



Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

# FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Serving Montana's Communities Since 1974

# HIGHGROUND

March 2015

This newsletter and other state floodplain management activities are funded, in part, through grants from FEMA.

## Who Does What With Floodplains?

A Glance at Tasks Done by Local Floodplain Administrators, DNRC Regional Engineers and State Staff, and FEMA Staff in Denver



Local Floodplain Administrators receiving free training at the July, 2014 Resource Seminar in Helena.

### Local Floodplain Administrators aka Floodplain Managers

You may not be able to identify most local floodplain administrators by their title. They may be in an array of positions such as a County Planner, DES (Disaster and Emergency Services) Officer, sanitarian, clerk and recorder, mayor, contracted engineer, etc. Yet these are the people that do critical and often thankless floodplain management work in 134 communities across the state. The appreciation for their work is often not expressed until...it floods! They are typically employees of or contracted by municipalities, counties or tribes.

### Tasks done by Local Floodplain Managers

- Review local floodplain permit applications and make decisions on these permits: to deny, accept or accept with conditions based on their local floodplain management ordinance. This can get very technical!
- Handle floodplain management violations according to their local ordinance.

- Notify property owners when a floodplain permit application is required
- Complete FEMA's "In Compliance Certificate" for property owners.
- Guide property owners through FEMA's "Letter of Map Amendment" (individual property) process.
- Brief their elected officials on the floodplain management program including FEMA's "Letter of Map Revision" (community) process.
- Understand their ordinance without the benefit of a law degree. ( A little humor can help in this line of work.)
- Keep local ordinances, floodplain maps and information i.e. Flood Insurance Studies.
- Guide community through adopting a new "floodplain" ordinance.
- Communicate with others i.e. DES, Conservation Districts
- Promote flood awareness.
- Field local questions/objections about regulations.
- Direct interested public to insurance specialists.
- Prepare for and receive Community Assistance Visits, also known as audits from the state and FEMA.



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Sun River – photo by Mark Boesch

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Regional Engineering Staff: John Connors (right) and Sterling Sundheim (lower right) talk with Local Floodplain Administrators at 2014 AMFM Conference

- Take time from busy schedules to receive training on how to do the above listed tasks.
- In many but not all cases, local floodplain administrators maintain elevation certificate records.

View a [current list](#) of who these wonder workers are.

### Regional Engineering Staff

Regional Engineering Specialists are employed by Montana DNRC-Water Resources Division. There are other DNRC regional staff who work for the DNRC such as trust lands, forestry, fire. However, the water resources regional engineering staff has technical knowledge related to floodplains. They do an array of other tasks including those related to water rights, dams, dam safety, and special water related projects such as irrigation systems.

#### Tasks done by DNRC Regional Engineering Staff

- Provide technical expertise to local floodplain administrators, engineers and surveyors regarding floodplain permitting. This is a big job!
- Provide technical assistance to local floodplain administrators on how to evaluate floodplain permits.
- Communicate regional floodplain issues and concerns to different parties in their region.

You can [locate the RESs](#) across the state.

### State Floodplain Staff (Helena)

The state floodplain staff is largely funded by FEMA grants.

#### Steve Story, State Floodplain Engineer

- Handles technical queries beyond the scope of expertise of Regional Engineering staff or technical issues which have state-wide implications.
- Oversees all the new floodplain mapping activities in the state.

This includes mapping contracts; work with FEMA, supervising staff including Scott Pfahler and activities related to new mapping projects and working with communities that are in the process of getting new maps and floodplain data.

- Responsible for overseeing the technical aspects of floodplain management on a state-wide basis.

#### Scott Pfahler, RiskMAP/MADMOD Program Coordinator

- Scott is an engineer who completes hydrology and hydraulic studies related to new mapping work in the state.

#### Traci Sears, National Flood Insurance Program State (NFIP) Coordinator

- Works closely with FEMA and representatives of federal officials, advocating for helpful policy changes and learns early of national issues affecting Montana.
- Successfully completes grant management activities.
- Communicates with representatives from the 134 NFIP participating Montana communities by conducting Community Assistance visits aka "audits" and by responding to community issues and concerns via phone calls, emails and visits.
- Supervises the floodplain outreach and training for the state (Mary Guokas, Tiffany Lyden, Bri Shipman).

