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[Floods & Flood Relief Assistance](#)
[Comprehensive Flood Mgmt Grant Program](#)
[Regulations for Floodplain Development](#)
[Floodplain Permitting](#)
[Using GIS for Floodplain Management](#)
[Map Modernization Program](#)
[Maryland Flood Damage Vulnerability](#)
[Flood Hazard Mitigation Home](#)

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[Citizens](#)
[Business](#)
[Research](#)
[To MDE Homepage](#)
[Home](#) > [Environmental Programs](#) > [Water Programs](#) > [Flood Hazard Mitigation](#) > Flood Task Force Exec Summary

## Task Force Report Executive Summary

The State of Maryland experienced several floods in 1996, two of which resulted in Presidential Disaster Declarations. Rapid snowmelt from the blizzard of early January 1996 led to the first of the two flooding disaster declarations (January 19, 1996) due to damage in Allegany, Garrett, Frederick, Washington, and Cecil counties. A second Presidential Disaster Declaration was granted for Allegany, Frederick, and Garrett Counties on September 22, 1996 as a result of heavy rainfall from Tropical Storm Fran. Both of the "declared" flooding disasters manifested the greatest damage in Western Maryland, although damage from Tropical Storm Fran was noted around the State. Flooding also occurred in Allegany County in late June 1995 due to heavy rainfall, and in the Emmittsburg area of Frederick County in June 1996, but the resulting damage from these events was not severe enough to warrant a Presidential Disaster Declaration.

Never before in the State of Maryland has more than one Presidential Disaster Declaration occurred in a single year; as a result of the January 1996 blizzard and two subsequent floods, there are now three so-called "open" disasters. As a result of these extraordinary natural disasters, a Governor's Task Force on the Flooding in Western Maryland was announced at the Governor's Flood Summit Meeting on October 7, 1996.

The Task Force is comprised of a cross-section of elected, appointed, and other officials and businesspersons. It's mission was to "review recent flooding events that occurred in Allegany, Frederick, Garrett, and Washington counties and develop recommendations to minimize or eliminate future flooding possibilities in that region."

The Task Force held a series of public meetings which allowed citizens, local elected officials, and others to bring significant flood-related issues to the attention of the Task Force. Many of the comments received at these meetings provided valuable information to the Task Force and its working groups. The public meetings were conducted in Allegany, Garrett, Frederick, and Washington counties between November 20-25, 1996. Local elected officials, members of the public and others were invited to speak to the Task Force and provide comments to identify flooding problems and potential solutions to assist in the development of the Task Force's recommendations. Individuals who could not attend the public meetings were permitted to mail or fax their comments to the Task Force by November 27, 1996.

At the organizational meeting of the Task Force at Frostburg State University on November 14, 1996, three workgroups were identified to investigate the causes, issues and recommended solutions to recurrent flood damage in the western Maryland counties of Allegany, Frederick, Garrett and Washington:

**Short-term Workgroup:** Addressed immediate efforts such as streambed restoration, floodplain management, and short-term mitigation measures. Short-term measures are those that are ongoing or should occur within the next 12 months, although some measures may have to be implemented over a 36-month period due to funding constraints.

**Long-Term Workgroup:** Addressed longer-term efforts such as flood gaging and warning systems, environmental restoration (including reforestation, wetland creation, re-establishment of stable stream forms, recapture of flood prone areas, and acid mine drainage abatement), and building acquisitions or retrofits which cannot be accomplished immediately. The group developed an action plan for the next five years.

## Agency Links

- [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#)
- [Maryland Emergency Management Agency](#)
- [Association of State Floodplain Managers](#)

## Related Links

- [Flood Mitigation Task Force Report for Western MD](#)
- [July 1997 Task Force Meeting Update](#)

Funding Workgroup: Addressed and identified current, possible funding sources for recommended mitigation measures. Members of the Task Force participated in workgroups related to their specific areas of expertise. Additional staff from local, State, and Federal departments and agencies provided technical assistance and information to the workgroups.

The workgroups examined the issues and recommendations presented through public meetings and historical data, and compiled their conclusions into action plans. The complete action plans are provided as sections of the main report. Significant issues and recommendations from the workgroups include:

### Short-Term Workgroup

#### RECOMMENDATION #1

Purchase and remove 288 structures in the 100-year floodplain and 20 structures in the 500-year floodplain in accordance with willing sellers. Acquire properties to enable residents to voluntarily relocated to other areas out of the floodplain.

Cost: Acquisition and demolition of identified structures/properties is estimated at approximately \$13.2 million. It is recommended that funding be provided by federal (75%), State (12.5%), and county (12.5%) governments over the next three years. A limited amount of State (\$1.3 million) and federal (\$1.1 million) funds are currently available which require a local cost share. It may be necessary for the State to assume responsibility for all or part of the local cost share for financially challenged local jurisdictions, to include the use of General Funds or bond flotation.

Note: The Task Force received comments from the Washington County Commissioners stating they approved of the concept of moving properties from the floodplain, but do not agree to participate in acquisition of private property citing inadequate financial resources. Task Force members noted that eligible applicants could participate in acquisition projects by contributing the local cost share.

#### RECOMMENDATION #2

Identify and assist in funding floodproofing methods for public buildings or facilities and business owners when appropriate through a State grant or loan fund. Floodproofing should be cost-effective, not adversely impact others, be targeted toward protecting structures, and should not reduce available floodplain or effective flow area. Funds should be available throughout the State to encourage mitigation measures in all local jurisdictions.

