

NOVEMBER 2009

# COLUMBIA COUNTY



LOCAL MITIGATION STRATEGY

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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The United States and more specifically the State of Florida can no longer afford to shoulder the extraordinarily high human and economic costs disasters bear. All local communities must take steps to decrease the vulnerability of their citizens, businesses, infrastructure, and institutions to the impact from these events. The development of a multi-jurisdictional local mitigation strategy is a pivotal step in the effort to mitigate against natural and man-made disasters.

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.

## 1.1.1. Purpose

The purpose of developing a Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) is to establish an ongoing process that will make hazard mitigation part of the daily functioning life in Columbia County. It serves as a bridge between local governments' programs, plans, and policies including but not limited to the comprehensive growth management plan, comprehensive emergency management plan, land development regulations, and relevant codes and ordinances for effective floodplain management.

Since the early 1990s, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the United States Congress has 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 predisaster 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
- 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 Plan encompasses the most recent process of reviewing and revising the Columbia County LMS in accordance with the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. The main goal of the local mitigation strategy is to identify and assess the risk and vulnerability to various natural and technological disasters the County and its municipalities face, and then develop local strategies to reduce the impact of future disasters. This plan is a continuation of the 2005 efforts and is the product of the 1<sup>st</sup> 5-year revision and update process.

### **1.1.2. Plan Organization**

This Plan is divided into four main sections (Sections 2 – 4) to address FEMA requirements for a local multi-hazard mitigation plan, plus the introduction, crosswalk and appendices. The sections are as follows:

- Section 1 – Introduction
- 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



## 2. PREREQUISITES

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### **Adoption by the Local Governing Body**

**Requirement §201.6(c)(5):** *[The local hazard mitigation plan shall include] documentation that the plan has been formally adopted by the governing body of the jurisdiction requesting approval of the plan (e.g., City Council, County Commissioner, Tribal Council).*

### **Multi-Jurisdictional Plan Adoption**

**Requirement §201.6(c)(5):**  
*For multi-jurisdictional plans, each jurisdiction requesting approval of the plan must document that it has been formally adopted.*

A local jurisdiction 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 five years of the approval date in order to remain eligible for mitigation project grant funding.

The State and FEMA guidelines for submitting the updated LMS are located in Appendix A. Upon completion of FEMA’s review and receipt of the “Approved Pending Adoption” letter from FEMA, the County, City of Lake City, and Town of Fort White will formally adopt the newly updated LMS. As per procedures put forth by FEMA, the county has within one calendar year of receipt of FEMA’s “Approval Pending Adoption” letter to formally adopt the Plan.



Resolutions will be added upon approval and adoption.



## 3. PLANNING PROCESS

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**Requirement §201.6(b):** *In order to develop a more comprehensive approach to reducing the effects of natural disasters, the planning process shall include:*

- (1) An opportunity for the public to comment on the plan during the drafting stage and prior to plan approval;*
- (2) An opportunity for neighboring communities, local and regional agencies involved in hazard mitigation activities, and agencies that have the authority to regulate development, as well as businesses, academia and other private and non-profit interests to be involved in the planning process; and*
- (3) Review and incorporation, if appropriate, of existing plans, studies, reports, and technical information.*

**Requirement §201.6(c)(1):** *[The plan shall document] the planning process used to develop the plan, including how it was prepared, who was involved in the process, and how the public was involved.*

Hazard mitigation is any action taken to permanently reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and their property from the effects of natural hazards. As the direct and indirect costs of disasters continue to rise, it becomes particularly critical that preparing for the onslaught of damage from these events must be done in order to reduce the amount of damage and destruction. The purpose of multi-hazard mitigation is two-fold: 1) to protect people and structures from harm and destruction; and 2) to minimize the costs of disaster response and recovery. Hazard mitigation planning is the process that analyzes a community's risk from natural hazards, coordinates available resources, and implements actions to reduce identified risks.

This section of the Columbia County Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) describes and documents the process used to develop and update the Columbia County LMS. This includes how it was updated and who was involved in the process.

### 3.1.2. Planning Area and Participation

Columbia County is located in the north central portion of the State of Florida and is bordered on the north by the State of Georgia, on the east by Baker and Union Counties, on the south by Alachua and Gilchrist Counties and on the west by Hamilton and Suwannee Counties. The Santa Fe River forms the boundary in the south and the



Suwannee River forms a boundary on the northwest border of the County. Approximately 126 square miles or 80,640 acres are located within the Osceola National Forest on the eastern side of the County. The County has two incorporated municipalities within its border, The City of Lake City and The Town of Fort White. The interchange for Interstate Highways 10 and 75 is located in the northwest portion of the County.

Since the 2005 plan approval, no new municipalities have been either created or disbanded. The planning area continues to include the City of Lake City, Town of Fort White, and the unincorporated areas.

### **3.1.3. Coordination**

The Columbia County Emergency Management office (CCEM) is the lead agency in scheduling and conducting the efforts of the Local Mitigation Strategy Working Group (LMSWG), including annual and 5-year LMS updates.

