MAKING THE MOST OF FLOODPLAIN BUYOUTS

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The Disaster Cycle

- Preparation
- Response
- Recovery
Mitigation

• Acquisition
• Elevation
• Land use planning
• Building codes
• Infrastructure policy
Acquisition (Buyouts)

Early Projects

- Rapid City, SD
  - 1400 homes after 1972 flood
- Soldiers Grove, WI
  - Relocation of downtown in 1983
- Valmeyer, IL (population ~900)
  - Entire town relocated after 1993 floods in MW

Since 1993 FEMA has purchased ~20,000 properties nationwide
Federal Policy

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program: – 15-20% of federal disaster assistance funds can be used for mitigation, including buyouts

- Funds triggered by a disaster

Flood Mitigation Assistance Program – funds used to reduce risk of flooding for communities participating in the NFIP.
How it Works

- Following a disaster, HMGP funds available
- Funds distributed through state government
- Buyouts are voluntary
- Homeowners paid pre-flood fair market value
- After purchase, homes demolished or relocated
- Property precluded from development
Advantages of Buyouts

- Saves money
  - debris removal, evacuation, search and rescue, …
- Provides permanent protection
- Serves multiple objectives
  - risk reduction, open space,
  - habitat, recreation
- Enhances natural buffers
- Protects private property rights
Disadvantages of Buyouts

- Expensive, particularly for coastal communities
- Loss of tax base
- Disruption of established neighborhoods
- Incomplete participation
- Could lead to higher housing costs (constrains land markets)
Making the Most of Floodplain Buyouts

Project Objectives

Our objective is to help communities learn how to leverage floodplain acquisition programs for community benefit by:

- developing strategies for local governments on how to optimize and manage acquired properties;
- Increasing the number of floodplain acquisition sites restored or managed to provide natural habitats and identifying opportunities to leverage these sites to improve connectivity among fragmented habitats; and
- helping make communities more resilient to climate change.
Methodology

- Research
  - Survey
    - Distributing to those involved in buyouts in 4 states
    - Characterizing buyout process and management of sites
  - Examine wetland habitat and flood mitigation benefit of acquired properties in local case studies
    - Visiting 3-4 communities in each state
    - Interviewing local government staff
    - Mapping

- Develop ‘Action Guide’
Making the Most of Floodplain Buyouts

Taking advantage of acquired properties, or missing opportunities?
Survey

Floodplain Acquisition - Management

RESPONDENTS: 39 of 39

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Q1

Location
Answered: 39 Skipped: 0

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How many properties have been acquired?

- 13 properties in the 1-10 range
- 10 properties in the 11-25 range
- 2 properties in the 26-50 range
- 2 properties in the 51-75 range
- 5 properties in the > 100 range

The bar chart shows the distribution of properties acquired across different ranges.
Roughly how large, in acres, was the total size of the property acquisitions?
How are the acquired properties being used currently? Select all that apply

- Open space: 29
- Recreation: 16
- Restored floodplain: 9
- Greenway: 7
- Community garden: 5
- Not actively managed: 5
- Restored wetlands: 5
- Managed wildlife habitat: 2
- Other: 4
Current Use
What office or agency is responsible for managing the acquired properties? Select all that apply.
What do you think would be the best use of the acquired properties? Select all that apply.
What are the obstacles to restoring habitat or natural floodplain functions to acquired properties? Select all that apply

- No funding available
- Patchwork distribution of parcels
- Cost and capacity to maintain/manage habitat or natural floodplain
- No capacity to plan and undertake restoration
- Existing infrastructure (roads, etc.)
- Unaware of opportunities to restore natural habitat or to connect parcels to existing protected areas or priority habitats
- Community opposition
- Local ordinances/codes or other requirements
- Other
Case Studies

- Rocky Mount, North Carolina
- Kinston, North Carolina
- Austin, Minnesota
Rocky Mount, North Carolina
(pop ~60,000)

