

**Finding of No Significant Impact
for
Voluntary Floodplain Buyout
Elkhorn Creek/Tug Fork River Watershed
McDowell County, West Virginia**

Introduction

The Elkhorn Creek/Tug Fork River Voluntary Floodplain Buyout Watershed Project is a federally assisted action authorized for planning under Public Law 83-566, the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, and by the Small Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments of 2000 (Section 313 of Public Law 106-472). This act authorizes the Natural Resources Conservation Service to provide technical and financial assistance to local project sponsors. Local sponsors of the Elkhorn Creek/Tug Fork River project are the McDowell County Commission and the Southern Conservation District. The cooperating agency is the U.S Army Corps of Engineers, Huntington District.

An environmental assessment was undertaken in conjunction with the development of the watershed plan – environmental assessment (Watershed Plan-EA). This assessment was conducted in consultation with local, state and Federal agencies as well as with interested organizations and individuals. Data developed during the assessment are available for public review at the following location.

U.S Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
1550 Earl Core Road, Suite 200
Morgantown, WV 26505
(304)-284-7540

Recommended Action

The recommended action is a voluntary floodplain buyout of approximately 30 residences in priority flood areas. As each participating property is identified, the impacts and benefits of each property will undergo site-specific review in an Environmental Evaluation, Form CPA-52, tiered to the Watershed Plan-EA. Properties in the program will be demolished, and the floodplain will be returned to natural floodplain conditions. In-ground infrastructure, such as septic systems, will be removed or stabilized as appropriate.

Effects of Recommended Action

The recommended action will:

- Reduce flood damages in chronically flooded areas
- Reduce the potential for loss of life
- Improve the economic and social wellbeing of participants
- Reduce floatable debris from flooding
- Support natural floodplain conditions

- Protect water quality.

Alternatives

Several alternatives were considered but were eliminated from the study. This includes dams, floodwalls, dikes, channel work, and other nonstructural measures besides the voluntary floodplain buyout. Due to costs, environmental impacts, effectiveness, and other factors associated with these alternatives they did not advance to a detailed study.

Two alternatives considered and evaluated in detail are:

1. No Action – No action will be taken to address flooding.
2. Voluntary Floodplain Buyout – Approximately 30 of the most vulnerable houses will be purchased from voluntary participants. Structures will be removed from the floodplain.

Consultation and Public Participation

An environmental scoping meeting was held at Twin Falls State Park on October 16, 2018. The meeting was advertised in local newspapers and on the NRCS website. Invitational letters were mailed to federal, state, and local agencies and known stakeholders. The purpose of the meeting was to explain the flooding in the watershed and describe the alternatives evaluated in the planning process. This meeting also provided a forum to solicit input from participants to avoid, minimize or mitigate environmental and/or social impacts that may result from any alternatives.

During the Draft Watershed Plan – Environmental Assessment public comment period, no comments were received from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Additional consultation may occur as the project is implemented.

The WV Division of Culture and History provided a concurrence letter regarding the tiered NEPA approach. A programmatic agreement between WV NRCS and the WV State Historic Preservation Office is included in the Final Watershed Plan – Environmental Assessment.

The U.S Army Corp of Engineers, Huntington District was requested to be a cooperating agency in the preparation of the Environmental Assessment. The Memorandum of Understanding and their comment letter is included in the Final Plan – Environmental Assessment.

No controversial issues were identified during the public comment period.

Conclusion

Based on the environmental assessment summarized above, I find the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of human environment. I have determined an environmental impact statement for the Elkhorn Creek/Tug Fork River Watershed is not required.