

INTRODUCTION

This section provides a general introduction to the Catawba County Multi-jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan. It consists of the following five subsections:

- Background
- Purpose
- Scope
- Authority
- Plan Outline

Background

Natural hazards, such as floods, tornadoes and severe winter storms are a part of the world around us. Their occurrence is natural and inevitable, and there is little we can do to control their force and intensity. We must consider these hazards to be legitimate and significant threats to human life, safety and property.

Catawba County is vulnerable to a wide range of natural hazards, including flooding, tornadoes, tropical storms and hurricanes, winter storms and earthquakes. These hazards threaten the life and safety of county residents, and have the potential to damage or destroy both public and private property and disrupt the local economy and overall quality of life.

While the threat from hazardous events may never be fully eliminated, there is much we can do to lessen their potential impact upon our community and our citizens. By minimizing the impact of hazards upon our built environment, we can prevent such events from resulting in disasters. The concept and practice of reducing risks to people and property from known hazards is generally referred to as *hazard mitigation*.

Hazard mitigation techniques include both structural measures, such as strengthening or protecting buildings and infrastructure from the destructive forces of potential hazards, and non-structural measures, such as the adoption of sound land use policies and the creation of public awareness programs. It is widely accepted that the most effective mitigation measures are implemented at the local government level, where decisions on the regulation and control of development are ultimately made. A comprehensive mitigation approach addresses hazard vulnerabilities that exist today and in the foreseeable future. Therefore it is essential that projected patterns of future development are evaluated and considered in terms of how that growth will increase or decrease a community's overall hazard vulnerability.

One of the most effective means that a community can implement a comprehensive approach to hazard mitigation is to develop, adopt, and update as needed, a local *hazard mitigation plan*. A mitigation plan establishes the broad community vision and guiding principles for reducing hazard risk, and further proposes specific mitigation actions to eliminate or reduce identified vulnerabilities.

The Catawba County Multi-jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (hereinafter referred to as "Hazard Mitigation Plan" or "Plan") is an effective means to incorporate hazard mitigation principles and practices into the routine government activities and functions of Catawba County and its municipalities. At its most inner core, the Plan recommends specific actions to combat the



Hazard Mitigation:
Any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk to human life and property from hazards.

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forces of nature and protect its residents from losses to those hazards that pose the greatest risk. These mitigation actions go beyond simply recommending structural solutions to reduce existing vulnerability, such as elevation, retrofitting and acquisition projects. Local policies on community growth and development, incentives for natural resource protection, and public awareness and outreach activities are examples of other actions considered to reduce Catawba County's future vulnerability to identified hazards. The Plan is designed to be a living document, with implementation and evaluation procedures included to help achieve meaningful objectives and successful outcomes over time.

Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000

In an effort to reduce the Nation's mounting natural disaster losses, the U.S. Congress passed the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) to amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act by invoking new and revitalized approaches to mitigation planning. Section 322 of the Act emphasizes the need for state and local government entities to closely coordinate on mitigation planning activities, and makes the development of a hazard mitigation plan a specific eligibility requirement for any local government applying for federal mitigation grant funds. These funds include the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program, Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program, Repetitive Flood Claims (RFC) program, and the Severe Repetitive Loss (SRL) program, all of which are administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under the Department of Homeland Security. Communities with an adopted and federally-approved hazard mitigation plan thereby become pre-positioned and more apt to receive available mitigation funds before and after the next disaster strikes.

This Plan was prepared in coordination with FEMA and the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management (NCEM) to ensure that it meets all applicable planning requirements. This includes conformance with FEMA's latest *Local Multi-Hazard Mitigation Planning Guidance* (dated July 1, 2008). A *Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Update Checklist*, found in *Appendix D*, provides a summary of FEMA and NCEM's current minimum standards of acceptability and notes the location within the Plan where each planning requirement is met.

Purpose

The general purpose of this Hazard Mitigation Plan is:

- To protect life and property by reducing the potential for future damages and economic losses that result from natural hazards;
- To qualify for additional grant funding, in both the pre-disaster and post-disaster environment;
- To speed recovery and redevelopment following future disaster events;
- To sustain and enhance existing governmental coordination in Catawba County and demonstrate a firm local commitment to hazard mitigation principles; and
- To comply with federal and state requirements for local hazard mitigation plans.

Scope

This Hazard Mitigation Plan will be updated and maintained to continually address those hazards determined to be of high and moderate risk through the detailed vulnerability assessment for

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Catawba County (see Section 6: *Vulnerability Assessment*). Other hazards that pose a low or negligible risk will continue to be evaluated during future updates to the Plan, but they may not be fully addressed until they are determined to be of high or moderate risk to Catawba County.

The geographic scope (i.e., the planning area) for the Plan includes all incorporated and unincorporated areas of Catawba County. This includes the following nine local government jurisdictions:

- Catawba County
- Town of Brookford
- Town of Catawba
- City of Claremont
- City of Conover
- City of Hickory
- Town of Long View
- Town of Maiden
- City of Newton

Authority

This Hazard Mitigation Plan has been adopted by Catawba County in accordance with the authority and police powers granted to counties as defined by the State of North Carolina (N.C.G.S., Chapter 153A). This Hazard Mitigation Plan has also been adopted by Catawba County's incorporated municipal jurisdictions under the authority granted to cities and towns as defined by the State of North Carolina (N.C.G.S., Chapter 160A). Copies of all local resolutions to adopt the Plan are included in *Appendix A*.

