

Federal Interagency Floodplain Management Task Force Listening Session Report

Floodplain Management Association Annual Conference

5 November 2010 9:00 am-12:30 pm

The US Army Corps of Engineers conducted a listening session for the Federal Interagency Floodplain Management Task Force at the Floodplain Management Association (FMA) Annual Conference on 5 November 2010. The audience of 25 people consisted primarily of members of FMA from California, Nevada, and Hawaii, as well as a few invited guests. The members of FMA were primarily engineers and employees of private consulting companies, state and local government agencies, and USACE District offices.

The primary messages delivered to the Task Force through this listening session include:

- More representative involvement in the Task Force is needed.
 - A better mechanism for involvement from stakeholders, including state and local government, the private sector, and NGOs, would be helpful.
 - The National Committee on Levee Safety (NCLS) was cited as an example of a group with representative membership from all stakeholders.
 - It was considered especially important to involve state and local government stakeholders because land use decisions, which impact flood risk, are made at the local level.
 - The roles that different levels of government and other stakeholders have to play were emphasized.
- The concepts of a Task Force vision and a National vision were also discussed.
 - The difficulty of creating an outcome vision for the Task Force because each individual agency within the Task Force already has a vision was emphasized.
 - It was also suggested that some sort of process guidance from the Task Force might be more helpful as a vision statement.
 - A process vision such as this should stress the importance of collaboration at all levels.
 - The difference between a Federal vision and a National vision was strongly stressed.
 - It was suggested that a National vision could be helpful; however, it was emphasized that any such vision would need to be flexible enough to account for regional and local differences.
 - Throughout the country, there are differences in physical and geological conditions, economic conditions, local regulations, and goals and priorities, that need to be able to fit into a National vision.

- Another potential concern relating to a National vision is that there are such a wide variety of possible solutions available, ranging from structural to nonstructural, and it would not be wise for a National vision to decrease this range of possible solutions.
- Because water does not typically follow political boundaries, it was suggested that the most useful help from the Task Force could be in reducing political conflicts related to water.
- It was concluded that although the Work Plan document indicated that it contained a vision for the Task Force, there was actually no vision statement contained within it.
- The activities suggested in the Task Force Draft Work Plan were reviewed, and a number of comments were made.
 - The term floodplain should be replaced with flood risk to be more comprehensive.
 - Activities 7 and 9 (Conducting public listening sessions on the scope, focus areas, and activities of the Task Force, and Serving as a forum for inter-agency problem solving and alignment, respectively) were identified as activities that should be given high priority.
 - It was particularly suggested that the Task Force should serve as a problem-solving body.
 - The suggested purpose of the Task Force as a problem-solving body would be to identify problem policies within the Federal government and work to resolve them.
 - It was also suggested that another group to include in coordinating with other Federal interagency efforts as directed by Activity 10 would be the Interagency Dam Safety Group.
- A number of concepts were suggested as being missing from the Work Plan.
 - The concepts of social and environmental justice were not found to be included anywhere in the Work Plan.
 - The concept of public safety was also observed to be missing.
 - A goal to seek input from local and state stakeholders was suggested.
 - A shift in purpose from policy-oriented to a problem-solving orientation was suggested.
 - The formation of an Advisory Committee or Technical Committee was suggested to broaden the membership of the Task Force and provide more stakeholder feedback.
 - Again, the organization of the NCLS was cited as an example the Task Force could follow.
- A number of suggestions were also provided to the Task Force as general advice.
 - The carrot and stick approach commonly used by the Federal government does not always lead to the best solutions, and may be leading to missed opportunities.

- The individual agencies need to compromise on their goals in order to make progress.
- As a starting point, the Task Force should identify competing interests and gaps, and then determine what the solution should look like and how to get to that solution.
- The Task Force does not necessarily need to establish new policy, it may be enough just to figure out how best to implement the policy that already exists.
- A regional approach should be adopted to determine what is best for floodplains, recognizing the regional variations that exist.
- The problem of trying to develop a project that can meet all of the requirements of each of the individual agencies was recognized. It was suggested that the Task Force should serve as a one-stop shop to help reduce this difficulty in project design.
- While the NCLS was repeatedly cited as an example the Task Force could look to in organization, the Community Ratings System was also suggested as a well-organized program that the Task Force should consider.
- It was also acknowledged that, while the Task Force needs to reach down to the local communities, there also needs to be a mechanism for the local communities to reach up to the Task Force, to share in the responsibility for ensuring communication between the different levels of government.
- A number of general concerns and comments were also provided.
 - The Federal government's approach to solving problems was classified as too binary. It was suggested that more nuanced solutions would better serve the country.
 - The concept of watershed-level planning and analyses was brought up as the direction in which most of the country is moving. It is important to consider not just the floodplain, but the entire contributing area of the watershed.
 - Some confusion was expressed over how all of the Federal interagency groups interact and fit together.
 - There was also concern expressed that the Task Force goals do not align well with the goals of the stakeholders
 - It was pointed out that the number one issue to the country right now, including politicians and private citizens, is the economy. The Task Force must be careful not to appear as a body to be limiting economic development in communities, or they will not be able to get buy-in from local stakeholders.