

## Equity in Disaster Related Mitigation

*Patrick Carnahan, R7 Resilience and Infrastructure Branch Chief*

Across the spectrum of Emergency Management, both Mitigation and Resilience have become key priorities, with increased funding options available to local communities in both disaster and non-disaster grant programs. Within Public Assistance (PA), Section 406 Mitigation funding is available to incorporate mitigation measures into the restoration process of damaged facilities to increase resilience against future events. With increased attention upon incorporating mitigation measures in the disaster recovery process, there is a corresponding natural tendency to prioritize and highlight the mitigation potential upon large, high-dollar infrastructure typical of larger jurisdictions. Yet, what may be perceived as a small, low-dollar mitigation measure may also be incredibly impactful to a smaller jurisdiction without the economic tax base of a larger community. For this reason, Region 7 PA strives to ensure all sub-applicants – regardless of size or background – are afforded the opportunity to pursue PA 406 Mitigation.

Recent PA declarations in Region 7 have seen a variety of effective mitigation proposals, ranging from a few hundred dollars to tens of millions. Mitigation measures such as flood walls, utility elevations, and increasing the capacity of large, drainage facilities are all examples of high-dollar mitigation projects typically pursued for larger sub-applicants such as county or city governments. However, Region 7 PA field operations teams regularly pursue measures for smaller sub-applicants (small county/city governments, townships, etc.) that are also incredibly impactful. For example, in a recent declaration, a small township experienced damages to a corrugated metal drainage pipe (CMP) in the amount of \$3,800. Without a FEMA PA declaration the township's road maintenance budget would have almost been depleted to simply replace the CMP. However, FEMA PA was able to replace the CMP and obligate mitigation funding in the amount of \$138 to ensure the CMP's integrity during heavy flooding. Despite subsequent flooding of greater severity, this CMP has remained intact. From a monetary perspective this mitigation measure may seem relatively insignificant, however due to a \$138 investment by FEMA and the local township, further regular financial burden has been avoided.

The most recent Public Assistance Declarations in Region 7 (DR-4612-MO and DR-4616-NE) serve as prime examples of how FEMA Region 7 seeks to ensure all sub-applicants are provided the opportunity to incorporate resilience into their restoration activities. This has been accomplished through two specific achievements. First, PA Program Delivery Managers (PDMGs), in their interactions with sub-applicants, have provided greater attention and focus during initial and follow-on meetings to identify damage and scope projects. Second, the DR-4612/4616 staff have been able to coordinate attendance for PA 406 Mitigation Specialists at 100% of PA Recovery Scoping Meetings, as well as increased participation in PA Exploratory Calls. The ability of the PDMGs and PA 406 Mitigation Specialists to prioritize mitigation during these initial meetings allows the individual disaster teams to thoroughly discuss and identify appropriate mitigation solutions with the affected communities. These efforts have been extended across all applicants, regardless of size or type (County, City, Non-Profit, etc.).

Resilience and Mitigation will continue to become more critical to Emergency Managers and local communities, as the Federal Government continues to posture itself to meet the increasing demands for investment in infrastructure and to battle the effects of climate change. Region 7's Public Assistance

Branch – in concert with the Resilience and Infrastructure Branch – are uniquely postured to meet the future resilience needs of our partners and stakeholders.