

Meeting Summary
Missouri River Flood Task Force Kickoff Meeting
Crown Plaza Hotel – DIA, Denver, CO
October 21, 2011

The agenda for the meeting, list of meeting attendees (including phone attendees), presentations and other meeting materials can be found at <http://www.nwd.usace.army.mil/MRFTF/>.

Meeting Objectives:

1. Learn about each others' capabilities, programs, authorities, interests, activities, and challenges related to flood recovery and restoration.
2. Discuss ideas for what the Task Force should accomplish in the short-term (by March 1) and beyond.
3. Identify initial activities members and partners should undertake.

Opening Remarks

Welcome and Opening Remarks were made by the Co-chairs for the Missouri River Flood Task Force (MRFTF): BG John McMahon, Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Ms. Beth Freeman, Administrator for FEMA Region VII; Mr. Doug Gore representing Ms. Robin Finnegan, Administrator for FEMA Region VIII; and Mr. Tom Christiansen of the USDA NRCS. The Co-leaders each expressed their intent for the task force to improve cooperation, collaboration, coordination, and communication among all parties. Mr. Christiansen suggested that parties work through the NRCS State Conservationists to seek coordination opportunities in their county. BG McMahon indicated that the task force should assist flood recovery efforts as quickly as possible, make intelligent investments, and reinstate services. He said that although the task force would not be a decision-making body and all agencies retain their statutory authorities, the task force would allow “the left hand to know what the right hand is doing” and move forward together. He also emphasized the need to return to pre-flood conditions or better.

Introductions and Interests

Following the opening remarks, participants introduced themselves, indicated who they represented or their interest in the task force, and explained why they were participating in the task force meeting and what they hoped the MRFTF could accomplish. Introductory comments of representatives of the sovereigns (Federal, Tribal, State agencies) who comprise the membership of the MRFTF were followed by introductions by partners, contributors, and observers. Below are common introductory themes articulated by participants. Specific comments are documented in Appendix A.

Common themes

- Work on building coordination and collaboration
- Complete damage assessments and property and infrastructure repairs quickly
- Human safety should be the highest priority
- Work together to secure funds needed for recovery and flood risk management
- Protect human health and the environment
- Share information concerning the 2011 flood and preparations for 2012 by the Corps and the BoR
- Improve forecasting and warning systems
- Identify common interests among the States
- Look at climate variability and how the basin can work together on this issue
- Assure that there is full support to relevant programs and authorities and understand the interaction between them
- Determine vulnerabilities for next spring's runoff
- Work with farmers and ranchers to maximize resources
- Inform task force about crop insurance programs
- Ensure water supply for power generation

Presentations

Various organizations gave presentations of participants' capabilities, programs, authorities, interests, activities, and challenges related to flood recovery and restoration.

Partners, Contributors, Observers Perspectives

A number of partners, contributors, and observers provided verbal input for the Task Force to consider. Several farmers and stakeholders from Missouri provided context to the group by explaining the consequences of the flooding. One participant had 40 inches of water in his basement for 10 weeks. Issues raised included what could have been done to avoid the disaster, need to invest in human safety, and the need for improved communication across all levels. There was a general frustration at the lack of repair and restoration efforts to-date and a belief that more people need to understand the devastation to people's livelihoods, and the impact of the flood on farms, businesses, and towns. There was also a request to figure out what would be necessary to protect the basin from this magnitude of flooding, as well as consider the role of climate change.

The Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM), The Nature Conservancy, and The Conservation Fund, gave PowerPoint presentations which can be found online at <http://www.nwd.usace.army.mil/MRFTE/>.

State Perspectives

Presentations from the states impacted by the Missouri River Flood (MT, WY, ND, SD, NE, KS, IA, MO), as well as a presentation from the City of Council Bluffs, IA, can be found on the website.