#### Bri Shipman, Floodplain Training Coordinator

- Plans for and coordinates floodplain related training across the state including the annual July, Floodplain Resource Seminar held in Helena and realtor training sessions.
- Works with AMFM in planning and coordinating the annual AMFM Conference.
- Conducts training for realtors across the state.
- Writes training modules for use by local floodplain administrators.



Front from left: Mary Guokas, Traci Sears, Tiffany Lyden  
Back: Scott Pfahler, Laurence Siroky, Steve Story, Aspen Bowler, Bri Shipman

**Tiffany Lyden**, Floodplain Outreach Specialist (Regulations)

- Communicates and coordinates meetings and information between local communities, state staff, FEMA and mapping contractors that are getting new maps.
- Presents at meetings with mapping stakeholders.
- Works with communities to adopt updated floodplain ordinances.
- Tracks the state adoption process of new maps and data.

**Mary Guokas**, Floodplain Outreach Specialist

- Coordinates and conducts outreach activities for different stakeholders through active participation at various professional conferences, floodplain management education with school groups, and for the general public at local events.
- Edits and writes for the state's floodplain management's program: the HighGround Newsletter.
- Produces media advisories for the Montana Flood Awareness Campaign.

**Aspen Bowler**, Administrative Assistant

- Responds to general DNRC Water phone calls.
- Organizes, files, tracks and secures a plethora of items for all in the Water Operations Bureau (floodplains, dam safety and water well contractors).
- Accomplishes office management tasks with humor and hard work.

**Laurence Siroky**, Water Operations Bureau Chief

- Supervises the mapping (Steve Story) and the state NFIP (Traci Sears) programs in the state.
- Represents the Bureau at other levels of state government.
- Manages the Bureau's budget.
- Commandeered the development of a couple of state model ordinances.
- Oversees floodplain management policies within state government.

Find contact information for [Regional Engineers](#) and [state staff](#) here.

**FEMA Region VIII Staff, Denver**

Often working behind the scenes: tracking the floodplain management work including processing LOMRs in six states and implementing dictates from FEMA headquarters is FEMA Region VIII Staff. In Montana, we primarily work with two of the FEMA Regional Staff.



Marijo Brady (right) talks with Yellowstone County FPA Darin Swenson at the AMFM Conference in March, 2014.

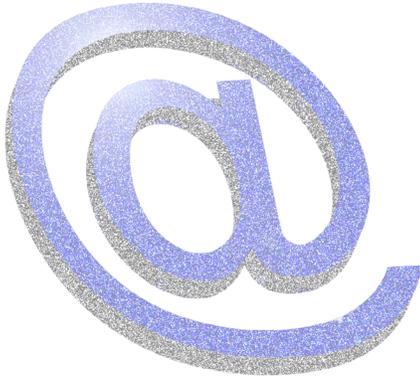
**Marijo Brady**, National Flood Insurance Program

- Conducts community visits.
- Insures communities are FEMA compliant.
- Provides floodplain policy guidance to state staff and local floodplain administrators.

**Sean McNabb**, Mapping Specialist

- Supports and oversees new mapping projects in the state.
- Furthers new technology in mapping projects.

## NEW Floodplain Administrators in Montana



### Blaine County

New: Shawn Higley  
1275 Maple St., Ste F  
Helena, MT 59601  
[shighley@wwcengineering.com](mailto:shighley@wwcengineering.com)  
443-3962 fax 449-0056.

Thanks to Ron Anderson for all the floodplain management work you completed in Blaine County. Congratulations on your "partial" retirement!

### Circle, Town of

New: Kelsey Kasten  
105 Main  
P.O. Box 140  
406-485-2524  
[townofcircle@midrivers.com](mailto:townofcircle@midrivers.com)

### Malta, City of

New: Lorie Bond is now the Clerk/Treasurer in Malta and is on her way to learning the ropes of Floodplain Management. She may be reached at 406-654-1251 or at [legalcon@mtintouch.net](mailto:legalcon@mtintouch.net)

Congratulations to Carolyn Schmoekel on her retirement!