This Plan was developed in accordance with current state and federal rules and regulations governing local hazard mitigation plans. The Plan shall be monitored and updated on a routine basis to maintain compliance with the following legislation:

- Section 322, Mitigation Planning, of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as enacted by Section 104 of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-390) and by FEMA's Interim Final Rule published in the Federal Register on February 26, 2002, at 44 CFR Part 201.
- North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 166A: North Carolina Emergency Management Act, as amended by Senate Bill 300: An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding Emergency Management as Recommended by the Legislative Disaster Response and Recovery Commission (2001).

Plan Outline

This Hazard Mitigation Plan is divided into ten major sections, each of which is briefly introduced and described below. It also includes several appendices for additional or supplemental items not included in the main body of the plan, including copies of local adoption resolutions, public participation survey results, a listing of key federal hazard mitigation funding programs and a completed Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Update Checklist.

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This *Introduction* (Section 1) provides some background on hazard mitigation planning and the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, and then defines the purpose, scope and authority of the plan as adopted by Catawba County and its incorporated municipalities. It also provides the following outline of each section making up the plan.

The *Planning Process*, found in Section 2, fully documents the process by which Catawba County and its participating municipal jurisdictions have prepared and updated this plan. This includes describing the key steps involved in the processes followed, who was involved (the planning team) and full descriptions of community meetings and workshops, how the public and other stakeholders were notified and involved, and how each of the municipal jurisdictions participated in the process.

The *Community Profile*, located in Section 3, describes the general makeup of Catawba County and local municipalities, including prevalent geographic, demographic and economic characteristics. In addition, building characteristics and land use patterns are discussed along with some general historical disaster data. This baseline information provides a snapshot of the countywide planning area and thereby assists Catawba County and municipal officials recognize those social, environmental and economic factors that ultimately play a role in determining community vulnerability to natural hazards.

The *Risk Assessment* is presented in three separate sections: Section 4: *Hazard Identification*; Section 5: *Hazard Analysis*; and Section 6: *Vulnerability Assessment*. Together, these sections serve to identify, analyze and assess Catawba County's overall risk to natural hazards. The *Risk Assessment* also attempts to define any hazard risks that may uniquely or exclusively affect the individual municipal jurisdictions. The *Risk Assessment* builds on available historical data from past hazard occurrences, establishes detailed profiles for each hazard, and culminates in a hazard risk ranking based on conclusions about the frequency of occurrence, spatial extent and potential impact of each hazard. FEMA's HAZUS^{®MH} loss estimation methodology was also used in evaluating known hazard risks by their relative long-term cost in expected damages. In essence, the information generated through the *Risk Assessment* serves a critical function as communities seek to determine the most appropriate mitigation actions to pursue and implement — enabling communities to prioritize and focus their efforts on those hazards of greatest concern and those structures or planning areas facing the greatest risk(s).

The *Capability Assessment*, found in Section 7, provides a comprehensive examination of Catawba County and the participating municipalities' capacity to implement meaningful mitigation strategies and identifies existing opportunities to increase and enhance that capacity. Specific capabilities addressed in this section include planning and regulatory capability, staff and organizational (administrative) capability, technical capability, fiscal capability, and political capability. Information was obtained through the use of detailed survey questionnaires for local officials and an inventory and analysis of existing plans, ordinances and relevant documents. The purpose of this assessment is to identify any existing gaps, weaknesses or conflicts in programs or activities that may hinder mitigation efforts, and to identify those activities that should be built upon (such as participation in the National Flood Insurance Program) in establishing a successful and sustainable community hazard mitigation program.

The *Community Profile*, *Risk Assessment*, and *Capability Assessment* collectively serve as a basis for determining the goals for the Hazard Mitigation Plan, each contributing to the development, adoption and implementation of a meaningful *Mitigation Strategy* that is based on accurate background information.

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The *Mitigation Strategy*, found in Section 8, consists of broad goal statements as well as specific mitigation actions for each local government jurisdiction participating in the planning process. The strategy provides the foundation for detailed *Mitigation Action Plans*, found in Section 9, that link specific mitigation actions for each jurisdiction to locally-assigned implementation mechanisms and target completion dates. Together, these sections are designed to make the Plan both strategic (through the identification of long-term goals) but also functional through the identification of short-term and immediate actions that will guide day-to-day decision-making and project implementation.

In addition to the identification and prioritization of possible mitigation projects, emphasis is placed on the use of program and policy alternatives to help make Catawba County less vulnerable to the damaging forces of nature while improving the economic, social and environmental health of the community. The concept of multi-objective planning was emphasized throughout the planning process, particularly in identifying ways to link hazard mitigation policies and programs with complimentary community goals related to housing, economic development, downtown revitalization, recreational opportunities, transportation improvements, environmental quality, land development, and public health and safety.

The *Plan Maintenance Procedures*, found in Section 10, includes the measures Catawba County and its municipal jurisdictions will take to ensure the Plan's continuous long-term implementation. The procedures also include the manner in which the Plan will be regularly evaluated and updated to remain a current and meaningful planning document.