



# *Town of La Conner*

## Memorandum

Date: October 26, 2011

To: Mayor Hayes and Town Council  
From: John Doyle, Administrator/ Floodplain Manager  
Re: Status of Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan and Implementation

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### **Background**

Resolution #337, adopted in September of 2003, committed the Town of La Conner to implement a flood and natural disaster mitigation plan. The Plan was updated in 2009 and readopted by the Town with Resolution #430. This memo will serve as a progress report. It was prepared by the Town's floodplain manager.

For credit under the Community Rating System, this memo must be distributed to the media and be made available to the public. It is being sent to the paper that covers the Town of La Conner. Copies of this report and of the 2003 *Plan Update* are available for review at Town Hall, 204 Douglas Street. A notice of its availability is being posted on the Town's website.

A major issue facing every property owner located in the delta area of the Skagit River Floodplain is the Federal Emergency Management Agency's proposal to change the Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Immediately following the release of the Map Modifications in the fall of 2010, significant omissions and errors were identified specific to La Conner. The timing and coordination of the release was also problematic. Not all jurisdictions were notified at the same time.

La Conner joined Burlington, Mount Vernon and Sedro Woolley in an appeal to the revised FIRM maps. In response to objections from Washington State and other areas of the United States, the Director of FEMA agreed to reconsider the method that assumes there are no levees unless the levees are certified as providing 100-year flood protection. All the remapping projects across the country are now on hold, pending the new hydrology analysis. Residents and parties of interest will be notified of any changes.

Local jurisdictions are working together to protect the interests of the citizens of Skagit County. One of the major concerns in the appeal of the map changes is to have the best data used on such key questions as the hydrology of the Skagit River and how much water arrives at the delta area in a 100 year flood event.

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## **Elevation Certificate Program**

The Town has established several benchmark locations throughout the Town to serve as reference points for surveyors. For each new development requiring a Floodplain Development Permit, two certificates are required; one at subflooring during construction and one at finished construction. All Certificates of Authorization specify the Town's CRS building standards prior to the beginning of construction.

Property owners need to carefully check into flood insurance rates. Anyone purchasing a home in the floodplain should get elevation certificate information early in the process and check out flood insurance requirements with a reliable insurance agency before buying. Some insurance premiums have gone up because crawl spaces over 2 feet below grade may be reclassified as a basement. You may also want to determine that the insurance agent has received training on flood insurance, verify that their map determination is accurate by checking with the Town yourself, and make sure that there is a complete and accurate disclosure of your location on all documents.

People who do not have mortgages are faced with the choice of getting flood insurance; mortgage holders are required to have it. In either case, the Elevation Certificate is your document that spells out the condition of your building with respect to potential flood damage.

## **Map Determinations**

The majority of La Conner is within the 100-year floodplain (approximately 65%). Map determinations are made prior to permitting and development. The Town has two type of Special Flood Hazard Areas; River Event and Storm Surge. Currently, the base flood elevation is the same for both areas (8 feet NGVD). Recently, the Town completed documenting benchmark locations for easier reference by surveyors.

The Town has copies of the FIRM maps at Town Hall that are available upon request. Electronic versions are available on our website at [http://www.laconner.net/uploads/FIRM\\_-\\_Norht\\_01-06.pdf](http://www.laconner.net/uploads/FIRM_-_Norht_01-06.pdf)

## **Flood Hazard Information Bulletins and other Public Outreach**

Flood hazard information is mailed to insurance and real estate professionals annually to provide current information regarding flood hazards and FEMA program updates. All current CRS and FEMA Technical Bulletins are also available at Town Hall.

La Conner participates in county wide planning and public information forums regarding the Skagit River flood hazard, emergency preparations, flood warning and emergency management coordination. The Town annually sends out flood preparedness information to all residents and utility customers.

Town staff has written several articles for the La Conner Weekly News explaining current activities and programmatic changes to NFIP and FEMA. All the jurisdictions that participate in the Multijurisdictional Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan conduct annual meetings to discuss progress and outcomes of plan elements.

The La Conner Regional Library has copies of the Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, FEMA FIRM maps, and flood preparation information for the public.

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## **Swinomish Channel and River Area**

The Town periodically experiences storm surge concurrent with high tides. This can cause momentary flooding in the A1 Zone on the Town's FIRM map. Flooding seldom lasts more than a couple of hours (until the tide shifts). These events are very unpredictable. However, the Town takes advanced preparations during the winter months that are predicted to have very high tides. Public Works stages sandbags and flood-fight materials at low points in the sea wall. This is a very manageable situation and little or no damage occurs during these events.

FEMA has formed a Marine Risk Assessment team and convened a meeting to discuss "natural hazard" risks posed from the marine environment. The process is likely to be similar to the Map Modification process for river events, and hopefully much less contentious.

During extreme weather events that cause the Skagit River to reach flood stage, the Townspeople mobilize in support of the "flood fight" effort in Burlington and Mount Vernon. Public Works and the Volunteer Fire Department members' stage sandbagging operations in the Public Works area and ship sandbags to areas along the Skagit. The Town has emergency communications equipment with generator back up to coordinate emergency response and evacuation activities on the west side of the valley.

### **Conclusion**

Flood preparedness is a significant issue for the Town of La Conner. "Flood Issues" is a standing agenda item for the Town Council. The Council has formed a standing committee for Flood Preparedness. In addition to information and implementation of FEMA programs, the Town Council is very interested in investing in positive flood control measures such as dike and temporary dike materials.

Town staff has taken additional steps to address CRS measures and have successfully lowered the Classification number from 8 to 7. La Conner will take additional steps to coordinate annual flood public information events and materials to heighten awareness.