



Photo Credit: FEMA Tom Hansen

West Virginia 2024 Risk Reduction Consultation

Summary Report

May 2024



FEMA

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Overview

On April 4, 2024, the West Virginia Emergency Management Division (WVEMD) and FEMA Region 3 hosted the West Virginia 2024 Risk Reduction Consultation (RRC). The yearly meeting brings together federal, state, and local partners to:

- Share progress on efforts to reduce risk.
- Find areas where they can work together.
- Discuss ways to advance mitigation solutions equitably.

The meeting was held in-person at the WVEMD Auditorium in Charleston, West Virginia.

Attendees are encouraged to discuss the projects and ideas in this summary report. They may also report on them at the next consultation (if not before).

Attendees

Name	Organization
Matthew Blackwood	WVEMD
Ginger Barnett	WVEMD
Tim Keaton	WVEMD
Ruthie Maniscalchi	WVEMD
Dale Hatfield	WVEMD
Gabriel Reed	WVEMD
Kaley Fittro	WVEMD
Cory Clay	WVEMD
Julie Sears	WVEMD
Ehrin Starcher	WVEMD
Amberlea Perks	WVEMD
Stephanie Carte	WVEMD
Austin Bayless	WVEMD
Andy Teter	WVEMD
Jason Means	WVEMD
Marilyn Lynch	WVEMD
Vivian Wood	WVEMD

Name	Organization
Tammy Sneed	WVEMD
Jonathan Rodriguez	WVEMD
Xzavier Morgan	WVEMD
William Kuhn	FEMA Region 3
Thomas Hansen	FEMA Region 3
Betsy Ranson	FEMA Region 3
Meesh Zucker	FEMA Region 3
Jason Metzger	FEMA Region 3
Hunter Roberts	FEMA Region 3
Thomas Wilson	FEMA Region 3
Dakota Morris	FEMA Region 3
Bobby Cobelli	FEMA Region 3
Brian Farkas	FEMA Region 3
James Young	FEMA Region 3
Andreas Vitone	FEMA Region 3
Ben Accurti	FEMA Region 3
Jason Roberts	Region 1 Regional Planning and Development Council (RPDC)
Charlotte Riestenberg	Region 2 RPDC
Tyler Ferrell	Region 3 RPDC
Lesley Taylor	Region 4 RPDC
John Tuggle	Region 4 RPDC
Jeremy Jones	West Virginia Division of Forestry
Brandon Moore	West Virginia Division of Highways
Ed Martin	West Virginia State Resiliency Office (SRO)
Robert Martin	West Virginia SRO
Kurt Donaldson	West Virginia University Geographic Information System (GIS) Technical Center
Tammy Tincher	Greenbrier County Commission
Kelly Banton	Greenbrier County Commission

Name	Organization
Terri Jo Bennett	Upshur County
Eric Duff	Town of Alderson
Ben Love	City of Oak Hill
Joe Trimboli	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
George Eidel	Doddridge County
Chet Oldfield	City of Wheeling
Sammie Smith	<i>Resilience Action Partners</i>
Tiffany Ledesma	<i>Resilience Action Partners</i>
Gewel Richardson	<i>Resilience Action Partners</i>

Presentations and Discussions

Opening Remarks

Tiffany Ledesma (*Resilience Action Partners*) kicked off the consultation and explained its purpose.

Tom Wilson, the branch chief of FEMA Region 3's Technical Services Branch, opened the meeting by thanking the attendees for being there. He noted the group efforts between FEMA and West Virginia in organizing the event; he thanked Gabe Reed of WVEMD for his efforts. The RRC highlights the value of aligning risk reduction and mitigation goals among FEMA, state, and other partners. Tom noted recent accomplishments, including progress in local hazard mitigation plans (HMPs), workshops and training sessions, Flood Resilience Week, the Flood Symposium, and grants awarded through FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and Congressional Directed Spending. He stressed the value of the joint effort to develop the agenda. He said he looked forward to the discussions and presentations throughout the day.

West Virginia State Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Gabe Reed, the State Hazard Mitigation Officer at WVEMD, gave an update on the West Virginia State Hazard Mitigation Plan. The plan aims to reduce risks from natural hazards and guide decision makers to mitigate their effects. Gabe outlined the planning process, which involved several agencies. The process highlighted flooding and mudslides as the top risks. He noted the value of the WV Flood Tool. Challenges include expired plans and the impact of the opioid epidemic on population trends. Mitigation strategy goals include infrastructure protection, program alignment, community education, and local support. The plan is made up of 20 high-priority mitigation actions across four categories: State and Local Plans and Regulations, Structure and Infrastructure Projects, Natural Systems Protection, and Education and Awareness Programs. Examples of high-priority actions include educating officials on dam failure hazards, building relationships with the owners of critical facilities, and coordinating dam safety programs.

