management (massFM), Rhode Island Flood Mitigation Association (RIFMA), and Connecticut Association of Flood Managers (CAFM). These organizations hold annual conferences and sponsor training opportunities. Each is actively involved in promoting floodplain management and mitigation through education and public activities.

Key Accomplishments

Connecticut

- Held virtual training sessions with CTDEEP Staff on coastal permitting, and a training session on the NFIP and climate change was held for tax assessors.
- The CAFM 8th annual Conference was held virtually and was a major success as everyone was still working remotely.
- Completed the new Coastal Property Owners Brochure to help property owners and buyers understand the requirements of owning coastal property (permits for sea walls, docks, FEMA requirements, etc.)

Maine

- Partnered with the Maine Emergency Management Agency, the National Weather Service offices in Caribou and Gray, and the NH Floodplain, Emergency, Weather, and Insurance offices for Maine Flood Safety Awareness Week with the theme “Low Risk does not mean No Risk”.
- Continued to partner with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, Shoreland Zoning Program to provide combined training for local code officials as these two programs share a lot of geography. Recently passed state legislation now allows increased structure height in the shoreland zone to conform with floodplain standards that require elevating above the BFE.
- Maine has received preliminary maps for the Lower Penobscot River Watershed. Discovery has started for the Dead River Watershed, Lower Kennebec River Watershed, Piscataquis River Watershed, the Saco River Watershed and 5 watersheds in Aroostook County shared with Canada. Re-delineated mapping is being conducted for the Upper Androscoggin River Watershed. Anticipating revised preliminary maps that have been re-issued for York and Cumberland Counties.
Massachusetts

- Received a BRIC Capability & Capacity Building grant award to analyze and develop actionable statewide local strategies for the strengthening of floodplain standards inside and outside of the state building code. Deliverables include the study and a guide with recommended actions and evidenced-based justifications to assist Massachusetts cities and towns, as well as state agencies, in advancing and/or enacting local flood resilience codes, policies, and/or programs to reduce current and future flood losses.
- Preparing to promulgate its 10th Edition of the statewide mandatory building code, which in draft form (as of this printing) includes for the first time the ASFPM Coastal A Zone standards for construction (with a minor exception). Higher standards, such as freeboard and foundation alteration/repair under Substantial Improvement/Substantial Damage are expected to continue in the updated code.

New Hampshire

- Developed yearly outreach campaign for NH Flood Safety Awareness Week (held 3/14-3/18/2022) which included social media posts, web content, and emails focused on the theme “Low Risk Doesn’t Mean No Risk”.
- Released “An introduction to Substantial Improvements and Substantial Damage”, a half-hour training video, and the second in the Flood Learning On demand for Officials (FLOOD) training series on NFIP-related topics.
- Conducted and recorded two webinars: “Making Substantial Improvement Determinations” and “Making Substantial Damage Determinations.”
- Currently developing a Risk Rating 2.0 outreach plan and activities, which includes creating a dedicated web site page with information and resources and a training webinar and collaboration with state Insurance Department and FEMA Region 1 insurance specialist.

Rhode Island

- The Town of Charlestown, RI increased to a Class 6 rating in the CRS, the first Class 6 in Region 1, effective April 1, 2022.
- Received preliminary notice of award for Silver Jackets FY22 proposal for RI Guide to Flood Mitigation.
- Two communities in Newport County successfully adopted the Cape Cod Watershed maps in July 2021.

Vermont

- The State of Vermont recently unveiled the new Flood Resilient Communities Fund (FRCF) to address the unmet needs from FEMA HMA funding streams. Program priorities include improving landscape and community resilience and reducing future public safety and water quality impacts of climate-related flood hazards in Vermont, focusing on buyouts of flood-vulnerable properties. The program places emphasis on prioritizing projects in communities and for homeowners with the greatest economic need and projects that mitigate repetitive loss among low-income and marginalized portions of the population. The program is a partnership between Vermont Emergency Management and the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation with dedicated funding through the State of Vermont for a
minimum of three years. The State of Vermont continues to promote flood hazard mitigation and awareness of both inundation and fluvial (flood)-related erosion hazards. The Vermont Rivers Program is in the middle of a multi-year project called the Functioning Floodplain Initiative (FFI). The FFI is intended to identify nature-based floodplain restoration projects through scoring, tracking, mapping of floodplain and wetland functions, and the quantification of their social values. The output of the second phase, which is underway, will provide a basin to site-scale assessment of stream and floodplain connectivity and function, and provide recommended projects and interventions based on those assessments.

- Equity in Floodplain Management – University of Vermont student Katie Pascoe (she/her) worked with the Vermont NFIP program last summer to highlight the importance of environmental justice in floodplain management. Pascoe prepared “Safe Family and Friends” as a new section of the Program’s Flood Ready Vermont website. The section highlights opportunities to promote inclusive process, equity, the importance of no adverse impacts to community members and to prevent losses of vital floodplain functions. The framing as “Safe Family and Friends” was chosen to engage municipal officials and partners in the work for a more just distribution of environmental benefits and burdens.