- Severe flood in 1999
- City purchased over 450 homes for $117 million
- Criteria: Located in floodplain, height of flooding, repetitively flooded; # days inundated
Rocky Mount, NC

Current uses of buyout properties: Disc golf, dog park, greenway, barbecue park, forest
Issue: Aggregate Risk

Rocky Mount, NC
Kinston, North Carolina

- City purchased over 400 homes for $31 million
- State Acquisition and Relocation Fund (SARF) to increase participation in buyout
- Call Kinston Home program – City provided up to $10,000 “extra” for participants who stayed within city limits
- City also relocated homes to vacant or infill lots

375 properties purchased in total, since 1978

HMGP funds, but state and local funding has greatly expanded the program
Austin, Minnesota

- Now a linear park, plan developed in 1993

Figure 6 – Proposed Central Park on the land acquired after 1993 floods.

FEMA, Losses Avoided due to Home Acquisitions in Austin, Minnesota, 2001
What we have learned...

- Opportunities to restore!
- Variation in management of sites
- Aggregate risk
- Many challenges
  - Obstacles in getting people to sell
  - Patchwork distribution
  - Funding
  - Timing
  - Capacity
Making the Most of Acquired Properties

Management Strategies and Other Considerations
Making the Most of Floodplain Buyouts – Management Strategies

- Patchwork
- Holdouts
- Comprehensive
Making the Most of Floodplain Buyouts – Management Strategies #1

Patchwork

- Options
  - Community garden (e.g., Montevideo)
  - Pocket parks
  - Garden (maintained by neighbors)
  - Pollinator habitat
  - Green infrastructure

- Considerations
  - Partnerships: Working with neighbors/getting buy-in,
  - Community management
  - What about maintenance?
Making the Most of Floodplain Buyouts – Management Strategies #2

Holdouts

- Options
  - Habitat restoration (e.g., Austin, Montevideo)
  - Linear Parks/ Greenway (e.g., Austin)
  - Other recreation
  - Community amenity

- Considerations
  - What to do with existing infrastructure and utilities to remaining residents?
  - Encouraging hold-outs to leave
  - Partnerships
  - What about maintenance?
Making the Most of Floodplain Buyouts – Management Strategies #3

Comprehensive

- Options
  - Floodplain/wetlands/habitat restoration
  - Large parks/community amenities (e.g., Austin)

- Considerations
  - Partnerships
  - How do I fund a large restoration project?
  - What about maintenance?
Making the Most of Floodplain Buyouts – Other Considerations

- Financing
- Up front planning/prioritization
- Community Engagement
What source(s) of funds was (were) used to acquire the properties? Select all that apply.

- Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HGMP): 27
- State program funds: 17
- Local funds: 12
- Community Development Block Grant Funds (HUD): 8
- Flood Mitigation Assistance Program: 9
- Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM): 5
- Other: 1
Making the Most of Floodplain Buyouts – Other Considerations

- Financing
- Up front planning/prioritization
- Community Engagement
What factors were considered in selection of properties to acquire? Select all that apply

- Enhance natural floodplain functions: 14
- Increase community resilience: 14
- Create public open space: 8
- Primary residence vs. secondary or rental: 6
- Effect on community character or other social factors: 5
- Residential vs. commercial property: 5
- Distribution across different types of neighborhoods (e.g., economic diversity): 0
- Enhance wetlands: 0
- Enhance wildlife habitat: 1
- None of these were considered: 6
Making the Most of Floodplain Buyouts – Recommendations

- Financing
- Up front planning/prioritization
- Community Engagement
In your opinion, how has the acquisition of properties affected participating communities?

- Enhanced community appearance: 17
- Increase community resilience: 17
- Loss of community tax base: 15
- Added community amenities (e.g., provide recreation or community gathering space): 10
- Loss of sense of community: 4
- Sellers not able to purchase comparable homes: 3
- Perceptions of forced relocation: 3
- Loss of historic character: 2
- Increase seller’s distance to work and other customary services: 1
- Other: 2
QUESTIONS

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