

“Cover the Border” Hazard Mitigation Plan Project Rio Grande Border

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INTRODUCTION

Texas A&M International University (TAMIU), in partnership with the Rio Grande Institute (RGI), is sponsoring the development of a comprehensive Hazard Mitigation Plan for the cities and counties in a ten-county area. The planning area includes: Starr, Jim Hogg, Webb, Duval, Brooks, McMullen, Terrell, Pecos, Reeves and Kenedy Counties and their incorporated cities.

This effort is funded by a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Funding will be used to provide technical support by the TAMIU team to local jurisdictions in the development of the plan.

The purpose of this effort is to develop a comprehensive “*Cover the Border*” Hazard Mitigation Plan that meets State and Federal requirements. The Plan will help localities maintain their eligibility for certain future Federal funding, including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. A FEMA-approved Mitigation Plan is required for participation in the Emergency Management Performance Grant Program and in projects under the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program.

THE ALL-HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

The product of this planning process will be a comprehensive, all-hazard Hazard Mitigation Plan for the ten-county region. The plan will outline actions designed to reduce the impact of a full range of natural and human-caused hazards facing the Rio Grande border. These include natural hazards such as floods, drought, tornadoes, high winds, hurricanes, wildland fires, drought, hail and extreme heat; and human-caused hazards such as fuel pipeline accidents, hazardous materials incidents and terrorism.

A multi-jurisdictional planning approach will be utilized. With multiple jurisdictions working together on common risks, the proposed planning process will be more efficient, eliminating the need for each local jurisdiction to prepare its own separate plan document. Further, this approach will provide a common basis for evaluating the region’s vulnerabilities and evaluating future policies and projects.

While a single, regional plan will be developed, **each local jurisdiction will have its own separate “action plan” as part of the overall border plan.** Each local jurisdiction’s plan must be reviewed and adopted by its governing body, such as City Council or Commissioners’ Court.

PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT

TAMIU will provide technical support to participating jurisdictions through a consultant team headed by

H2O Partners, a Texas-based firm. H2O Partners will work PBS&J, a national engineering company, to provide the best possible support to TAMIU and its participating jurisdictions.

The entire plan will comply with the State of Texas Planning Standards for Mitigation Action Plans (Annex P, items P-29 through P-52) issued by the Texas State Division of Emergency Management in the Office of the Governor. It will also comply with Section 201, 44 Code of Federal Regulations. The planning process will involve the steps listed below:

ASSESSMENT OF PREVIOUS MITIGATION ACTIONS

A questionnaire will be provided to local jurisdictions during the two-hour Kick-Off Workshop. The Kick-Off Workshop is designed for local officials to learn about the planning process and ensure that all participants understand their roles and responsibilities. Using a questionnaire, the TAMIU project team will collect information about mitigation actions already underway in the areas of planning, land use, floodplain management, and fire protection. This questionnaire will help the project team understand each jurisdiction and provide information required for the plan. It will also help guide the identification of hazard mitigation actions for each jurisdiction.

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION

During this step, the TAMIU project team will compile data on natural and human-caused hazards that may affect the planning area. Information will be compiled on the previous occurrence of hazard events in and around participating communities. As data is available, hazardous areas will be mapped. Based on its search of nationally available data sources and hazard mapping, the project team will provide a list of top hazards to local jurisdictions for review and comment. To the extent possible, those hazards on the Mexican side of the border that will affect the U.S. will be identified.

Each local jurisdiction will review the list of hazard events and amend the list, as appropriate. Examples of hazards that may affect the planning area include: natural hazards as floods, drought, tornadoes, high winds, hurricanes, wildland fires, drought, hail and extreme heat; and human-caused hazards such as fuel pipeline accidents, hazardous materials incidents and terrorism.

RISK ASSESSMENT

During this step, the consultant team will first collect data on population and assets that may be affected by hazards, such as housing units, critical facilities, special facilities, infrastructure and lifelines, hazardous materials facilities and commercial facilities. PBS&J will collect this information from national and state databases and will integrate local level data, where possible.

PBS&J will then assess potential impacts from each hazard using FEMA's Hazards U.S. (HAZUS) loss estimation model and other risk modeling techniques. The resulting information will provide local jurisdictions with information that outlines the full range of hazards they face and potential social impacts, damages and economic losses.

MITIGATION STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The TAMIU project team will draft an overall mitigation strategy for the region based on the findings of the risk assessment, the questionnaires on previous mitigation actions, and discussions during the Kickoff Workshop. The strategy will include regional goals, objectives and actions to reduce potential in the planning area.

A Mitigation Workshop will be held to provide an opportunity for participating jurisdictions to review the regional strategy and discuss possible mitigation actions for each jurisdiction. A detailed “menu” of possible mitigation options will be provided to assist local jurisdictions in identifying appropriate actions for their communities. For each mitigation action identified by the local jurisdiction, participating jurisdictions must provide critical project information that will guide implementation.

This will include the department or office responsible for implementing the action, estimated costs, priority and an implementation schedule.

The TAMIU project team will consolidate individual jurisdictional plans into an overall plan. The draft plan will include background on the planning area and process, the risk assessment, regional and local mitigation action plans, and plan maintenance. The project team will solicit feedback by participating jurisdictions and revise the plan accordingly. Local jurisdictions will be ultimately responsible for implementing, as appropriate, the actions outlined in the mitigation plan.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation is critical to the planning process. The TAMIU project team will convene three Public Meetings in different parts of the border region. The purpose of the meetings will be to solicit information from the public to help identify hazards affecting border residents and to take action to reduce the impact of those hazards. In addition, each jurisdiction will be responsible for making the draft plan available for public review and providing the public with an opportunity to comment on the draft plan.

A Hazards Survey will be posted on the TAMIU website and made available to the public. The Hazards Survey is designed to solicit information from the public about hazards of concern and their recommendations for actions to be taken to reduce risk.

PLAN REVIEW, ADOPTION AND APPROVAL

In accordance with Federal and State requirements, the Governing Bodies of each participating jurisdiction must review and approve that portion of the overall plan that affects their jurisdiction. To help accomplish that, the TAMIU team will provide a standardized format for documenting the local approval process and provide support, as requested, to the local jurisdiction as their Governing Body considers the plan.

The Hazard Mitigation Plan will be submitted to the Texas Division of Emergency Management in the Office of Governor for review and then to FEMA Region VI in Denton, Texas for review and approval. For more Information contact:

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