

# HAZARD MITIGATION

Keeping Minnesota *Ready*



## ZUMBRO FALLS ACQUISITION PROJECT

Every summer, a small town in southeastern Minnesota welcomes visitors who enjoy the Zumbro River for canoeing, tubing and fishing. But that same scenic waterway has repeatedly caused major flooding in Zumbro Falls. Homes — many of which were located on the aptly named “Water Street” — flooded year after year until a successful hazard mitigation project removed the houses and provided the community with an attractive green space.

“It was tough to see the houses go,” said former Zumbro Falls Mayor Al Christenson. “But fortunately, it was mostly a relocation program.” Christenson was not only the mayor during the September 2010 flood; his home was among those devastated by flood waters. He participated in the buyout program approved by community leaders in May 2011.



They moved forward with a hazard mitigation project that included the purchase of 14 residential homes and one commercial property by the city of Zumbro Falls. All structures were within the 100-year floodplain of the Zumbro River and Buckman Coulee, an adjacent drainageway.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) helped Zumbro Falls secure a \$1.5 million federal grant through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources assisted with a local match of \$488,384. Details on the HMGP are available at <http://hsem.dps.mn.gov>

“We know acquisition projects work to reduce future damage from floods,” said Minnesota’s State Hazard Mitigation Officer Jen Nelson. “We are anxious to help more Minnesota communities locate their greatest flooding risk and determine ways to eliminate it.”

[hsem.dps.mn.gov](http://hsem.dps.mn.gov)



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In Zumbro Falls, community leaders knew they had to prevent future damage and also protect the city's residents. The protection goal stems from a deadly history in southeastern Minnesota.

In May 1970, three people died following a flash flood in the area; in 1978, five people drowned in flood waters and one was electrocuted trying to pump out a basement; in June of 2005 a woman was rescued and one man died after their vehicles were swept off Highway 1.

Although no one died during the 2010 flood, Christenson remembers close calls as first responders rescued folks trapped in the upper levels of their homes and in cars. He said the acquisition program offered homeowners a fair price for properties that could never be rebuilt in a practical manner.

"Don't let your emotions rule," Christenson advises homeowners. "Look at the options, because the acquisition program benefits homeowners and communities." The open green space that now exists, he points out, will revitalize the riverfront and provide a gathering spot for community festivals and other cultural events, including the annual *Zumbro Falls Ripplin River* days.

Nearby communities also participated in the property acquisition process following the floods of September 2010.

- The city of Hammond purchased four substantially damaged homes with FEMA funding in the amount of \$446,310.
- Wabasha County purchased two substantially damaged homes with FEMA funding in the amount of \$221,498.
- The city of Oronoco purchased five substantially damaged homes with FEMA funding in the amount of \$456,863.
- The city of Pine Island purchased one substantially damaged home with FEMA funding in the amount of \$273,300.

Additional counties and cities in the region affected by the 2010 flood participated in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Hazard Mitigation program, also known as the Flood Damage Reduction program. That resulted in additional buyouts due to the flood of 2010.

Minnesota's Hazard Mitigation staff is prepared to help community members anywhere in Minnesota learn how to participate in the property acquisition process. For more information email staff at [hazard.mitigation@state.mn.us](mailto:hazard.mitigation@state.mn.us).