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Pilot project has new flood risk management style

KANSAS CITY, Mo.—The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Kansas City District has begun a large pilot project in Manhattan, Kan., that is helping communities in the Big Blue River floodplain apply tools for managing flood risks.

The tools being discussed are home elevations, flood proofing, and for some, possibly buyouts. These are things not typically found in USACE projects.

The objective of the pilot project is to reduce flood risk for homes and businesses. Another objective is to improve on how USACE is involving stakeholders in risk-informed decision making. This includes helping the residents and businesses understand their flood risk, then looking at measures that can reduce the impact of floods. This is being done through a focus group and at least a few public open house events. The city and both counties are closely involved, and the city of Manhattan is leading the public involvement efforts with facilitation support from the Institute for Water Resources at the USACE.

The tools being considered would be pursued through the appropriate entity that has authorization to implement it, and it must have funding to pursue it.

The homes and businesses are on the border of Pottawatomie and Riley counties concerning the following neighborhoods: Brookfield, Dix, Eagles Landing, Knoxberry, Countryside Estates, Northview and the commercial areas along U.S. 24 Highway.

The project is intended to complement, or work in harmony with, the county hazard mitigation plans with a focus on flooding. This will be done by getting public feedback on how they may choose from tools that reduce their risk of flooding. The project will also set up flood inundation maps like the nearby Wildcat Creek website, provided by the National Weather Service.

The city, county, state and federal partners plan to have more than one public open house. The first is scheduled for April 16, in Manhattan, Kan., from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Manhattan Fire Station located at 2000 Denison Ave. One main goal is to share data on the cost effectiveness of the tools, such as elevating homes in the neighborhoods listed above. A topic that will not be a focus is flood insurance, although this is also recognized as an important tool for addressing flood risk. Separate meetings will follow on that and will be coordinated through the city and counties.

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The pilot project is a continuation of the popular U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Silver Jackets Program, which started in 2009. The program enables active USACE participation in the existing Kansas Hazard Mitigation Team, which prioritized this area of the Big Blue River for this pilot.

The Silver Jackets pilot project is on the USACE Silver Jackets webpage for Kansas, www.nfrmp.us/state/index.cfm. The maps mentioned above will be hosted initially on the NWS webpage, similarly to the Wildcat Creek example http://water.weather.gov/ahps2/inundation/inundation_google.php?gage=mwck1, as early as December of 2014. The Kansas City District fact sheet on Silver Jackets is located at www.nwk.usace.army.mil/Portals/29/docs/outreachfactsheets/Silver%20Jackets%20Overview%202013.pdf.

This project is a partnership between several federal, state and local entities:

- The Kansas Hazard Mitigation Team
- Kansas Department of Emergency Management
- Kansas Department of Agriculture, Division of Water Resources
- City of Manhattan
- Pottawatomie County
- Riley County
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- NOAA National Weather Service (NWS)
- U.S. Geological Survey

For additional information, please contact the USACE project manager (816) 389-3337 or the city floodplain manager (785) 537-2412.

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