2024 Risk Spotlight Panel

Bill Kuhn, Community Planner on the West Virginia FEMA Integration Team (WVFIT), led the Risk Spotlight Panel. This panel featured Ehrin Starcher from WVEMD Individual Assistance, Kurt Donaldson from the WVU GIS Tech Center, and Jeremy Jones, Director of the West Virginia Division of Forestry. Bill noted the state's diverse challenges in 2023, including flooding, wildfires, and landslides. The panelists addressed several topics:

1. Evolving risk identification methods and insights gained from recent years.
2. Gathering post-event feedback.
3. Opportunities for collaboration on mitigation planning to reduce impacts statewide.

Ehrin highlighted the major issue of flooding in West Virginia, noting that residents need a better understanding of flood insurance and how they can afford it. Jeremy talked about the human-caused nature of many wildfires. He stressed the value of wildfire protection measures. Kurt outlined how technological tools like mapping have advanced how we pinpoint risks.

The panelists also addressed gaps in flood insurance education and access. They stressed the need for improved connectivity, especially in rural areas. They discussed FEMA's efforts to address these issues through partnerships and data sharing. Jeremy offered statistics on wildfires in 2023 and ongoing efforts to secure assistance for affected communities. Regarding risk prevention, Ehrin focused on education about the WV Floodplain Tool and carrying out emergency housing plans. Jeremy is working on training projects across state agencies and promoting the state risk index tool.

The audience asked questions about the interconnectedness of flooding, wildfires, and mudslides. They wanted a sense of their impacts and available data on mudslides; Kurt directed attendees to review the WV Landslide Tool as part of the WV Flood Tool.



Photo Credit: FEMA Philip Maramba, Photographer

Federal Flood Risk Management Standard

Bobby Cobelli, Floodplain Management section supervisor for state support at FEMA Region 3, gave an in-depth presentation on the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard (FFRMS). He talked about the impact of Executive Order (E.O.) 11988 on Floodplain Management. He laid out its eight-step process to review routine aspects of Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) and Public Assistance (PA) project funding, as well as Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) reviews spanning over 45 years. Bobby stressed the value of compliance with the eight-step process and E.O. 11988. He noted that while EHP mainly addresses these aspects, Floodplain Management can provide subject matter expertise.

The discussion extended to Executive Order 13690, which reinstated the FFRMS in 2015. Bobby talked about how it mandates that federal agencies apply higher elevation standards to specific federal actions, especially in flood-prone areas. Bobby stressed that those agencies should consider natural systems and nature-based approaches as they develop projects. He underscored what the FFRMS means for local, state, and federal partners. Coordinated efforts will be required to fund HMA and PA projects following Stafford Act events.

Discussing E.O. 11988 and the FFRMS cast light on the details of the latter. In particular, the discussion turned to how the FFRMS applies to projects already in progress with varying funding sources. Bobby talked about partial implementation policies for HMA and PA. This entailed laying out elevation standards for critical and non-critical actions and defining critical actions based on their vulnerability to flooding.

The presentation ended with insights into the future pathway of the FFRMS. This includes developing procedures to address how flood hazards can change (i.e., non-stationarity) and using alternative methods to define hazard areas. Bobby called for ongoing policy and guidance development, especially incorporating the Climate-Informed Science Approach and using data and tools beyond Flood Insurance Rate Maps.

Bobby illustrated new mapping methods to determine hazard areas based on elevation standards. They underscored the need to adapt to these changes. Bobby stressed that federally funded actions must align with shifting policies and techniques to foster resilience against future flood risks.



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FMA Swift Current

Gabe Reed gave an overview of the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program; he covered its legislative authorities and program highlights. FMA aims to reduce flood risk for buildings insured under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The program is nationally competitive and has been given \$175 million each year since 2016. It will receive a further \$3.5 billion over five years through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021.

Gabe discussed the Innovation in Action initiative. He focused on Hurricane Ida recovery efforts and how FEMA aims to better align funding delivery with disaster survivor needs. He emphasized Swift Current's goals of expediting funding, creating equitable outcomes, and fostering community resilience.

The Swift Current effort targets NFIP policyholders. It has \$300 million available to mitigate repetitively flooded or substantially damaged properties. Funding is available right after a flood disaster to break the cycle of repetitive flood damage. Subapplicants must meet eligibility criteria. These include having a current NFIP insurance policy and a history of repetitive or substantial flood damage.

