

## **RX DISCOVERY 2011: Cordova, Floodplain Administrator Interview**

*Meeting Notes*

**February 1, 2011, 12:00 pm MT, interview via conference call**

**Attendees:** Samantha Greenwood, FPA, City of Cordova  
Matthew Johnson, STARR Discovery NFIP Specialist  
Bridget Belliveau, STARR Discovery GIS Coordinator  
James Patanio, STARR Discovery Coastal Specialist

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*PREFACE: Sam Greenwood is the new floodplain administrator for the City of Cordova, a position she has held for four months. Although she is new to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and she has received some recent training, an information gap exists. Therefore, the Discovery meeting should open with a solid introduction explaining the NFIP program and the implications that a revised mapping effort will have on the community.*

***Hi Sam - thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. As you already know, FEMA's new Discovery process involves learning as much as possible about selected watersheds so that we can help the local officials identify the best projects for FEMA funding and implementation. Our goal with the interviews is to confirm the data we've collected so far with you, to find out other information about your community's flood-related issues, and to answer any questions you have about Discovery as best as we can.***

***Did you have a chance to look over the Fact Sheet, map, and contacts list we sent? How did the data look to you?***

Population numbers seem a little high, 2100 was the last census. As far as economics goes, she felt the number one industry will be fishing and then government (US Forest Service (USFS)).

***As you see on the Fact Sheet, we found that you have been involved in several presidentially-declared disasters. Does your community have any flooding-related educational efforts or special programs to support folks who need flooding-related information or support?***

The former flood plain administrator accumulated pamphlets that are now available to Sam. She is not sure if there are community talks or meetings held for education and outreach. The citizens are talked to at the city planning level.

***One indicator that an area may need a new study is a significant number of Letters of Map Amendment (LOMAs) along a flooding source. We found that you had five Letters of Map Change (LOMCs) in the community - do you know if they were clumped together at all?***

There are three Letters of Map Revision (LOMRs) she is aware of. She will send a map that identifies the locations. A recent LOMA removed a specific lot from the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) with survey information.

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***We also saw that there were two mitigation projects. [Acquisition/relocation of private structures - riverine ~ \$738,920, Earthquake in 2002: 205.4: Non Structural Retrofitting/Rehabilitating Public Structures - Seismic; Anchor lights in Cooper River School district buildings ~ \$17,350, and that the community contributed 25%. Are these the only mitigation projects that you know of? Using the reference map we sent, can you point out where these mitigations occurred?***

Near mile 5 of the Copper River Road, adjacent to Eyak Lake, the area experienced avalanches that destroyed several homes. At least one home was relocated as a result of that event. She indicated that she will follow up with the public works official to investigate the anchoring of lights at the school.

***Follow-up on mitigation: Are there other projects that you think are needed in your community? Where? Why? Would the community be willing to share costs for such a project? Have you worked with the State to request FEMA funds for the projects?***

Eyak River and Eyak Lake are areas of concern. In the past, an earthquake changed the elevation of the lake so a large weir was constructed to prevent the lake from draining. Ecotrust is conducting a study to determine the effects of changing the weir due to sediment accumulation in this important salmon spawning area. Sam thought the weir reconstruction may qualify as a potential mitigation project.

***I saw that there were no repetitive loss properties in the community - properties that had experienced flood problems enough to require repeat claims. Is this correct?***

Six Mile is a subdivision just downstream of Eyak Lake on Eyak River that has flooded in the past. However a SFHA has not been established for the river, so no insurance is required and no claims were filed.

***It looks like there has only been one claim made outside of the mapped floodplain. Is this correct?***

Sam indicated this claim probably occurred in the Six Mile area. Following up, this claim occurred on the coast.

***We collected levee data from the National Levee Database. From our understanding, Alaska's levee inventory has not yet been added to this database. Do you know of substantial levees or other flood control structures in the borough?***

Sam pointed out that there are a couple levee structures: The first is located on the right bank of Ibeck Creek. The intent is to prevent Ibeck Creek from entering the Eyak River near Six Mile subdivision. The other levee is located at the eastern boundary of our study area, past the airport. This levee protects the road.

