

RX DISCOVERY 2011: City of Seward, Floodplain Administrator Interview

Meeting Notes

February 2, 2011, 3:00 pm MT, interview via conference call

Attendees: Donna Glenz, Floodplain Administrator (FPA), City of Seward
James Patanio, STARR Discovery Coastal Specialist
Matthew Johnson, STARR Discovery NFIP Specialist
Bridget Belliveau, STARR Discovery GIS Coordinator
James Huffines, STARR Discovery Meeting Facilitator (introduction only)
Tom Tufts, STARR Discovery Meeting Facilitator (introduction only)

Hi Donna - thanks for taking the time to talk with us today.

Introduction... We have three people on the phone with us from PBS&J

- *Matt Johnson, Water Resources Engineer; NFIP Specialist*
- *James Patanio, who is our Coastal Specialist, and*
- *Bridget Belliveau, who is our GIS/Mapping specialist.*

With that I should ask how familiar you are with Discovery and the overall goals of this process.

Donna is not familiar with the program or the process.

Discovery Background: I'm going to paraphrase a few excerpts from FEMA's guidance documents.

Discovery is the first phase of FEMA's Risk MAP program, in which FEMA seeks to learn about the unique issues in a watershed. The Region X Discovery process provides for data collection for the areas within a watershed, including meeting with local stakeholders to discuss the local issues and unique challenges communities face. Later, FEMA regional staff will identify how FEMA can support the communities through new products and processes in the Risk MAP program.

Through this process, we are trying to gather data that identifies flood risk, historical flooding information, existing flood hazard data, and mitigation activities. If a flood risk project is appropriate, then the data and information we have collected during Discovery will be used to target appropriate technical assistance for hazard mitigation planning; to determine which flood risk products will be developed; and to plan a communication strategy that leads to increased flood risk awareness in the watershed. All of these items will be incorporated into a final scope of work for the flood risk project. It is important to be aware that performing Discovery does not necessarily mean that a flood risk project will take place – rather, it is a process by which FEMA learns about the issues in a watershed.

That brings us to the purpose of our phone call today, which is simply 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. Does this all make sense to you or do you have any questions at this time?

Donna did not have any questions at this time. She indicated the area has been studied extensively and Dan Mahalak has been involved with and has knowledge of most these studies. Seward's rivers are very

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dynamic and mobile and this has caused the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) maps from 1981 to be severely inaccurate.

First I'd like to go over the contacts we have for Seward to make sure we have our contacts list up to date...

<i>Administrative Assistant</i>	<i>Dwayne</i>	<i>Atwood</i>
<i>Associate Planner</i>	<i>Donna</i>	<i>Glenz</i>
<i>Mayor</i>	<i>Willard</i>	<i>Dunham</i>
<i>City Clerk</i>	<i>Johanna</i>	<i>Kinney</i>
<i>City Manager</i>	<i>Phillip</i>	<i>Oates</i>
<i>Public Works Director</i>	<i>W.C.</i>	<i>Casey</i>

Are there any other's you think we should add to our list?

The Fire Chief, David Squires, has 25 years emergency management experience and should be invited to the Discovery meeting.

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

Donna did not receive the documents sent by email due to technical difficulties, however the information was relayed to her and she confirmed the fact sheet information.

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?

She indicated that not much development is occurring in the floodplain within city limits, with the exception of transportation infrastructure. Outside the city limits, however, residential and recreational development is occurring in the floodplain.

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

Donna was not familiar with these LOMCs. In 1998, the Borough handed floodplain management responsibilities to the city, so the LOMCs may have occurred before that time. She will attempt to find documentation for the LOMCs.

We also saw that there were several mitigation projects. [The Resurrection River flood reduction project \$309K – widening bridge opening and construction/expansion of levees, replacement of an outdated tsunami warning system, all with a local cost share of 25%. Are these the only mitigation projects that you know of?

The state highway runs through Seward. The Resurrection River mitigation project widened three bridge openings to pass large debris and reduce flood backwater, however the construction and expansion of levees was unknown. A culvert was removed on Fish Ditch to improve fish passage. Some culverts on

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Dairy Hill were upgraded to reduce runoff backwater from the hillside. The tsunami warning system was implemented by Dave Squires, Fire Chief.

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?

The Lowell Creek tunnel/aqueduct is in need of attention; however the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) oversees the flood control structure. Some potential flood mitigation activity may consist of debris removal. After every significant flow event, a massive amount of debris is deposited in the Resurrection River, Japp Creek, and Sawmill Creek.

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?

Inside the city limits, the lack of repetitive loss properties is likely correct. As mentioned earlier, there is not much development in flood prone areas inside city limits.

