



NEW YORK STATE
FLOODPLAIN AND STORMWATER MANAGERS ASSOCIATION

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December 10, 2008

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Honorable David A. Paterson
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Re: State Floodplain Management and Stormwater Management programs

Dear Governor Paterson:

The New York State Floodplain and Stormwater Managers Association (NYSFSMA) would like to remind you that flooding and drainage concerns are public safety issues. NYSFSMA is a statewide professional organization dedicated to reducing loss of life and property damage resulting from floods. Our members work in various capacities to manage risks associated with drainage and flooding. State personnel within the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) are critical partners in successful implementation of programs that protect the citizens of New York from flood damage. In light of the current budget discussions, we urge you to place high priority on securing funding to support adequate staffing of the floodplain and stormwater management programs.

The importance of flooding and the urgent need for enhanced management of flood risks was highlighted at the DEC Commissioner's Flood Summit in October. Flooding affects all parts of New York, causing millions of dollars in damage each year. In addition to the direct damages to flooded properties, communities experience significant economic disruption following flood events. Of even greater concern are the lives lost to flooding.

Effective management of new and existing development within flood risk areas is necessary to prevent escalating flood damage and the associated safety concerns. Although municipal governments are responsible for managing development within their floodplains, the Floodplain Management Program of DEC provides invaluable support in the form of floodplain mapping, training, technical support, public outreach, and other assistance. When flood damage occurs, DEC support helps to ensure that rebuilding occurs in a manner that is protected from future flood damage. About 40% of the staff positions in DEC's Floodplain Management Section are currently unfilled. These staff shortages are severely limiting the ability of the State to provide outreach, training, and other assistance to local governments and the public. It would also cripple the ability to respond to a major flood event. Full staffing of the Floodplain Management Program would have significant benefits in the prevention of future flood losses for New York residents and businesses.

Another critical technique for reducing future flood damages is appropriate management of drainage from new and existing development. Drainage problems escalate natural flood hazards, resulting in additional damage to roads, ponding in developed areas, destabilization of stream systems, and increased peak flows in streams and rivers. The State promotes improved stormwater management through the SPDES permit program, training, and technical assistance. Unfortunately, four regional Stormwater Specialist positions are slated for termination due to funding shortages. This staff has been instrumental in providing training, technical support, and enforcement for the stormwater management program. We thus urge you to find a means to retain these positions.

We live in a time of increasing flood risks due to the impacts of development and changing weather patterns. It would be shortsighted to reduce the State's support for floodplain and stormwater management programs at this time. Although we recognize the severity of the budget issues facing New York, we urge your support for full staffing of these programs. If I can provide additional information or assistance, please contact me at 607-737-5271 or jthigpen@co.chemung.ny.us. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janet Thigpen".

Janet Thigpen
Chair

Cc: DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis
NYS Legislators
NYSFSMA Board of Directors