

International Flood Mitigation Initiative for the Red River

IFMI highlights initiatives that were born out after the Red River flood that impacted across the Canada-United States border.

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The Red River flows for 400 miles from south to north across the Canada-United States border at the 49th parallel. The Red River basin includes the States of South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota and the Canadian province of Manitoba. In 1997, the Red River flooded. Grand Forks, ND and East Grand Forks, MN suffered extensive damage. Manitoba, Canada was narrowly saved by a change in wind direction at time of the peak flood level. The damage from this 1997 flood totaled US \$500,000,000. The entire basin was disrupted for months.

In the aftermath, the governments of the United States and Canada jointly sponsored The International Flood Mitigation Initiative for the Red River (IFMI). IFMI was the first watershed-wide programme funded by Project Impact: Building Disaster Resistant Communities, a national disaster mitigation initiative developed by the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency

(FEMA). For this first regional and international project of its kind, FEMA Director James Lee Witt asked the Consensus Council in Bismarck, North Dakota to assemble Canadian and US participants in a consensus process, with bi-national staffing. IFMI sought to build consensus on a comprehensive set of practical initiatives to reduce future flood damages in the Red River basin and to strengthen basin community resources to accomplish this goal.




Participants in IFMI included representatives of the states of Minnesota and North Dakota and the province of Manitoba including legislators; provincial and state executive branch officials with responsibilities for public health, the environment, water, and natural resources; representatives of federal emergency management, environment and water agencies; political leaders; local government officials; disaster relief agencies; environmental organizations; business and banking groups; university leaders; charitable foundation representatives; international agencies; and water management agencies.

The goals of the IFMI process were identified as follows:

Goal No. 1: Developing Basin Wide Cooperation, Coordination and Citizen Participation: To develop and support implementation of a basin-wide approach for forecasting, cooperation and communication for flood mitigation in ways that assure accountability, citizen assistance, responsiveness to local concerns, and public awareness and participation.

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Goal No. 2: Forging Public-Private and Community Partnerships: To forge lasting partnerships among government, private and non-profit organizations and communities to ensure best practices in flood mitigation.

Goal No. 3: Protecting People and Property: To recommend and support flood mitigation strategies that protect human life, property and well being.

Goal No. 4: Enhancing Environment, Economy and Community: To recommend and support flood mitigation practices that enhance ecological benefits, economic development, heritage preservation, and social, cultural and recreational opportunities.

Goal No. 5: Coordinated Oversight and Funding: To recommend a method for establishing basin wide coordinated oversight and for securing funding and other resources needed to achieve these flood mitigation goals.

IFMI sponsored fourteen community meetings in locations in North Dakota, Minnesota and Manitoba. The community meetings guided the direction of the assembled leaders, provided new ideas and helped establish the IFMI priorities. Community meetings within the basin were held early in the process to identify citizen values and priorities and near the end of the process to assess and improve the IFMI proposals and initiatives.

IFMI participants met 14 times from December 1998 through March 2000 in cities throughout the Red River Basin. Meetings included a review of progress, education sessions on specific topics followed by discussions and often by breakout groups that each considered aspects of the education sessions and developed recommendations while ideas were still fresh.

IFMI produced a series of 12 initiatives, some of which are illustrated in the text box below, that are grouped into three categories: Basin-wide Flood Mitigation Governance, Public Education and Research on Flood Damage Mitigation and Basin-wide Flood Resilience.

Examples of International Flood Mitigation Initiative (IFMI) Projects and Activities

Basin Legislator Forum. A regular gathering of Manitoba, Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota legislators from the Red River Basin to increase understanding of basin-wide issues (including flood mitigation) faced by each jurisdiction and to lay a foundation for building cooperative agreements among the jurisdictions. This group of 30 legislators from the four jurisdictions has met annually since 2001. They deal not only with water/flood mitigation but also energy transmission, renewable energy, agriculture harmonization, animal health and food safety and joint tourism efforts.

The Greenway on the Red. A shared, continuous Greenway corridor along the Red River and its tributaries was developed that links the people and communities of the Red River Basin from Lake Traverse in South Dakota to Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba. The Greenway on the Red will reduce and mitigate future flood damage while enhancing economic development, conservation and wildlife habitat, recreation, and tourism. To date, Greenway on the Red has focused its efforts both stateside and in Manitoba on: (1) an inventory and assessment of ongoing and potential Greenway initiatives; (2) private landowner outreach; (3) research linkages with the IFMI-recommended Red River Institute for Research, Mapping and Education; and (4) education and communication efforts. Through meetings with a broad base of private and agency partners, Greenway on the Red is developing protocols for land management within the Greenway, and ways to maximize the benefits of Greenway designation beyond flood mitigation.

"River Watch". A media partnership that has been created a regular programme for television and radio and for an extensive web site. RiverWatch is a partnership between Prairie Public Broadcasting, the International Flood Mitigation Initiative, the viewing and listening public and more than 28 local, state, federal and communication partners. During a flood event, the RiverWatch provides current and reliable television and radio news and weather updates on flooding and flood mitigation throughout the Red River Valley of the North. Weather forecasts and river level update information are provided daily by the University of North Dakota's Regional Weather Information Center, The National Weather Service and Environment Canada. Year-round expanded information is posted daily on the website, riverwatchonline.org. It includes public information and education about the river, flood preparation, flood recovery and flood mitigation in the Red River Valley. In addition, the RiverWatch project - with guidance from members of the Red River Center for Watershed Education - has developed student and teacher friendly educational materials. These lessons can be used with most science and social studies curriculums for students at the fourth, fifth and sixth grade levels. They are available on request. The RiverWatch team continues to gather information in preparation of next spring's potential flood events.