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UPSTATE FLOOD MITIGATION TASK FORCE ANNOUNCES RECOMMENDATIONS TO MITIGATE FLOODING THROUGHOUT THE MOHAWK AND OSWEGO RIVER BASINS

*Year-long Review Concludes, Report Identifies and Recommends Ways to Enhance
Flood Management and Mitigation in the Mohawk Valley and Central New York*

Full Task Force Report Available [Here](#)

Chair of the Upstate Flood Mitigation Task Force and New York State Canal Corporation Director Brian U. Stratton today announced that the Task Force has concluded its year-long investigation into the impacts of flooding throughout the Mohawk and Oswego River Basins and has identified a series of recommendations that can be taken to mitigate future flood damages.

“With extreme weather impacting New Yorkers and our communities on a more frequent basis, and through the work of the Upstate Flood Mitigation Task Force, we now have tangible action items that seek to improve our state’s resiliency,” **Task Force Chair Stratton** said. “Throughout this past year under Governor Hochul’s direction, the Task Force has collaborated with various subject matter experts, several state agencies, and members of the public to research and recommend mitigation strategies that aim to protect the residents who live within these watersheds from future high-water events. With the report now in hand, I look forward to continuing our engagement as we work to implement the recommended mitigation tactics with our partners in government.”

The nine-member Task Force, appointed by Governor Hochul and the State Legislature in July 2022, and its subcommittees reviewed the effects of flooding in the Mohawk and Oswego River Basins. The two watersheds combined encompass more than 8,500 square miles in all spanning from the Capital Region west to the Finger Lakes. The two drainage basins are individually distinct in their respective geology, topography, and hydrological dynamics with the Mohawk River Basin having a steep elevation and a lack of large water bodies to provide flood water storage, whereas the Oswego River Basin has little change in elevation and receives combined flows from seven of New York’s 11 Finger Lakes.

The Task Force reviewed the impacts of flooding in these areas over the last five years to agriculture, transportation, infrastructure, land use, public health, insurance, tourism,

recreation, and power generation. In addition, the Task Force assessed the New York State Canal system's operation, procedures and plans that may impact flood mitigation and management and identified adaptive measures, with costs, that could be executed to lessen flood damages.

The Task Force recommends implementing the following measures to enhance flood management and mitigation in the Mohawk and Oswego River Basins:

COMMON RECOMMENDATIONS

A critical initial project is the development of detailed watershed models and improved communications across both the Mohawk River and Oswego River Basins. As noted throughout the Report, the two watersheds are complex systems that are managed by many different private and public entities for various purposes, including ecological, recreation, potable water supplies, navigation, and hydropower. A common understanding of how these complex systems react and operate during normal flow conditions as well as different and changing weather patterns to minimize flooding, while still supporting their core purposes, will be needed to develop programmatic approaches to inform operations and policy actions throughout the two basins.

Numerical Watershed Models

Develop and calibrate model(s) utilizing industry standard software for each watershed (multiple models may be required per watershed) to allow scenario development and response estimation. The development of trustworthy models is a very important first step to managing the two watersheds and will permit more informed decision making across the various watershed managing entities to ensure intended benefits of the proposed recommendations and future adaptive measures are achieved.

Standing Committees

Create a permanent, standing committee for each watershed to include water control entities, community stakeholders, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES), and other appropriate entities. The purpose of the Committees would be to develop better flood operational strategies, to direct water releases during a flood event or create actionable operational plans for high flow events during canal navigation and non-navigation seasons, and to provide better public communication during extreme events.

Increase Public Outreach, Education, and Communication

Recommend developing an informal group of involved state agencies, lake associations, the New York State Floodplain and Stormwater Manager's Association, and local governments to develop an educational strategy to inform and provide land use tools to both local government and those stakeholders residing near or within the floodplain to reduce flooding long term and increase awareness of their risks during a flood event. In

addition, the Task Force recommends developing and providing information/disclosure of flood prone areas to municipalities, real estate companies and the public to manage the property buyer's development expectations.

Communicate High Flow Event Elevations Using a Common Datum

To improve communication with the public and other stakeholders, especially during high water events, the Task Force recommends communicating all elevations using a common datum. All publicly facing flood event elevations should be reported and displayed in NAVD88 datum. The use of the Barge Canal Datum (BCD) and NAVD29 should be discontinued. Additionally, a central, electronic location should be developed to allow stakeholders to obtain and view existing conditions and forecast condition information to better understand their risk.