West Virginia has received a \$10 million allotment for Swift Current; the state deadline for subapplicants was May 3, 2024. Eligible project types include property acquisition, structure elevation, and mitigation reconstruction. People can apply through the WVEMD website.

Leveraging Regional Planning and Development Councils (RPDCs) in Community Outreach

During the session, Tom Hansen discussed the concept of Plan Implementation and Grant Development Workshops (PIGDs). He discussed a new approach to contacting Planning and Development Councils (PDCs) instead of requiring their travel for engagement and technical assistance. Upcoming PIGD roadshow visits are scheduled for Region 5 on May 23 and Region 6 on July 10. Dr. Jason Means, WVEMD Grant Manager for Public Assistance, then took the floor, inviting RPDCs to join the discussion. He addressed the challenges these councils face, especially in understanding community dynamics. One significant difficulty is navigating resources, where using resources poses a challenge.

RPDC representatives discussed the 25%-match requirement hurdle for PA grant programs. They emphasized the value of building pre-disaster relationships. Another obstacle is the turnover of local employees and the subsequent lack of trust between state and federal agencies and local communities. Attendees lauded RPDCs for bridging this trust gap; they serve as trusted liaisons to acquire community resources and information. It was stressed that FEMA should communicate in plain language to make joint efforts work better. Dr. Means emphasized the value of building relationships to prevent contractors from taking advantage of communities. He pushed for joint grant applications to lead to the best outcomes.



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RPDC Breakout

Bill Kuhn, Community Planner at WVFIT, led the RPDC Breakout session. Attendees were split into four groups to conduct the BERT Analysis: Barriers, Engagement, Risks, and Tools. Each group addressed specific questions relevant to their community perspective. Here are the takeaways from each group.

Barriers Group Questions:

- What are the top two hurdles to addressing your risks?
 - The top hurdles are knowledge of the process and cost sharing.
- Any hesitancy to use an HM grant program?
 - There are concerns about using hazard mitigation grant programs due to uncertainty about eligibility and policy compliance.
- How are you addressing challenges to match funds?
 - Address challenges by funding State Resiliency Office (SRO) and providing in-kind services to match funds.

Engagement Group Questions:

- Who are you not engaging in your community? Why?
 - Elderly communities are not adequately engaged due to a lack of media outlets targeting them.
- Who is generating the most ideas towards mitigation actions in your community?
 - Actively involved participants are floodplain managers, mayors, and residents in mitigation actions.
- Does your community have a comprehensive plan? Are they participating?
 - Some communities have comprehensive plans and warrant more integration in local plans.
- How is your collaboration with state and federal entities?
 - Communities felt they were working well with state and federal entities.

Risks Group Questions:

- How are you prioritizing risks?
 - Emergency managers assess risks and implement proactive strategies to mitigate potential threats. Room for more public involvement.
- Are mitigation actions (not just the mitigation strategy) identified in your risk assessment?
 - Incorporating risk assessments and a benefit-cost analysis into plans is crucial to mitigation actions when identifying risk assessments.
- How often do you use the HMP?
 - Utilization of HMPs depends on the staff member.

Tools Group Questions:

- What kind of Technical Assistance could you use?
 - Technical assistance tools, such as the WV Flood Tool, GIS, and the USACE resources to help with project identification.
- What funding are you applying for? Upcoming NOFOs?
 - Exploring various funding opportunities, such as Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities, FEMA FMA / SWIFT Current and Economic Development Administration grants.
- What kind of data would you like to have?
 - Accessing in-depth eligibility lists, loss data, and flood tools for comprehensive risk assessment would be helpful.

Overall, attendees engaged in a great deal of collaboration and appreciated the exercise.



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Mitigation Through Collaboration Across Stakeholder Groups

During his presentation, Gabe Reed emphasized the need for group efforts among stakeholder groups to implement mitigation strategies. He highlighted the value of working closely with the SRO to engage stakeholders, pushing for cost-sharing initiatives that do not impose federal requirements. The main goal is to foster joint efforts that lead to the best community outcomes. Gabe prompted the audience to think of ways WVEMD and FEMA could enhance the quality of grant applications. Suggestions included encouraging communities to forge partnerships with state and federal agencies beyond WVEMD and FEMA. There was also a call to comprehend the role of data in decision-making processes. Agencies must address challenges such as population decline, land acquisition, and demolition. They must be able to connect these insights.

