

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The most obvious questions when developing a local mitigation strategy are “what is mitigation, what is the best mitigation strategy for our communities, and why should a local government develop a local mitigation strategy?”

Mitigation is any action taken to permanently reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and their property from the effects of hazards. Some examples of mitigation include land use planning techniques that limit infrastructure in high hazard areas, programs for retrofitting existing structures to meet new building codes and standards and the acquisition of structures that are in a high hazard area. Ideally, a community can minimize the effects of future hazards through a mix of planning, code enforcement and responsible development.

The local mitigation strategy is a community-based plan to make the county and municipalities safer and more resistant to natural and technological hazards. Every community is exposed to some level of risk from a variety of hazards, including:

- Earthquakes
- Tsunamis
- Coastal & Riverine Erosion
- Landslides / Sinkholes
- Hurricanes & Coastal Storms
- Severe Thunderstorms & Tornadoes
- Floods
- Wildfires
- Dam/Levee Failure
- Drought/Heat Wave
- Winter Storms / Freezes
- Hazardous Materials
- Terrorism
- Nuclear / Biological Hazards

Hazards cannot be eliminated, but their impacts can be reduced through proper planning. The local mitigation strategy seeks to do the following:

- Identifying hazards to which the Calhoun County is vulnerable
- Determining where the communities are most vulnerable to these hazards
- Assess the facilities and structures within the communities that are most vulnerable to hazards
- Identify and prioritize mitigation projects to take advantage of available funding
- Identifying funding sources and tie the mitigation projects to these sources of funding; and
- Make hazard awareness and education a community goal.

The local mitigation strategy benefits the Calhoun County by seeking to reduce risk, and save community members and the local government’s valuable resources. Businesses in high hazard

areas lose valuable revenue when damaged or isolated by storms. Residents, who build in high hazard areas, are subject to evacuation, damage to their homes and personal property, lower home values, and higher insurance premiums.

Disasters also cost the local government's money. Community infrastructure such as roads, drainage systems, water systems, and wastewater treatment plants built in high hazard areas are subject to frequent damage and costly repairs. Federal post-disaster assistance does not cover all the costs of recovery. A local government is typically responsible for a percentage of local public recovery costs in a federally declared disaster. In smaller events that are not federally declared, the local government's are responsible for all of the local recovery costs. These costs can put a significant strain on the budget of a local government. Disruption of the community's infrastructure can also hamper the local economy, impacting the tax base and making recovery more difficult. But the public costs of a disaster are not related to infrastructure alone. Critical facilities such as hospitals, schools, airports, and major government buildings located in high hazard areas are often subject to damaging conditions just when they are needed the most. And of course, the cost to community health, safety and welfare can never be accurately calculated.

The Calhoun County Local Mitigation Strategy will enable county and municipal officials, the business community and local citizens to reduce risks and costs by including mitigation as part of everyday planning, rather than limiting it to the measures taken immediately before or after a disaster strikes.

1.1. Purpose

Since the early 1990s, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the United States Congress have witnessed large increases in disaster response and recovery costs; as a result, they have provided funds to communities, counties, and states to reduce impacts from natural hazards through hazard mitigation. This marked a fundamental shift in policy; rather than placing primary emphasis on response and recovery, FEMA's focus broadened to incorporate mitigation as the foundation of emergency management. Changes in Federal laws have resulted in pre-disaster mitigation project funding and mitigation planning requirements. As a result on October 30, 2000 amending the Robert T. Stafford Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA2K) was signed into law. DMA2K states that if States and local governments do not have approved multi-hazard mitigation plans in place and a disaster occurs, they will not be entitled to Public Assistance and other FEMA funding. The following is a summary of the parts of DMA2K that pertain to local governments:

- The Act establishes a new requirement for local governments to prepare a Hazard Mitigation Plan in order to be eligible for funding from FEMA through Pre and Post-Disaster grant programs such as Pre-Disaster Mitigation Assistance (PDM) and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP).
- The Act establishes a requirement that natural hazards such as but not limited to tornadoes, floods, and wildfires, need to be addressed in the risk and vulnerability assessment section of the Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- The Act authorizes states to receive up to seven percent of Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds after a federal disaster to be used for development of state, local, and tribal organization Hazard Mitigation Plan (in Florida referred to as a Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS)).



- The Act establishes November 1, 2004 as the date by which local governments and tribal organizations were required to prepare and adopt their respective plans in order to be eligible for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance. In addition, local jurisdictions must review and revise its plan to reflect changes in development, progress in local mitigation efforts, and changes in priorities, and resubmit it for approval within 5 years from date of FEMA approval to remain eligible for the mitigation project grant funding.

This most recent process of reviewing and revising the Calhoun County LMS began in March 2008. The Local Mitigation Strategy Working Group (LMSWG) comprised of Calhoun County government agencies, businesses, county residents and residents of the City of Blountstown and the Town of Altha participated in a series of meetings. A handful of the working group members were originally charged in 1997 by the Calhoun County Board of Commissioners to develop the Calhoun County Local Mitigation Strategy. The main goal of the local mitigation strategy is to identify and assess the various natural and technological disasters the County and municipalities face, and then develop local strategies to reduce the impact of future disasters. This plan is a continuation of the 1997 efforts and is the product of the 2nd revision and update process.

1.2. Plan Organization

This Plan is divided into five main sections to address FEMA requirements for a local mitigation plan, plus the crosswalk and appendices. The sections are as follows:

- Section 1 – Executive Summary
- Section 2 – Planning Process
- Section 3 – Risk Assessment
- Section 4 – Mitigation Strategy
- Section 5 – Plan Maintenance
- Section 6 – Local Mitigation Plan Review Crosswalk
- Section 7 – Appendices