Tribal Perspectives

Several tribes attended the meeting and presented information for the Task Force to consider. First, the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe made the point that their land used to be over 2.8M acres until much of it was flooded in 1944. There were no roundtable discussions then, and Tribes are still dealing with high waters taking their land away today. The Tribes who presented all experienced significant flooding and are worried about damage to water treatment and drinking water systems, and to cultural sites, including cemeteries. They will lose the trees that were flooded out, and they lose land again when the water doesn't go out of the lakes. Other issues raised involved water contamination and its impact on the fish and wildlife that people depend upon for food. The presenters expressed interest in working together with other MRFTF members and partners for the health of their communities.

Federal Perspectives

Presentations detailing approximately 25 agencies' capabilities, programs, authorities, interests, activities, and challenges related to flood recovery and restoration can be found on the website.

Lunchtime Presentation: Value Added and Lessons Learned from the 2008 Inter-agency Levee Task Force & Upper Midwest Region Regional Flood Risk Management Team (Iowa Emergency Mgmt, FEMA Region 7, USACE Mississippi Valley Division)

The Inter-Agency Levee Task Force established after the 2008 upper Midwest flood was a regional and state-level effort. This Task Force accomplished its flood recovery work through state-level working groups. Initially there were questions about whether this was the best way to structure the effort. It was a collective effort of state and federal agencies that went "all the way to the farm" and got people out of working in their silos.

Representatives from this Task Force said that the key to the groups' efforts was having all agencies together at the table, or a phone call way to immediately solve issues as they came up. They emphasized that it is extremely important to have that communication, and a lack thereof is one of the biggest obstacles to success. Having diverse groups present enables the group to find means to incorporate non-traditional thinking to accomplish its goals. At the end of the flood recovery effort, the team transitioned into a Regional Flood Risk Management Team that now addresses bigger-picture issues related to flood risk management, such as identifying where gaps exist in agency programs.

Lots of obstacles to overcome:

- Mother nature

- Some parties were not engaged as early as they could have been
- Alternative ideas were lost
- Funding stream was not there initially
- Real estate issues
- Nontraditional means for repair
- Protecting livelihoods
- Loss of life and safety issues
- Inter-agency coordination

Specific lessons from their experience:

1. Engagement of decision-makers/high level leadership is critical to moving from ideas to action.
2. Finding the funding to keep the engines burning is critical.
3. We do better working collectively.
4. It is important to explore the full range of options, including non-structural alternatives, early.
5. “Go local, go local, go local”. The Corps needs to get input from local communities in order to effectively and efficiently design and implement recovery and flood risk management strategies; States can help identify communities’ interests.
6. Help local communities access the resources they need to recover and be resilient – including information, funding, and technical assistance; Mitigation grant program
7. It is critical to come together and speak with a single, unified voice for the region about what is needed in terms of response and recovery and how it should be executed.
8. Communication and collaboration are essential.

Short-term Outcomes from this Task Force:

- Allowed identification of long-term challenges that needed to be overcome and put a framework in place to solve those challenges.
- Generated ideas to build capacity to provide for resiliency in recovery and rehabilitation projects.
- Able to identify recommended improvements to federal policies for multiple agencies.
- Began development of a regional high-water mark MOU between several federal agencies and the 5 states that participated.
- Strengthened relationship with FEMA.
- Task Force members were able to align with other agencies and have a unified voice greater than in previous years.

Discussion

Following the presentations and all comments and information provided at the meeting, a facilitated discussion of what activities the task force should accomplish both pre-March 2012

and beyond proceeded. Grouping of activities eventually led to the initial identification of nine working groups to support Tribes and States in their recovery efforts:

- Agriculture
- Floodplain Management
- River Management
- Infrastructure
- Tribal Support
- Levee Repair
- Communications
- Policies/Regulatory/Permitting
- Hydropower

An initial convener for each workgroup was identified to set up a preliminary conference call with workgroup members and participants to further refine issues and tasks the workgroup would focus on, and to identify a leader for that workgroup.