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***Following -up on levees: FEMA's requirement for levees is that communities provide documentation that the levee is compliant with the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 65.10, in order for the levee to be shown on new FIRMs as providing protection from the base flood. If these levees were determined to not be compliant with the requirements, what would be the impact on the residents, for example if the area behind a levee is below the BFE and the area was remapped as a SFHA?***

The riverine environments in which these levees are located are not mapped as SFHA areas.

***We found that there are no tribal entities in the watershed, does that sound right to you?***

The Eyak Native Corporation, along with the Eyak Village, and the Chugach Native Corporation own significant land in the study area.

***We did not find any Environmentally Sensitive Areas, like wetlands, or coastal areas requiring protection. Do you know of any that we may have missed?***

The Eyak Lake and Cordova Coast are protected under the Alaska State Coastal Management Plan. The coast may also have shorebird protection. Also, the Eyak River and Eyak Lake are sensitive anadromous fish protected areas. Any development is subjected to rigorous and stringent permitting requirements from Fish and Game.

***FEMA has a database of best available topographic data and that shows Cordova does not have any LiDAR datasets. Do you know of any LiDAR data collection projects in the area?***

No LiDAR data has ever been collected. The USFS has provided 1996 black and white digital orthoquads, and with that, 100 foot elevation contours. Sam will send us contact information for the orthoquads. The USFS has flown for new imagery in 2009, but it has not yet become available to the city. The USFS and the city of Cordova have a high level of interest in obtaining LiDAR data. The potential for multi-agency cost sharing exists.

***FEMA has been documenting areas where new studies may be needed in a data system called Coordinated Needs Management Strategy (CNMS). On the map we sent to you, these mapping needs are shown in red. There is only one area highlighted on the west side of Eyak Lake. Is this consistent with your thoughts on new study needs?***

Yes. The west side of Eyak Lake is an area that floods, however a SFHA already exists there. The priority area is Eyak River, downstream of Eyak Lake. This river has flooded several times in the last 20 years, where the Six Mile subdivision is located, and impacted several residences. Some residents have taken upon themselves to elevate their homes; however this is an old subdivision with only one house built in the last 20 years. Power Creek, a tributary to Eyak Lake, is also an area with potential flood hazard but not a priority area.

***Does the community have funding that they could contribute to a new study?***

The USFS, the city, and potentially other agencies or organizations have expressed interest in obtaining LiDAR data that may offset the cost of topographic data collection efforts for a new study.

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***Are you aware of any existing studies, maybe completed by the community or developers or the DOT? IF YES, We need to have those studies in hand before the Discovery meeting. Can you send us either a pdf or hard copy?***

Sam was not aware of any flood studies but she indicated the DOT has replaced a couple bridges on the Copper River Highway. Sam also indicated that Ken at the USFS did a study in 2000 on the levee that protects the Six Mile subdivision. The Eyak Lake study is being conducted now, so documentation has not yet been published.

***As you probably know, FEMA requires a mitigation plan for any community to be eligible to receive disaster assistance (funding). Our records indicate your plan is good until 2013, does that sound correct to you?***

Yes.

***We have collected a lot of GIS data, some from the Alaska Geospatial Clearinghouse website which has helped a lot. We appreciate including more local GIS layers like transportation layers, political boundaries, land use data, parcel data, building footprints, essential facility data, inundation areas from historic flooding, coastal data. Do you have local data and are you willing to provide that to us for the Discovery meeting?***

Sam will provide links and contact information for personnel at the USFS which holds a vast collection of local GIS information. She will provide local parcel data, the locations of the avalanche hazard areas, levee locations, and the locations of the LOMC.

***Do you know of any recent transportation projects, like replaced bridges or culverts, or highway reconstruction that were in the floodplain? Many times transportation projects are not quickly reflected in the flood maps. Can you tell us the location and date?***

The Copper River highway has not changed over the 20 years Sam has lived here; it is only paved for 13 miles, and then turns gravel. The Power Creek road has seen improvements over the years. No SFHA mapping would have been impacted by these projects, however, since there are no SFHA on the Eyak River and the Lake is a still water elevation.

***Are there areas of rapid growth or development that may have affected the water runoff or areas that are close to floodplains? Were LOMRs performed as part of the development? How about other land changes, like wildfires or landslides?***

No areas of rapid growth. No wildfires due to the area receiving 180 inches of rainfall per year. Not any landslide areas known, avalanche areas were identified however.