- Vermont has six municipalities in the CRS program. On April 1 the Town of Berlin shifted from Class 9 to Class 7. Four communities are now Class 8.

**Challenges**

The COVID-19 Pandemic has continued to be a challenge for Region 1 as most are still working remotely and trying to hold virtual meetings. Everyone has more proficiency in using Teams and Zoom for meetings or Community Assistance Visits but holding a CAV in person usually garners more information than over zoom.

- One of the other big challenges that the States have is the CAP-SSSE program. With the State Tiered Framework and the transformation tool it has become more of a micro-management tool for the CAP-SSSE activities. The State APP Tool has made significant changes on how states develop their annual Scope of Work. There is more time spent on the management of the program than doing the actual work of supporting the communities that are enrolled in the National Flood Insurance Program. More time is spent on the “box-checking” activities then time being spent in the field. CAP-SSSE funding has remained level-funded in Region 1 for many years. The funding needs to be adjusted annually to keep pace with the cost of doing business as states risk cutting staff due to the inability to over-match the cooperative agreement. Even though FEMA says it is paying for activities, benefits and fringe are included in costs. FEMA must recognize that states base their budgets on FTEs. FEMA risks underfunding states by not recognizing that they must pay for consistent, dedicated staff to execute CAP activities. If states are not given enough funds to pay for an FTE, staff will be placed on other activities. If this approach continues, we may see some states stop relying on CAP-SSSE funds so they can actually manage the program how it should be. While everyone recognizes that states must be accountable for the money that is granted to help support state programs, it appears that there is virtually little dialog with states on how to achieve better floodplain management goals and outcomes. States are essentially being given the message to step back from doing valuable and meaningful work
because it can’t be entered into a multi-decades old database (CIS) that was not created to account for all work of a State FPM program. The only activities being recognized and credited for state programs are those that can meet the narrow reporting fields and definitions that are found in the CIS program. This is now emphasized by the quarterly Performance Reports. While the process is more streamlined, the real diverse work of a state coordinating program is lost in this reporting process and creates a feedback loop that the discreate countable activities are the most valued work of a state floodplain management program.

- Getting the FEMA flood insurance data with the ISAA/RUL process in time to fill out the grant applications and for updating Hazard Mitigation Plans in a timely fashion has been a problem. FEMA has a large backlog in processing these ISAA requests that can hinder the grant process as well as the plan update process.
- The pandemic has slowed down communities joining the Community Rating System (CRS) as FEMA cannot travel to do the CAV needed to join and there has been a lot of staff turnover at FEMA Region I. Many of my existing CRS communities are getting frustrated with all the new 2021 changes, threatening to quit, but none have done it so far.

**Priorities**

There are many priorities for states in Region 1.

- Reduce reporting burden on state staff for CAP-SSSE program; former reporting provided more detailed information that FEMA could use to help improve the program.
- Provide clarification on many elements of Risk Rating 2.0 and highlight how risk reduction measures can reduce annual premiums. This will help communities with mitigation measures.
- Improve communication between the FEMA Region I Risk Analysis Branch and the Flood Mitigation and Insurance Branch and state staff for better mapping coordination regarding mapping updates. Map processes impact state work and it’s difficult to plan appropriately without good communication of changes in region’s progress. Currently, States are not included in discussions to set mapping priorities, timelines, communication efforts, etc. The state staff often finds out about mapping efforts when a contractor reaches out for information at the beginning of the discovery process.
- Training. Training is desperately needed at all levels:
  - Floodplain Management 101 for new staff
  - E-273 both virtual and in person
  - Elevation Certificates
  - Risk Rating 2.0
  - DRRA 1206
  - Substantial Improvement/Substantial Damage;
  - Higher standards
Recommended Actions

- Region 1 states often are included in efforts regarding climate change, adaptation, and sea level rise. These activities can take up considerable time and are not recognized by the CAP NOFO and there is no activity task associated with these topics. It is recommended to include an optional task in the CAP-SSSE NOFO and SOW for participation and activities related to climate change/adaptation and if applicable, sea level rise.
- CIS needs to be fixed and proper guidance on how to enter GTAs and other critical data must be provided to states if it affects annual funding.
- The TSF and State APP Tool are becoming overly complicated and cumbersome. TSF was initiated to evaluate all the states equally but inconsistent data entry into CIS does not allow a fair comparison as well as over-reliance on counting “widgets” rather than allowing States to continue to foster meaningful relationships with communities and partners.
- The State APP Tool pays for activities, not people, but FEMA ignores the fact that State agencies base funding on FTEs. FEMA should step back and evaluate the TSP and State APP Tool before further implementation.