A list of the workgroups and their activities is posted on the above website. While all working groups will be lead by a representative of one of the members of the MRFTF (i.e. federal agency, tribe, or state), other partners/observers/contributors may contribute information and their views for consideration. Participants were asked to provide the Corps the names of members and participants on the workgroups within one week. The next meeting of the task force will be held in Kansas City prior to December 25, 2011.

APPENDIX A

Introductory Comments

Federal Agencies

- NRC – To learn about river management to better manage two nuclear power plants impacted by the 2011 flood
- WAPA - To continue their power marketing mission from the Corps and BoR dams
- EPA - To learn how they can support agencies while doing their mission to protect human health and the environment
- USFWS – To help facilitate quick recovery and restoration of the Missouri River and coordinate restoration of National Wildlife Refuges impacted
- NPS – To work together with others to manage flood risk while restoring the floodplain
- NRCS – To have clear, concise guidance for Ag producers to repair their lands and return them to productivity
- NOAA – To provide information for flood planning and mitigation for both the short and long term
- NWS – Would like to provide information to inform the task force
- USGS – Interested in assisting with data consolidation and providing information to assist the task force.
- USDA Farm Service Agency - FSA needs technical assistance from other agencies. The ECP program is currently not funded (\$57 million short for Missouri River Counties). CRP is a non-structural tool that could be used.
- BoR – would like cooperation to gain better forecasting and stream gauging information
- FHWA – FHWA Emergency Relief Program is allocated \$100 million annually nationally. Funds are not for local lower class roads. Supplemental funding from Congress is needed. Challenges are finances, event start date, and getting permanent repairs. Permanent repairs follow the normal federal aid process.
- Corps – Interest is to get the Mainstem System ready for 2012. Challenges are to prioritize repairs, and use out of the box thinking because of the current funding situation. The Corps is currently operating under a CRA so it is difficult to predict the level of response that can be provided by the Corps.
- BIA – Focus on recovery of forested cottonwood areas. On a short term basis damage assessment is a priority. There is no coordinated effort between Tribes.

- USDA Risk Management Agency – Need to know the status of levees and when and to what level they are repaired so that crop insurance rates can be adjusted upward (for croplands where levees are broken breached) and downward when breached and breaks are repaired.

Tribes

Mr. Bob Walters of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe (CRST) indicated that the flood caused devastation on their reservation, impacting 104 acres of land. He indicated that the tributaries were impacted because water could not run into the reservoir because of siltation and that many trees were flooded. He noted that the CRST is not a casino Tribe so funding is an issue. Mr. Walters was also concerned about cultural resources along the 500 miles of Lake Oahe along their lands.

Ms. Gail Hubberling, newly elected Councilwoman for the Yankton Sioux Tribe, explained that their lands are contaminated as are their fish and wildlife that their people rely on for sustenance. She would like the Corps to do water quality testing.

Mr. Verdell Rouse of the Yankton Sioux Tribe indicated that lands were lost and that flood repair actions need to get done quickly. He also indicated the Tribe's drinking water supply infrastructure needs repair

Mr. Robert Walters of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Council requested that the Corps conduct water quality testing of their waters to determine if there is contamination.

Chairman Wilfred Keebler of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe had concerns about drinking water supply pumps, water treatment system, and irrigation pumps.

Lana Gravat, Yankton Sioux Tribe Tribal Historical Preservation Office participated by phone.

States

The representative from the State of Montana indicated that everyone cannot just look to the Corps but to what everyone can do to address floodplain issues.

The representative from the State of Wyoming indicated they are not as impacted as other states along the mainstem of the Missouri River, but that 2/3 of Wyoming drains into the Missouri River. Wyoming would like to determine if there is an appropriate role for them on the task force.

The representative from the State of North Dakota indicated that the draft USACE Annual Operating Plan does not provide additional flood storage, and wants additional releases from

Garrison Reservoir to provide additional storage. He also wants the Corps to inspect banks and repair riprap, recognized sediment at the headwaters as a problem, and indicated there are difficulties in getting through the Corps easement process to allow water to be withdrawn from the reservoirs. Developing better forecasting, warning systems, and emergency action plans were also important to North Dakota.