### Musselshell County

New: Adam Carlson  
704 1st St. East  
Roundup, MT 59072  
[acarlson@co.musselshell.mt.us](mailto:acarlson@co.musselshell.mt.us)  
323-2777 fax 323-2367

Jeff Gates, former Musselshell County FPA-accepted a position with Montana DES. Congratulations Jeff.

### Roundup, City of

Mayor Sandra Jones (acting)  
406-323-2804  
[roundupmayor@yahoo.com](mailto:roundupmayor@yahoo.com)

Annie Pallas (former Roundup FPA)-accepted position with MT FWP. Way to go Annie!

### Wibaux, Town of

New: Debbie Zinda is now serving as the FPA. She may be reached at 406-796-2412 or at [wibauxmt@midrivers.com](mailto:wibauxmt@midrivers.com)

Debbie McBride, former FPA in Wibaux had some serious health issues which resulted in her leaving the Wibaux position. We send healthy wishes to Debbie.

### Updated FPA Contact Information

Dennis has been serving as the local FPA in Fort Belknap for a number of years. However, he has had a change with his phone number to: 406-353-8465  
406-399-0517 (cell)

# Help Promote Flood Awareness



Montana DNRC continues to release monthly media advisories to Montana newspapers in an effort to promote flood awareness across the state. Unlike flooding, the newspapers aren't chomping at the bit to report flood awareness. Local efforts to help in getting the word out to local media would be appreciated.

Local floodplain administrators will continue to receive the state's media advisories and are free to cut and paste information to share with their local media. Scheduled topics through the remainder of this September, 2014-July, 2015 Flood Awareness Campaign Season are as follows:

<p><b>February 2015</b> Highlight the communities in the state that participate in FEMA's Community Rating System (CRS) which rewards policy holders with insurance discounts.</p>
<p><b>March 2015</b> Recognize that many local floodplain administrators in the state work hard to learn and enforce actions that promote flood safety in their communities and keep their communities in good standing with FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program. Many local floodplain administrators learn and share information at the annual conference of the Association of Montana Floodplain Managers which will be held in Helena in 2015. Promote flood safety awareness week.</p>
<p><b>April 2015</b> Highlight the availability of Flood Insurance Rate Maps and the LOMC process. Note 30-day insurance requirements.</p>
<p><b>May 2015</b> Remind property owners that if they are building or doing something in what might be a floodplain, they need to contact local Floodplain Administrator. They may need to apply for a floodplain permit. Note 30-day insurance requirements.</p>
<p><b>June 2015</b> Focus on the free annual Floodplain Resource Seminar for many professionals including floodplain administrators, realtors and insurance agents.</p>

Past advisories may be viewed at [http://dnrc.mt.gov/wrd/water\\_op/floodplain/news.asp](http://dnrc.mt.gov/wrd/water_op/floodplain/news.asp)

Advisories are named by numeric year, month and in some cases day followed by topic. For example the December, 2014 media advisory is named, "2014 12 Early Season Ice Jam". Thanks in advance for helping spread the message of flood awareness.



# Montana Rates High with Number of Certified Floodplain Managers



## Next CFM Tests in Montana

March 16, 2015  
Annual AMFM  
Conference, Helena

July, 2015 (Date to be announced later) – Floodplain Resource Seminar, Helena

I don't think I've yet met a Montanan who wasn't proud to be one. We boast about our spectacular scenery, great outdoor recreational opportunities and an array of license plate types. Additionally, we have a high number of professionals who have completed rigorous national testing to become a certified floodplain manager and maintain their certification through continuing education. The website from the national organization that administers the certification, the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) reveals that Montana has 87 CFMs. This means that Montana has the highest number of CFMs per capita among 44 states. Six states don't participate in the ASFPM CFM program. [See a complete list of all the CFMs.](#)

In our state office, one of the most recently certified CFMs was Tiffany

Lyden who passed the CFM test at the Resource Seminar last July. Four others also passed this national test at the same time: Chad Bailey (Pioneer Technical Services-Bozeman), Nathaniel Hagen Pioneer Technical Services-Helena), Katherine Matthew (Sanders County Planner) and Caleb Minnick (CTA Architects Engineers-Belgrade).