#### *Local and Regional Agency Involvement*

The Columbia County LMS is a local community product which was developed by the LMSWG in 2005 to be in compliance with the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 requirements, and in 2010 for the 5-year required update. The Working Group is comprised of local private citizens, local business, county / city government personnel, neighboring county government officials and regional officials. The CCEM initiated the LMS planning process by hiring consultants to coordinate and author the Plan including the 2005 and 2010 update. Facilitated by the consultant, CCEM and the Working Group worked together to engage local agencies and community members in the planning process.

The Working Group is scheduled to meet on at least a semi-annual basis (if possible, fall and spring) to review the local mitigation strategy in order to ensure it is current and reflects changing conditions within the community (see Section 6 for more detail). The Working Group has been meeting since 2005 to review and approve mitigation projects to be added to the project list. The Working Group recognizes that they were not particularly diligent when it came to meeting the maintenance schedule between the 2005 and 2010 updates. They have since realized the importance of maintaining the LMS Plan and in moving forward will be fully committed in adhering to the schedule outlined in the Plan Maintenance section. The Working Group met numerous times during the 2010 update process, for a complete list of 2010 meeting dates and meeting materials please refer to Appendix B.

The Working Group members consist of a few remaining members from the 2005 Plan, as well as new members for the 2010 update. All members of the Working Group participated in various aspects of the update process including technical assistance, data input, and local knowledge and/or data gathering (see Appendix C). The newly required NFIP element was developed with the assistance of the County and City Floodplain Administrator.



### *Neighboring Community Involvement*

Neighboring Communities were invited to participate in the update process. Hamilton County was represented during the update process.

### *Public Involvement*

The general public (residents, businesses, and other interested parties) is given the opportunity to participate in any LMS meeting throughout the 5-year planning cycle. They also have the opportunity to comment on the plan during the annual and required 5-year update. Comments can be submitted during the drafting stage and prior to plan approval as outlined in the Plan Maintenance Section. All Working Group meetings are open to the public and welcome any input from attendees whether they are a committee member or not. All Working Group meeting notices are published in The Lake City Reporter and on the CCEM website (see Appendix B).

### *Meeting Summaries*

The Working Group meets on a semi-annual basis and as needed. Since the 2005 plan approval, the Working Group has met to review and approve mitigation projects to be added to the project list in addition to conducting the annual update. For the purpose of 2010 Plan update, the Working Group meeting schedule is summarized below (see Appendix B for more detail). A copy of the updated LMS was made available to the public at the CCEM office, in the public library and on the Columbia County Emergency Management website. Any feedback from the public is submitted to the Columbia County Emergency Management office and reviewed by the Working Group for consideration.

#### *July 23, 2009*

A general overview was provided to the Working Group of the LMS update process describing why it is needed, who should be involved, what resources are needed to conduct the update, what timeframe to expect and the next steps.

The group was asked to review the Plan Maintenance Section of the plan and determine if the process is still viable. Following was an overview of the risk assessment and the process by which it will be updated. The current critical facilities list was requested and discussed.

#### *August 20, 2009*

The update timeline was reviewed and future meeting dates were agreed upon. They were scheduled as follows:



September 16, 2009 9:00a.m. – 12:00p.m.

October 7, 2009 9:00a.m. – 12:00p.m.

October 21, 2009 9:00a.m. – 12:00p.m.

The Working Group member list from the 2005 Plan was cross referenced to ensure the participants for this update capture an appropriate representation of the various segments of the county. The group developed a list of stakeholders of whom they felt were missing and the LMS Chair will extend written invitations to these individuals/organizations (see Appendix D). Other housekeeping issues, including the organization of the plan, were discussed. The Mitigation Strategy was reviewed and Goals and Objectives were revised.

The Working Group reviewed the Risk Assessment, specifically the hazards and vulnerabilities that affect Columbia County. This debate sparked a new discussion which resulted in additions to the goals and objectives list. Acquisition of historical hazard data was also discussed.

*September 16, 2009*

Discussions were conducted in regard to the process by which the draft LMS would be made available to the public. Additionally the Working Group reviewed the goals and objectives that were proposed during the August 20, 2009 meeting. These were found to be favorable with the addition of a few new objectives. The Working Group examined the existing plans, studies, reports and technical information section and created a list of documents to be reviewed for the 2010 update.

*October 7, 2009*

The group discussed the need for an additional meeting before the plan would be ready to submit to the State. A new meeting date of November 4, 2009 from 9:00am – 12:00pm was scheduled. The Working Group reviewed the final goals and objectives as amended after the 9/16/09 meeting. The Working Group reviewed the Risk Assessment and determined the probability for each identified hazard. The then reviewed the status of mitigation actions within the current mitigation strategy.

*October 28, 2009*

The Working Group reviewed and approved the Plan Maintenance and Public Participation sections. The Working Group conducted an assessment of the LMS Projects. Comments were accepted and new projects were considered for addition. In the end, the group updated the project list to incorporate 3 new countywide initiatives and 2 Lake City public acquisition projects. A draft of the prioritization process was presented and recommended revisions that the Working Group members felt best



reflected the objectives of the community were accepted. Formal suggestions were integrated into process with the draft pending finalization at the next meeting.

*November 4, 2009*

The revised prioritization process was reviewed and determined to be in accordance with the community objectives and was subsequently approved. A final review of the planning process, risk assessment, and mitigation strategy sections was conducted. After a thorough analysis, members concluded that these too were in concordance with community objectives and unanimously agreed for their approval.