Purchase and/or Restore Disconnected Floodplains

Support state and local entities and Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) efforts and initiatives to purchase and/or restore these areas to provide additional flood storage and peak flow attenuation potentially reducing current upstream and downstream flooding impacts and improving water quality.

Purchase Flood-Prone Structures within the Floodplain

Develop a more robust, coordinated flood buyout program throughout the basins for homes within the FEMA floodplain. The buyout program should be targeted for properties subject to severe flooding, not nuisance flooding. These would be properties that are within FEMA mapped floodways, especially those properties subject to repetitive flooding.

Address Tributary and Main Stem Erosion and Sedimentation

There are many different local, state, and federal agencies involved in reducing sedimentation and erosion. The Canal Corporation and DEC should initiate discussions with other responsible local, state and federal agencies as well as local stakeholders for each watershed to champion programs, provide information on available grant programs, and, if agreeable, begin working on basin wide planning for sediment and erosion reduction.

National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) support for Municipalities and DEC

Pursue and implement additional measures to assist DEC with program oversight and pursue additional funding or educational opportunities to assist communities with implementation and compliance.

Reduce Development in Flood Prone Areas

Develop an outreach program at the state level to assist municipal governments having jurisdiction over properties in each watershed. Additionally, provide municipalities with a 'toolkit' including recommended model zoning and land development provisions, as well as higher standards for their local laws for flood damage prevention, that would be helpful in reducing flooding and flood damages over time. The goal would be to reduce filling in flood prone areas, reduce runoff, and reduce approval of future development in flood prone areas.

Sharing of Agency Hydraulic Studies with Other Agencies and Stakeholders

A more formal framework for sharing hydraulic modeling completed by state agencies should be developed and implemented to avoid redundant efforts and to keep all agencies informed of ongoing efforts.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Additional recommendations specific to the Mohawk and Oswego River Basins may be found [here](#).

Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Basil Seggos said, "Climate change is the driving force between an increasing number of flooding and extreme weather events across New York State. The work of the Upstate Flood Mitigation Task Force, bolstered by generational investments to improve water infrastructure, further demonstrates Governor Hochul's sustained commitment to assisting at-risk communities, including those in the Oswego and Mohawk River basins. Through ongoing collaboration across agencies, bolstered by local expertise, implementation of the task force recommendations will be instrumental in benefiting the region's environment, economy, and communities."

Department of Transportation Commissioner Marie Therese Dominguez said, "New York is seeing the devastating impact that climate change is having on our state with increased extreme weather events and rising water levels leading to greater risks of flooding – all of which impacts businesses, communities and people across the state. As a part of addressing these challenges under Governor Kathy Hochul's leadership, the Upstate Flood Mitigation Task Force is creating an actionable plan to help mitigate the impacts of future flooding. These measures will help create a more sustainable transportation infrastructure for communities throughout the Oswego and Mohawk River basins now and in the future."

Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services Commissioner Jackie Bray said, "New Yorkers face flooding threats across the state and all year round. DHSES works with our public safety partners in local, state and federal agencies to mitigate the effects of flooding on our communities and to build a more resilient New York."

State Senator John W. Mannion said, "I look forward to reviewing the recommendations of this report and am hopeful we can use its findings as a guide towards meaningful actions to mitigate flooding in Upstate communities. I appreciate the work and leadership of the Canal Corporation and I thank all the members of the task force for their service and for soliciting input from stakeholders across the state."

Assemblymember Al Stirpe said, "The Upstate Flood Mitigation Task Force was created to provide the experienced leadership and critical assessment needed to find viable solutions to natural extreme flooding weather events that have impacted our communities in recent years. And the submission of the task force's initial report detailing floodplain management measures is a critical step forward. I thank the New York State Canal Corporation Director, Brian U. Stratton, who serves as the chairperson for spearheading this effort and working in conjunction with our communities to diligently execute the task force's mission and produce this public report. We must continue working together to fortify our flood mitigation strategies and ultimately protect residents and businesses from the devastation of future flooding. "

With the report now submitted, the Task Force will convene annually as a working group to support the implementation of its initial recommendations and to continuously update the report based on current or forecasted conditions throughout the watersheds.

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