It looks like there have been three claims made outside of the mapped Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs). Is this correct?

That is probably correct; there are very few policies inside city limits. Donna thought there were eight policies in city limits before she was informed the fact sheet indicated 11 policies. The NFIP maps are worthless due to the volatility of the riverine environment here.

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 Seward?

There are several levees protecting infrastructure within the Seward city limits. Japp Creek has a levee with the final phase of construction to be completed this summer. There is another levee on Fourth of July Creek. Donna has forwarded her GIS specialist's contact information to obtain exact locations of all levees in Seward.

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?

There are no certified levees within the city.

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

No tribal areas in city limits.

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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?

There are wetlands on the Resurrection River delta into the bay. There are significant coastline surges when high wind and high tide events occur, an example of this transpired in December 2009. The coastal area is susceptible to erosion during these events and they are mapped as V zones.

FEMA has a database of best available topographic data and that shows LiDAR datasets. I've been told Seward has multiple LiDAR datasets, to study the sedimentation trends and it looks like our database shows the most current collected in 2009 by Aero-metric. Do you know of any other topographic data collection projects in the area?

No other topographic projects known, however the Flood Service Area coordinates topographic collection efforts and they are responsible for obtaining the multiple LiDAR datasets Seward holds.

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 an abundance of CNMS shown in Seward, most of which look to have been addressed during the Map Mod effort, except Scheffler Creek and Lowell Creek. Is this consistent with your thoughts on new study needs?

Fourth of July Creek is a high hazard riverine area that is not a mapped SFHA. There are millions of dollars of infrastructure there being protected by a substantial levee that diverts the river to one side of the alluvial fan. Lowell Creek, if the impoundment were to be released, would bring severe devastation to the City of Seward. Scheffler Creek often plugs up with debris and causes flooding problems in town. Marathon Creek (unnamed in NHD), causes problems during rain events and is mapped Zone A. This is in the Daisy Hill area where mitigation activities have occurred in the past.

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

No funds have been allocated for flood studies.

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?

The state studied the airport due to the Resurrection River migrating adjacent to the runway in 1995. The state has done work on the river here to control its migration. The airport has developed a master development plan in the past six years that likely has results from studies.

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 for the Borough expired in August 2010. Has the Borough submitted an updated plan to FEMA for review?

Seward's mitigation plan draft was approved in April 2010, as an annex to the Borough's mitigation plan. It is unknown if FEMA has yet approved this updated plan.

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We have collected a lot of GIS data, some from the Alaska Geospatial Clearinghouse and from FEMA's database. 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 that will enhance the Discovery Map. Do you have local data you can provide to us for the Discovery meeting?

Gary Greenburg is a consultant hired to manage the GIS activities for the city and has been notified to provide local GIS layers for the Discovery effort.

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 only project known is the Resurrection River bridge widening mentioned above.

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

No areas of rapid growth are occurring in Seward. There is very little "dry" land remaining for new development.

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 community is active in flood related meetings and they are aware of the high risk hazard and know where these areas are, as opposed to referencing the NFIP maps, which do not hold much validity in this community. The community welcomes the information and risk identification but do not welcome the regulation.

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 [4% non-English speaker pop, 17% 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?

The demographics seem correct. Word of mouth is very effective in this small community; however there are city council meetings and public postings that help spread the word. The local newspaper is struggling due to internet based news.

Each community has unique opportunities and challenges for outreach due to their local floodplain management programs and the local conditions that impact that community. Seward appears to have unique flooding issues, being surrounded by steep mountains and the coast, and very little remaining land available for development:. 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?

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Donna is willing to help get the word out to help protect people.

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 any group or organization missing?

The US Forest Service (USFS) is not represented on the community list. They are performing a watershed study and may have interest in Discovery and Risk MAP. Mary Benoit is the contact and was forwarded the Discovery Meeting notification.

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

The community shares a concern that new flood studies are difficult and unreliable due to the dynamic nature of the riverine environment: Before the maps and study are published, due to flooding events, they are already invalid.

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

Donna see's these folks frequently, she knows them personally, and communicates with them on a daily basis.

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

There is not a mayor's office, the mayor is part time and has another full time job.

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

City council meetings and flood board meetings occur on a regular basis.

f. 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 CRS points for outreach)

Yes, they already notify community members.

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?

This community participates in Community Rating System (CRS) and already performs these activities. They have recently undergone the annual NFIP rating for CRS.

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.

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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.

Donna handles these activities, so everyone is already on the list. For emergencies and other general topics, the city clerk is responsible.

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

Donna had no further questions or concerns.

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