

Unifour Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan

Natural hazards have the potential to cause property damage, loss of life, economic hardship, and threats to public health and safety. Hazard mitigation measures are the things we do today to be more protected in the future. They are actions taken before a disaster happens to reduce the impact of future hazard events on people and property in the community. Mitigation reduces the risk of loss and creates a more resilient and sustainable community.

Project Overview

The counties of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba, in coordination with their participating municipal jurisdictions, prepared a **regional hazard mitigation plan** that covers the four-county Unifour area. The Unifour Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies local policies and actions for reducing risk and future losses from natural hazards such as floods, severe storms, wildfires, and winter weather. It builds upon four separate hazard mitigation plans that were prepared by each county in coordination with their municipalities in the previous five year planning cycle.

The new regional plan serves to meet key federal planning regulations which require local governments to develop a hazard mitigation plan as a condition for receiving certain types of pre and post disaster assistance, including funding for hazard mitigation projects and flood plain management.

These mitigation planning requirements stem from the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, which was passed by the U.S. Congress in October of 2000. This Act amended federal law to require that all states and local governments must have hazard mitigation plans in place in order to be eligible to apply for funding under such programs as the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and the Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program.

The Planning Process

The planning process for the Unifour Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan consisted of six main phases described in detail in the following sections: **public outreach, risk assessment, capability assessment, mitigation strategy development, plan maintenance, and plan adoption.** The end result is a new regional hazard mitigation plan based on this new planning effort.



Above: The plan update process being followed for the Unifour Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Public Outreach

The goals of the public outreach strategy for this planning effort were to: generate public interest, solicit citizen input, and engage additional partners in the planning process.

Public outreach included two open public meetings, a project information website at <http://www.catawbacountync.gov/emergencyServices/hazard/regionalPlan.asp>, a web-based public participation survey (accessible through the website), and updates and information shared via social media, such as on Facebook and Twitter.

Risk Assessment

The outcomes of the risk assessment were an evaluation of each hazard's potential impacts on the people, economy, and built and natural environments in the planning area plus an understanding of each participating jurisdiction's overall vulnerability and most significant risks. These potential impacts and a thorough understanding of the overall vulnerability were used to create problem statements and identify and prioritize mitigation actions to reduce risk.

Capability Assessment

Each participating jurisdiction has a unique set of capabilities, including authorities, policies, programs, staff, funding, and other resources available to accomplish mitigation and reduce long-term vulnerability. By reviewing the existing capabilities in each jurisdiction, the planning team identified capabilities that currently reduce disaster losses or could be used to reduce losses in the future.

Mitigation Strategy Development

The primary purpose of mitigation planning is to systematically identify policies, actions, and activities to reduce the impact that future natural hazard occurrences will have on people and property in the planning area. Mitigation strategy development included developing long-range mitigation goals common to the planning area and short-term mitigation actions specific to each participating jurisdiction.

Plan Maintenance

Plan maintenance is the process established to track the plan's implementation and to aid in updating the plan every five years. These procedures help to ensure that the mitigation strategy is implemented according to the plan. They also provide the foundation for an ongoing mitigation program, standardize long-term monitoring of hazard-related activities, integrate mitigation principles into local officials' daily job responsibilities, and maintain momentum through continued engagement and accountability in the plan's progress.

Plan Adoption

Each participating jurisdiction seeking plan approval must adopt the plan. Adoption by the local governing body demonstrates the community's commitment to implementing the mitigation strategy and authorizes responsible agencies to execute their actions. The final plan is not approved until the community adopts the plan and FEMA receives documentation of formal adoption by the governing body of the jurisdictions requesting approval.

Project Leadership

This regional planning effort was led by Catawba County Emergency Services and the Catawba County Planning, Parks & Development office, with technical assistance from AECOM. A local Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee made up of local officials, representatives, and stakeholders was established to guide this process. In addition, local points of contact were established for each of the four counties as well as all of the participating municipal jurisdictions. Planning committee meetings and open public meetings were scheduled to occur at key points throughout the project timeline.

Schedule

The planning process began in June 2013 and a fully updated plan was ready for review by the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management and the Federal Emergency Management Agency by the Fall of 2014. Plan documents were available on the project information website throughout the various stages in the planning process.

For More Information

To learn more about this project, or to find out how you can be involved, please contact Karyn Yaussy, Catawba County Emergency Management Coordinator, at (828) 465-8230 or kyaussy@catawbacountync.gov.

Additional information and regular updates throughout the duration of this project can be found on the Unifour Hazard Mitigation Planning website at <http://www.catawbacountync.gov/emergencyServices/hazard/regionalPlan.asp>



Alexander County
North Carolina



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