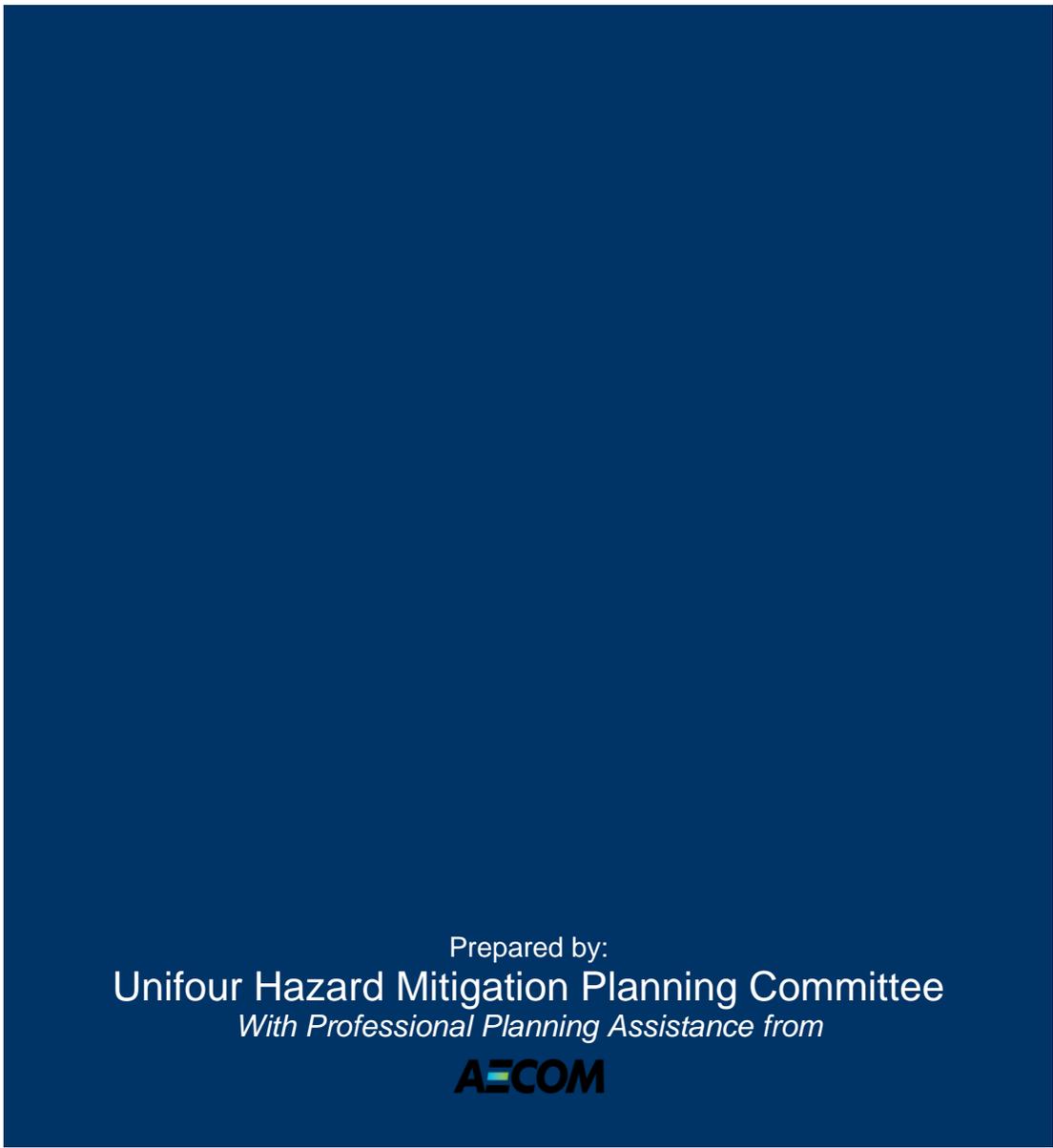




# Unifour Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan

Alexander County, Burke County, Caldwell County, Catawba County



Prepared by:  
Unifour Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee  
*With Professional Planning Assistance from*



**FINAL DRAFT**

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# Acknowledgements

This regional hazard mitigation plan was made possible through the dedicated efforts of each participating jurisdiction, stakeholders, members of the public, and the project consultant. Detailed information about the planning process and individual participation can be found in the *Planning Process* section of this document.

Participating county and municipal jurisdictions are listed here in alphabetical order by county.

## **Alexander County**

Town of Taylorsville

## **Burke County**

Town of Connelly Springs

Town of Drexel

Town of Glen Alpine

Town of Hildebran

City of Morganton

Town of Rutherford College

Town of Valdese

## **Caldwell County**

Town of Cahah's Mountain

Village of Cedar Rock

Town of Gamewell

Town of Granite Falls

Town of Hudson

City of Lenoir

Town of Rhodhiss

Town of Sawmills

## **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

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# Section 1: Introduction

This section provides a general introduction to the Unifour Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. It consists of the following five subsections:

- 1.1 Background
- 1.2 Purpose and Vision
- 1.3 Scope
- 1.4 Authority
- 1.5 Plan Overview

## 1.1 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.

The Unifour Region, which is comprised of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties, is vulnerable to a wide range of natural hazards. These hazards threaten the life and safety of the Region’s 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 damaging effects of natural 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 is defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as, “Any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk to human life and property from hazards.”