Cost: Currently being estimated

Note: The Task Force received comments from the Washington County Commissioners stating they do not agree to participate in floodproofing and retrofitting of private structures, citing inadequate financial resources. Task Force members noted that eligible applicants can participate in floodproofing and retrofitting projects by contributing the local cost share.

#### RECOMMENDATION # 3

Immediately restore streambeds and affected infrastructures to their condition prior to storm events. Immediately remove debris from prior storm events from affected waterways.

Cost: The Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has been authorized to spend approximately \$6.1 million since January 1996 to implement the above activities. This cost includes a 25% local share in either cash or in-kind services, which represents a total project cost of \$8.2 million.

#### RECOMMENDATION #4

Where feasible, remove waterway blockages (e.g. old dikes, dam, trestles, etc.) to allow the free flow of flood waters.

Cost: An estimated cost for removal is not available at this time, pending final identification of structures for removal. Cost of removal should be shared by the owners of the structures.

#### RECOMMENDATION #5

Work with Federal officials and the insurance industry to expedite payment of flood insurance claims.

Cost: Unknown. Staff from the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), the Maryland Insurance Administration, the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will focus efforts toward this recommendation.

#### RECOMMENDATION #6

Provide comprehensive public information and education on river hydraulics and geomorphology, when and how to floodproof, functions and values of floodplains, and the National Flood Insurance Program.

Cost: Unknown. Available staff from MDE will focused efforts toward this recommendation.

#### RECOMMENDATION #7

Create legislation to amend/augment the State's Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program (CFMGP) as follows:

Increase the State share from 50 percent to 75 percent and reduce the local government minimum contribution from 50 percent to 25 percent. The Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program should be utilized when federal assistance is unavailable, or when State matching funds are required for mitigation projects.

Increase the CFMGP bond authorizations over the next two to three years to provide the necessary support to accomplish the recommendations of this Task Force in acquiring properties, conducting flood studies, and supporting necessary flood warning systems.

Provide relocation costs and financial incentives as deemed appropriate to induce residents to relocate out of the floodplain.

Cost: Recommend that the amended Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program seek additional bond authorizations annually to facilitate property acquisitions and other recommendations of this report.

#### RECOMMENDATION #8

Fund the State Catastrophic Event Fund to meet disaster needs. Create legislation to amend/augment the State's Catastrophic Event Fund as follows:

Expand availability of the fund for use by local jurisdictions.

Utilize the resources of the fund to assist financially challenged communities with their 25 percent share of federal disaster assistance. Utilize the fund to pay 50 percent of the local governments' cost share of federal disaster assistance when the cost of the disaster exceeds five dollars per capita for the jurisdiction in a current budget year.

Reserve certain funds for disbursement following a disaster to jurisdictions where federal disaster assistance is unavailable, and the estimated cost of the disaster exceeds five dollars per capita for the jurisdiction in a current budget year. These funds would be provided on a 75% State/25% local cost share based on federal disaster assistance criteria.

Cost: Recommend that the amended Catastrophic Event Fund be maintained at a minimum of \$10 millions through annual appropriations.

#### RECOMMENATION #9

Implement currently proposed elevation and construction mitigation projects.

Cost: Estimated total cost of these projects is \$822,250. Funding required should be provided by federal (75%), State (12.5%), and county (12.5%) governments over the next three years. It may be necessary for the State to assume responsibility for all or part of the local cost share for financially challenged local jurisdictions, to include the use of General Funds or bond flotations.

### Long-Term Workgroup

RECOMMENDATION #1: That the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) be designed as the responsible agency for synchronizing all post-flood watershed restoration efforts in Maryland. These efforts includes: (1) ensuring that all emergency response actions are taken with due consideration of the environment, (2) providing technical and permitting assistance regarding waterway construction, stormwater management, dam safety, wetlands, water supplies, and wastewater management as necessary, (3) assisting in the provision of funding support for water and wastewater facility repairs, (4) coordinating flood mitigation efforts, (5) supporting local governments in establishing and maintain programs necessary to qualify them for participation in the National Flood Insurance Program, (6) managing the state floodplain management program and (7) administering the Maryland CFMGP.

RECOMMENDATION #2: That the Task Force, appointed by the Governor of Maryland, meet on a semi-annual basis to monitor the progress on identified issues of this report. This Task Force should coordinate its actions with the State Hazard Mitigation Policy Team. The first meeting will be scheduled for June or July, 1997.

RECOMMENDATION #3: That the lead State, federal and local departments and agencies investigate the open issues and report progress at the Task Force meetings.

RECOMMENDATION #4: That the elected and appointed officials assist in appropriating fund to implement the required actions and to minimize the financial burden of the local cost share requirements.

RECOMMENDATION #5: That the Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland Office of Planning, National Park Service, the Interstate commission on the Potomac River Basin, the Maryland Emergency Management Agency, and other departments and agencies deemed appropriate conduct a public outreach program for western Maryland to educate citizens on the relationship between land use and flooding.

RECOMMENDATION #6: That watershed studies be targeted to address the flood protection and environmental restoration needs of the individual counties and that information be used to update existing county master plans. Plans should be consistent with local land-use regulations and coordinated with other related water and land resource management programs.

RECOMMENDATION #7: That authorities responsible for all existing State of Maryland programs for locally designated Conservation and Revitalization Areas give priority of effort, in order, to Allegany, Garrett, Washington and Federick Counties. The Secretaries/Directors of appropriate Departments and Agencies should assume responsibility for this action.

[Back to top](#) 

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