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***As part of Discovery, FEMA wants to support local officials in educating their residents about flood risk. We would like to ask a few questions about your community's communication strategies. If new flood studies were performed for the high priority areas we discussed earlier, what is your sense of how the residents would receive the new flood study results and associated flood maps?***

The residents impacted will likely not accept the mandatory flood insurance behind the new mapping. Big government is not favorable in Alaska, in general, however some folks will appreciate the new LiDAR the mapping will bring.

***Because no two communities are alike and come in so many types and sizes, they all have unique outreach needs. We collected demographic data and found that [8% non-English speaker pop, 10% native pop, etc]. Does this seem correct to you? Have you found any particular type of outreach that works better to communicate risk to these folks?***

Yes, the non-English speakers are likely Filipinos and Mexicans that come to work the canneries. These groups of people typically do not live in the high hazard flood prone areas.

***Each community has unique opportunities and challenges for outreach due to their local floodplain management programs and the local conditions that impact that community. The community appears to have unique flooding issues. What is the current awareness level about this issue among your citizens? With FEMA's help, would you be willing to serve as a Subject Matter Expert on this topic?***

Yes. The citizens are aware of the risk and accepted it, however perhaps not aware of the severity or magnitude, since a major flood event has not taken place in the recent past. People have elevated their homes voluntarily to protect themselves, but without a specific elevation of which to build. There is very limited space to build due to large tracts of federal and state land adjacent to the community.

***We sent a list of local contacts we would like to notify about any future projects. Could you take a look and let us know:***

***a. Is the name/contact info correct?***

Sam will forward additional contacts discussed in the interview.

***b. Is any group or organization missing?***

The USFS is a major player in the community with interest in new studies. Also, the Copper River Watershed group is a non-profit organization that may have additional studies and resources to contribute to Risk MAP.

***c. Do you anticipate any concerns from anyone on the list? What would they be?***

The community is very pro development. They will want to know what this means and what will happen. Also, there are significant environmental concerns for birds and fish.

***d. Do you know any of these people personally? How often do you meet/speak with them?***

Some folks are seen on a daily basis and some are bi-monthly.

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***e. Does the Mayor/Executive's Public Affairs office have these groups on his/her mailing list?***

***f. Are there regular meetings that these stakeholder hold where a status on this project might be appropriate to add to the agenda?***

City Council meets twice a month, the planning and zoning commission meets once per month, and there are regular city staff meetings.

***g. If we provided information about the project to you/the Mayor/Executive would your community be willing to send a letter inviting the community to a meeting or providing project update(s)? (You could get Community Rating System (CRS) points for outreach.)***

Yes, Sam agreed to send a letter inviting the community to a meeting regarding the project. She can mail standard letters and bring updates to city council meetings. Also, commercials, newspaper ads, and radio announcements.

***At the end of a Risk MAP project, FEMA will provide you with new data and risk assessment tools that will help you and your residents better understand and visualize your risks. With customizable outreach tools and templates provided by FEMA, would you and/or your community be willing to take a proactive approach in educating people who live and work in your community about their risk and the steps they can take to protect themselves?***

Sure.

***Would you be willing to have a future call/meeting to discuss the community's capabilities and support resources that may be needed from FEMA?***

Yes, she is willing to have a meeting or call to discuss the community's capabilities. Some confusion was expressed as to what this question actually means without getting into specific details.

***Who else should we include on that call that has knowledge about existing community outreach? Specifically, we would discuss things like website information and email lists; mailings to citizens and key stakeholders; press releases and media briefings; public meetings; and other outreach efforts.***

Sam began expressing confusion about what exactly are the ramifications of FEMA's revamping of the existing NFIP products for Cordova. As noted earlier, she has only been the floodplain administrator for four months, and is new to the NFIP. She emphasized that community officials likely do not know their options in regards to flood mapping and the NFIP. Are there alternatives from FEMA on what is done, do they have a choice, and if FEMA revises the flood hazard information, what are those implications. She indicated that Taunnie Boothby, Planner with the State of Alaska should provide a ten minute introduction for the meeting to describe the NFIP and what that means for the city of Cordova. There seems to be an information gap between the NFIP and Cordova's floodplain management program.

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***That's about all the questions that we have. Is there anything else you think we should know or include on our map?***

***Thank you so much for spending the time to talk with us.***