State Resiliency Office Update

Director Bob Martin and Deputy Director Ed Martin of the SRO led a session to discuss the SRO. They began with an overview of critical legislative directives, including WV Code §29-31: 2023 and Senate Bill 677. These highlight the focus of the SRO on disaster recovery. They include establishing the Disaster Recovery Trust Fund and the Flood Resiliency Trust Fund and qualifications for fund disbursement. Bob and Ed highlighted the roles and responsibilities of the SRO. These include leading coordination efforts, planning, legislative recommendations, reporting requirements, and stakeholder communication.

The discussion also covered the drafting of the 2024 Flood Resiliency Plan. This involved assessing the status of goals, objectives, and recommendations outlined in the 2004 plan. Feedback was gathered from relevant agencies, federal entities, and nongovernmental organizations, including through the 2024 West Virginia Flood Symposium and the WV Flood Resiliency Framework (WVFRF) creation. The flood survey closes on June 1, 2024. The consensus affirmed the relevance of the six goals laid out in the 2004 plan. This paved the way for ongoing review and updates facilitated through symposiums and digital resources to boost accessibility and track progress.

Resource Sharing

- [West Virginia Division of Forestry's Daily Fire Report](#)
- Online Tools for Risk Identification
 - [WV Flood Tool](#)
 - [WV Property Viewer](#)
 - [WV Landslide Tool](#)
- [Risk Product Index](#)
- [Hazard Planning Guides Using WV Risk Assessment Data](#)
- [Statewide Building-Level Risk Assessment \(BLRA\) GIS File](#)
- Statewide BLRA Data and Supporting Documents.
 - 98,000 structures inventoried statewide in the 1%-annual-chance effective and advisory floodplains
 - [PDC Regions](#)
- Presentation: Flood Risk Assessment Presentation (2022)
 - [PDF](#)
- [Risk MAP View](#) of WV Flood Tool
 - Shows building inventory for future map conditions; orange symbols represent areas mapped in a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA); yellow symbols represent areas mapped out of an SFHA
- [WV Flood Tool Resources](#)
- [WV Flood Resiliency Framework](#)

Appendix A: West Virginia 2024 RRC Event Agenda

West Virginia 2024 Risk Reduction Consultation (RRC) Agenda

Thursday, April 4, 2024 | 8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

8:30 a.m. Welcome

Tiffany Ledesma, *Communications and Community Engagement Lead, Resilience Action Partners*

8:35 a.m. Opening Remarks

Tom Wilson, *Technical Services Branch Chief, FEMA Region 3*

Dr. Matthew Blackwood, *Deputy Director, West Virginia Emergency Management Division (WVEMD)*

Bill Kuhn, *Community Planner, West Virginia FEMA Integration Team (WV FIT), FEMA Region 3*

Gabe Reed, *State Hazard Mitigation Officer, WVEMD*

Vivian Wood, *Hazard Mitigation Community Planner, WVEMD*

9:00 a.m. West Virginia State Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Gabe Reed, *State Hazard Mitigation Officer, WVEMD*

9:30 a.m. 2024 Risk Spotlight Panel

Kurt Donaldson, *GISP, Senior Project Manager, West Virginia University*

Jeremy Jones, *State Forester, Director, West Virginia Division of Forestry*

Ehrin Starcher, *Individual Assistance Coordinator, WVEMD*

10:10 a.m. 15-Minute Break

10:25 a.m. Federal Flood Risk Management Standard

Bobby Cobelli, *Floodplain Management Section Supervisor: State Support, FEMA Region 3*

10:45 a.m. FMA Swift Current

Gabe Reed, *State Hazard Mitigation Officer, WVEMD*

11:15 a.m. Leveraging Regional Planning and Development Councils (RPDCs) in Community Outreach

Tom Hansen, *Grants Management Specialist, FEMA Region 3*

Dr. Jason Means, *State Public Assistance Officer, WVEMD*



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11:35 a.m. RPDC Breakout

Bill Kuhn, *Community Planner, WV FIT, FEMA Region 3*

12:15 p.m. Lunch

**Note lunch is provided. **

1:00 p.m. Mitigation Through Collaboration Across Stakeholder Groups

Gabe Reed, *State Hazard Mitigation Officer, WVEMD*

1:30 p.m. State Resilience Office Update

Bob Martin, *Director, State Resilience Office*

Ed Martin, *Deputy Director, State Resilience Office*

2:00 p.m. Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Tiffany Ledesma, *Resilience Action Partners*

Tom Wilson, *Technical Services Branch Chief, FEMA Region 3*

Dr. Matthew Blackwood, *Deputy Director, West Virginia Emergency Management Division (WVEMD)*

Gabe Reed, *State Hazard Mitigation Officer, WVEMD*

2:15 p.m. Post-Event Survey and Story of Resilience Video

2:30 p.m. End



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