

## Program Cooperation Alleviates Repetitive Flooding Burden

Blackhawk Island, located in Jefferson County, is plagued with flooding. Blackhawk Island Road is located on a peninsula with Mud Lake to the north, the Rock River on the south and Lake Koshkonong at the end. There are approximately seventy-five homes on Blackhawk Island, and when the water levels are high, the three bodies of water swell and merge into one, covering the low-lying areas of the peninsula. As the water rises, the entire road becomes submerged and many of the seventy-five homes are affected.

Jefferson County utilized FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) to help residents on Blackhawk Island voluntarily participate in a Flood Mitigation Buyout Program to relocate out of the floodway. The HMGP makes funds available for mitigation measures aimed at reducing the costs associated with damage caused by severe weather events. The State administers the program, but the local communities are responsible for identifying and implementing projects. Although there are several types of projects funded through the HMGP, the flooding in Jefferson County led to the creation of a Floodplain Hazard Mitigation Plan, which indicated acquisition and demolition as the best option for voluntary participants on Blackhawk Island Road.

### *Jefferson County HMGP Acquisition Facts*

- *Participation in the program is voluntary*
- *Grant funds were used to purchase repetitively flooded properties*
- *The structures are demolished*
- *The property is left in perpetuity to the community as open space, never to be built on again.*
- *Taxpayer dollars are saved*

One HMGP requirement is a 75%/25% cost split for each project. The State of Wisconsin funds 12.5% of the 25% local match. Some counties are apprehensive about applying for the program because of this requirement, but Jefferson County pursued various funding sources and successfully acquired 35 structures since 1995 with the assistance of FEMA, Wisconsin Emergency Management, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and the Wisconsin Department of Commerce.

## Priorities Change with New Flooding Events



*Blackhawk Island Road. The homeowner heading towards his home is directly above the road. WEM Photo*

The Jefferson County Emergency Management Office has been working on the Flood Mitigation Project for the last several years. Blackhawk Island Road was identified as the area with the most severe flooding and in 1995, the initial phase of the buyout began and several homes were acquired.

The buyout continues on Blackhawk Island Road, including additional properties in nearby areas that have been identified by the National Flood Insurance Program as Repetitive Loss structures.

Within the last two years, the buyout scope has expanded to include structures in three additional areas in Jefferson County.

The County's main concern is the health and safety of its residents, including the accessibility for local emergency crews. Jan Brom, the first resident who volunteered to participate in the project, described the clean up as "horrendous". When the floodwaters subsided, the burden of the clean up, including removal of snakes, bugs and frogs deposited inside her home from the river water, was just too great. "There was just no place for the water to go," she said. Spring had always been the most depressing season for her because she would drive through town and see her friends growing beautiful tulips and green grass. Returning to her home, surrounded by water, she would think about the muddy mess that was left behind.

### **Savings Realized as Project Expands**

Jefferson County utilized two main sources of funding over the years to fulfill its 12.5% portion of the cost share: a Lake Protection Grant from the WDNR, funding \$600,000 and a Community Development Block Grant from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce, funding more than \$500,000. The Lake Protection Grant's main objective is to prevent harmful material from being poured into lakes. Since each grant has certain required criteria, a combination of the grants was pursued. The Federal portion of the HMGP has totaled more than \$1.5 million.

During the application process for HMGP, the cost to benefit ratio must be considered. As a result of the recent flooding in May 2004, many of the 35 structures acquired, to date, would have been damaged. If the properties were not mitigated it is estimated that the repair expense for the homeowners would have totaled \$406,000 (based on an average value of \$58,000 per structure and a projected 20% damage based on floodwater levels). These are only the structural costs. The emergency costs from first response (making sure residents were safe and the cost of emergency equipment) are extensive during a disaster. The Health Department, local emergency response and the American Red Cross send staff and use their resources to assist residents whose home are uninhabitable due to floodwaters. Since the project has spanned over nine years, the overall savings have well exceeded the cost of the acquisition.



*Acquired home awaiting demolition  
submerged in water from May 2004 flood.  
WEM Photo*

Through program cooperation, the stress on Local, State and Federal funds is lessened as they work towards a similar goal of protecting property and lives. Donna Haugom, a part of the Emergency Management team working on the project reflected, "It is great to know that we helped not only the homeowners, but the environment as well." She feels a

sense of accomplishment knowing that the homeowners will have a safer, healthier existence because of the program.

**For more information on mitigation in the State of Wisconsin,** please contact Roxanne Gray, State Hazard Mitigation Officer, by phone at 608-242-3211 or email at [roxanne.gray@dma.state.wi.us](mailto:roxanne.gray@dma.state.wi.us). For more information about the Wisconsin Division of Emergency Management, go to <http://emergencymanagement.wi.gov>