The State of Nebraska representative indicated flood control should always be the highest priority to avoid repeating the 2011 flood. He also indicated there is a lack of understanding of the flexibility in the manual, problems in communicating real time flood information, and that there needs to be more education of stakeholders.

The State of Missouri representative indicated that flood control should be the highest priority, that there needs to be accurate damage assessments, and that infrastructure should be quickly restored. He also indicated parties need to know what the federal cost share versus the local cost share will be.

The State of Kansas representative indicated the Kansas Department of Parks, Wildlife, and Conservation has assisted the Corps with fish and wildlife mitigation projects on the floodplain. He emphasized that repairs are needed before next year, that there needs to be a better use of forecasting information and information on projected flows, and that there needs to be communication about what happened this year and what is possible. He also indicated the importance of obtaining necessary funding for repairs.

The State of Iowa representative supported interagency working groups. He indicated that in Iowa 192 miles of roads were flooded, and that transportation (particularly because of the closure of I-29) was impacted greatly. He indicated some of the challenges are to prepare for 2012, the lack of inventory for non-federal levees, lack of funding, and public expectations. Impacts to the City of Council Bluffs including the need to repair city infrastructure and 28.5 miles of levee were also raised.

The representative from South Dakota indicated they wanted to ensure that flooding does not happen again, that there should be better information regarding plains and mountain snowpack and runoff, the Corps models underestimate runoff, and that there is a need to know more about soil conditions

Participants

Mr. Ken Reeder, a Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC) member representing lower river recreation indicated it was time to invest in humans for a while so that in the future we can support fish and wildlife recovery. Mr. Reeder also held up the USACE Missouri River Recovery Program, “Related Efforts and Programs” chart and indicated he could not even understand it or explain it to his constituents.

Mr. Tom Waters, President of the Missouri Levee and Drainage District Association indicated he believed the next meeting should be held in Missouri in Holt or Atchison County since those counties were extremely affected by the flood. He stated that the Corps should stop going down the path of the Galloway Report and indicated that his farm and others in the lower basin are not laboratories and they are not guinea pigs for Missouri River fish and wildlife recovery.

Mr. Bill Lay, a farmer in Missouri and MRRIC member stated there is a need to study what facilities and storage are necessary to provide adequate flood protection and that these studies should be done in light of global warming.

Mr. Clint Miller of the Conservation Fund stated their organization promotes economic development and conservation. He indicated that the Conservation Fund can do conservation easements to assist in layer funding. He also pointed out that the relationship between his organization and the Corps is ad hoc and that formal policies and procedures between the Corps and the Conservation Fund do not exist.

Jason Skold, representing The Nature Conservancy indicated their organization seeks appropriate response to individuals and communities at risk. He pointed out that the channel capacity in the Nebraska City reach has been reduced such that there are problems even at normal releases, let alone during high releases. He referenced a 1930-2010 graph depicting the channel capacity loss.

Mr. Dave Sieck, co-chair of the MRRIC and a farmer who lives south of Council Bluffs, IA discussed the devastation of the flood including the displacement of 432 people in Iowa, and the impacts to infrastructure. He stated that people want the infrastructure fixed and to get back into their farms and businesses, and that they don't want their levees three feet lower. He recommended that funding be taken from recovery to fix levees and that it is not a time to take advantage of willing sellers.

Mr. Robert Vince indicated that there needs to be creative ways to protect prime farmlands along the Missouri River, maintain lands in private ownership, and do some fish and wildlife recovery.

Mr. Ron Blakely of the Missouri Levee and Drainage District Association indicated that there are siltation problems at mile 133 which are impacting navigation. He urged the Corps to consider the "big" things including river management coordination, flood warning, better forecasting, siltation behind the dams and in the channel, funding from various sources and cost share arrangements, property rights, and better communication.

Mr. Russ Baker of the Omaha Public Power District indicated he was there to support water supply for nuclear and thermal power generation.