Hazard mitigation techniques include structural measures and non-structural measures. Structural measures include activities such as strengthening or protecting buildings and infrastructure from the destructive forces of potential hazards. Non-structural measures include activities 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 overall hazard vulnerability in the planning area.

One of the most effective means that a community can use to 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 local vision and guiding principles for reducing hazard risk, and further proposes specific mitigation actions to eliminate or reduce identified vulnerabilities.

The Unifour Regional 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 the four counties and 24 municipalities participating in this Plan. At its most inner core, the Plan recommends specific actions to protect our built environment from the forces of nature and to protect the residents of the Unifour Region 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 the Unifour Region'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. 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 declared disaster.

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 Mitigation Planning Handbook* (released March 2013) and *Local Mitigation Plan Review Guide* (released October 2011). A *Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Update Checklist*, found in Appendix B, 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.

## **1.2 Purpose and Vision**

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 the Unifour Region and demonstrate a firm local commitment to hazard mitigation principles; and
- To comply with federal and state requirements for local hazard mitigation plans.

A Unifour Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee was created, consisting of representatives from each of the 28 participating jurisdictions, to develop a regional plan. This committee established a vision statement to help guide the regional planning process and to give all of the participating jurisdictions a common focal point for discussion, coordination, and development of the Plan:

**Vision Statement**

*“Through a coordinated regional planning effort, create and implement an effective hazard mitigation plan that will identify and prioritize risk reduction measures for natural hazards in order to protect the health, safety, quality of life, environment, and economy of the Unifour area.”*

**1.3 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 the Unifour Region (see Section 4: *Risk 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 the Unifour Region.

The geographic scope (i.e., the “planning area”) for the Plan includes all incorporated and unincorporated areas of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties. This includes the following 28 local government jurisdictions:

<b>Alexander County</b>	<b>Burke County</b>	<b>Caldwell County</b>	<b>Catawba County</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town of Taylorsville</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town of Connelly Springs</li> <li>• Town of Drexel</li> <li>• Town of Glen Alpine</li> <li>• Town of Hildebran</li> <li>• City of Morganton</li> <li>• Town of Rutherford College</li> <li>• Town of Valdese</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town of Cahah’s Mountain</li> <li>• Village of Cedar Rock</li> <li>• Town of Gamewell</li> <li>• Town of Granite Falls</li> <li>• Town of Hudson</li> <li>• City of Lenoir</li> <li>• Town of Rhodhiss</li> <li>• Town of Sawmills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town of Brookford</li> <li>• Town of Catawba</li> <li>• City of Claremont</li> <li>• City of Conover</li> <li>• City of Hickory</li> <li>• Town of Long View</li> <li>• Town of Maiden</li> <li>• City of Newton</li> </ul>

These 28 participating jurisdictions have previously been covered under four separate county level plans. The decision was made to create one regional mitigation plan in order to accomplish the following planning goals:

- Support a more holistic regional planning effort, taking into account shared concerns and shareable resources;
- Conform to NCEM’s preference for regional hazard mitigation planning in the state; and
- Leverage available funding and resources for mitigation planning.

**1.4 Authority**

This Hazard Mitigation Plan has been adopted by all participating counties 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 all participating 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).

## 1.5 Plan Overview

This Hazard Mitigation Plan is divided into eight major sections, each of which is described briefly below. The Plan also includes several appendices for additional or supplemental items not included in the main body of the Plan, including copies of local adoption resolutions (Appendix A), a completed *Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Update Checklist* (Appendix B), Public Outreach Strategy (Appendix C), public participation survey results (Appendix D), copies of meeting agendas, sign-in sheets, and PowerPoint slides (Appendix E), etc.

This *Introduction* (Section 1) provides background on hazard mitigation planning and the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, and defines the purpose, scope, and authority of the Plan as adopted by all participating jurisdictions. 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 the Unifour Region prepared this regional hazard mitigation plan as an update to its four existing county level plans. This includes a description of the key steps involved in the processes followed, who was involved (i.e., the members of the Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee) 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 *Planning Area Profile*, located in Section 3, describes the general makeup of the Unifour Region, including its counties and local municipalities, including relevant geographic, demographic, and economic characteristics. In addition, building characteristics and land use patterns are discussed along with general historical disaster data. This baseline information provides context for the region-wide planning area and thereby assists the planning team in recognizing the social, environmental, and economic factors that ultimately play a role in determining community vulnerability to natural hazards.

The *Risk Assessment*, found in Section 4, serves to identify, analyze, and assess the Unifour Region'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. 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 areas facing the greatest risk(s).

The *Capability Assessment*, located in Section 5, provides a comprehensive examination of the Unifour Region 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.

The *Mitigation Strategy*, found in Section 6, consists of regional goal statements as well as specific mitigation actions for each local government jurisdiction participating in the planning process, along with a set of regional mitigation actions to be implemented by the Unifour Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee. The *Mitigation Strategy* provides the foundation for detailed *Mitigation Action Plans*, found in Section 7, 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) and 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 the Unifour Region 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 8, includes the measures each participating jurisdiction 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.

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