

## Public Input Wanted as County Updates Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan

July 22, 2020 – Recently, Otter Tail County suffered extensive property damage and loss of life as a result of four tornadoes in a single day. As we work to recover from this disaster, we seek to identify ways we can continue to prepare our county for future tornadoes and other natural disasters.

The Otter Tail County Office of Emergency Management is working with U-Spatial at the University of Minnesota Duluth to update the County’s Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan (MHMP). The plan assesses the natural hazards that pose risk to the county, such as tornadoes, straight line winds, ice storms, blizzards, wildfire, flooding, and extreme temperatures and identifies ways to minimize the damage of future events. As the County works to update the plan, it wants to hear from the public.

The Otter Tail County MHMP is a multi-jurisdictional plan that covers Otter Tail County, including the cities of Battle Lake, Bluffton, Clitherall, Dalton, Deer Creek, Dent, Elizabeth, Erhard, Fergus Falls, Henning, New York Mills, Ottertail, Parkers Prairie, Pelican Rapids, Perham, Richville, Underwood, Urbank, Vergas, and Vining. The plan additionally covers the portions of the cities of Rothsay and Wadena that are located within Otter Tail County. The Otter Tail County MHMP also incorporates the concerns and needs of townships, school districts, and other stakeholders participating in the plan. The plan will be updated by a planning team made up of representatives from County departments, local municipalities, school districts and other key stakeholders.

“Hazard mitigation planning is a central part of our emergency management program,” said Patrick Waletzko, Otter Tail County Emergency Management Director. “Understanding the natural hazards that can cause serious impact to our communities and taking action to reduce or eliminate the impact of future disasters makes us more resilient. Hazard mitigation helps us to break the cycle of damage and repair caused by things like flooding, ice storms, and severe wind events that can damage property, stress economies, and threaten life safety in our county.”

Examples of hazard mitigation include actions include improvement of roads and culverts that experience repetitive flooding; construction of tornado safe rooms at campgrounds, public parks, mobile home parks or schools; burying powerlines that may fail due to heavy snow, ice or wind storms; ensuring timely emergency communication to the public through warning sirens and mass notification systems, and conducting public awareness and education campaigns to help people to be prepared to take safe action before, during, or following a hazard event. Some mitigation activities may be eligible for future FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant funding.

Public input is an essential part of the plan update. As part of the planning process, Otter Tail County is seeking feedback from residents and businesses from across the County to incorporate into the plan:

- What are the natural hazards you feel pose the greatest risk to your community?
- Have you experienced a previous disaster event?
- What concerns do you have, and what sorts of mitigation actions or projects do you feel would help to reduce the damages of potential future events for your personal property, your community, or the County as a whole?

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Comments, concerns, or questions regarding natural disasters and potential mitigation actions to be included into the plan update process should be submitted to Otter Tail County Emergency Management by phone or email. Public comments may also be submitted on the Otter Tail County Facebook page where this news release will be posted.

There will be additional opportunities for public feedback throughout the planning process. A draft of the plan will be posted on the County website for public review prior to submission of the plan to the State of Minnesota. Future news releases will be shared with the media to notify the public of these opportunities.

The Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) requires counties to update their plan every 5 years to maintain eligibility for FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) grant programs.

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