Proctors administer CFM testing at least twice a year in Montana at the annual AMFM Conference in March and at the free Resource Seminar in Helena in July. The location of the AMFM conference rotates around the state. Prospective test-takers are encouraged to allow about 3 months for testing preparation.

[See more information about the CFM program, including a 5-minute video.](#)

# Community Rating System: Odds and Ends

Montanans in 12 communities save around \$150,000/year in flood insurance premiums because their communities participate in FEMA's CRS program. This program rewards communities that take extra steps to mitigate flood damages. This year, Gallatin County Planner Sean O'Callaghan submitted a well-organized and thorough application.

When a community considers applying for the CRS program, it is worthwhile to know which policies will be discounted. The discount does not apply to all policies. The following table is from the CRS Center and displays which policies are eligible for discounts.

1) Emergency Program policies, Preferred Risk Policies (PRPs), Mortgage Portfolio Protection Program (MPPP) policies and Group Flood Insurance Policies are not eligible for the CRS premium discount. 2) For a Post-FIRM Elevated Building with an elevator below the BFE, contact the insurer for CRS discount eligibility.

## CRS PREMIUM DISCOUNT ELIGIBILITY (Regular Program Communities)

Flood Zone	Eligible for CRS Premium	Not Eligible <sup>1</sup> for CRS Premium
All Flood Zones	Pre-FIRM Buildings	N/A
B, C, X, D, A99, AR, and AR Dual Zones (AR/A, AR/AE, AR/ A1–A30, AR/AH, and AR/AO)	Pre-FIRM Buildings	N/A
A Zones (AE, A1–A30, Unnumbered A, AO, AH)	Post-FIRM Non-Elevated Buildings where the elevation difference used for rating is at or above the Base Flood Elevation (BFE); OR With subgrade crawlspace certification from a community official	Post-FIRM Non-Elevated Buildings where the elevation difference used for rating is 1 foot or more below the BFE; OR With no subgrade crawlspace certification from a community official
	Post-FIRM Elevated Buildings <sup>2</sup> where the elevation difference used for rating is at or above the BFE	Post-FIRM Elevated Buildings <sup>2</sup> where the elevation difference used for rating is 1 foot or more below the BFE



**Mark Your Calendar!**

March 16-19, 2015  
AMFM Conference - Helena



Highground Editor - Mary Guokas  
Graphic Design - Martha Hodder

**Mary Guokas, Floodplain Outreach**

Mary Guokas, who has been the front woman for Montana Floodplain Program Outreach, is embarking on a new adventure. Mary has been part of the DNRC Floodplain Program since 2006. From conferences, fairs, outreach events, classrooms, and community visits; Mary has met almost a quarter of the state. Her travels have taken her back and forth across Montana.

As DNRC's Floodplain Outreach Specialist and Highground Newsletter editor for nine years, she has helped share information and provide important floodplain assistance to communities across the state. Her humor, jokes and April fool pranks cannot be replicated.

She is heading south for a few months to soak up the warm sun.

Persons with disabilities who need an alternative accessible format of this document should contact DNRC public information officer at 406-444-0465.

The DNRC Floodplain Program will miss her fresh perspectives, humor, and enthusiasm, but we're sure the mountains and good friends will bring her back to Montana, in new and different capacities.

So kick back and enjoy the great outdoors Mary. No need for deadlines or flood awareness. We wish you all the best and thank you for your years of dedication and enthusiasm for everything floodplain, National Parks, Green Bay Packers, Wisconsin, cheese and more.



**Montana's Floodplain Program Contact List**

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<http://mtfloodplain.mt.gov/>

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SCOTT PFAHLER, Civil Engineering Specialist  
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TRACI SEARS, NFIP Coordinator  
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BRI SHIPMAN, Floodplain Training Officer  
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STERLING SUNDHEIM, Regional Engineer  
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**KALISPELL** Unit Office, 655 Timberwolf Parkway, Suite 4 Kalispell, MT 59901-1215  
MARC PITMAN, Unit Manager  
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For Pre-disaster Mitigation Grant Information, contact Kent Atwood, State Hazard Mitigation Officer Department of Military Affairs P.O. Box 4789 - 1956 Mt. Majo St. Fort Harrison, Montana 59636-4789  
(406) 324-4782 [katwood@mt.gov](mailto:katwood@mt.gov)