

## SECTION VIII

# INTERAGENCY RECOVERY TASK FORCE

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### A. INTERAGENCY RECOVERY TASK FORCE - OVERVIEW

In the midst of one of the most historic floods in the modern history of the Mississippi River, the MVD was charged to assemble key Federal and state agencies in the form of an Interagency Recovery Task Force (IRTF). The primary intent of this task force was to focus regional managers, leaders and decision maker's attention, priorities and resources on the challenging flood recovery. This task force met regularly for more than a year to identify and successfully address numerous flood recovery challenges and issues. An Annual Report was developed to provide a synopsis of the IRTF's activities, accomplishments and lessons learned. The Report reviews IRTF efforts in context of established purpose, mission, goals and objectives. Brief summations of the series of eight IRTF meetings convened provide understanding of the range of topics and issues embraced by this group. Products directly or indirectly influenced by the IRTF are detailed in this document as well. This Report concludes with sections on lessons learned and next steps that describe the value-added nature of interagency collaboration and its importance for continued improvement and implementation of a successful and shared responsibility for FRM.

The IRTF was conducted under the direct leadership of MVD Commanders MG Michael Walsh from May to October 2011 and MG John Peabody from October 2011 to present. This forum was designed and implemented in an integrated, collaborative, and holistic fashion to facilitate the recovery and rehabilitation of flood risk management (FRM), navigation, and floodplain management systems (FRMS) damaged by the historic Mississippi River Basin flooding of 2011. Members united in common purpose to leverage State/Federal resources and communication networks to ensure the continued safety and protection of lives and livelihoods of affected U.S. citizens, communities and industry. Charter members included regional and state-level representatives from Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana. Coordinating agencies included FEMA; NWS; USDA; USEPA; USGS; USCG; Maritime Administration (MARAD); and the Corps' Major Subordinate Commands, comprised of MVD; LRD; and Northwestern Division; and support from Southwest Division and South Atlantic Division.

The efforts by the IRTF in 2011-2012 have served to improve working relationships, increase flood risk understanding and implement critical flood repairs and preparedness actions. Group discussion covered a broad and challenging array of tactical and strategic Flood Risk/Recovery responsibilities and challenges. Member agencies leveraged authorities, experience, and resources to put the region on an aggressive and attainable path to recovery; increased flood risk awareness; and made recommendations for future flood preparedness. The regularity and focus of IRTF meetings and interactions were appropriately paced with the tempo and challenges of the recovery process. With the late December 2011 passage of and supplemental appropriations provided by the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act, the Corps is well positioned to repair and restore the majority of damaged levees, structures and navigation channels over next 2 years. With construction repairs in full swing and a below average spring flood season in 2012, the IRTF is downshifting to a long-term sustainment mode that will seek to maintain periodic interaction to ensure recovery is progressing smoothly and the working relationship among State/Federal agencies is maintained through the full life cycle of regional FRM.

### B. INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

**1. Purpose.** The IRTF was intended to create an integrated and holistic method of rehabilitating our flood risk management systems damaged by recent flood events, by collaborating and combining solutions for short- and long-term restoration efforts. The Task Force was established with lead Federal agencies and state-appointed members involved in assessing, documenting, and repairing FRM, floodplain management, and watershed management systems.

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**2. Mission Statement.** The IRTF collaborative process will:

- create a multi-agency forum to solve the many regional issues and challenges that will be presented in the recovery from this historic flood event;
- provide safety and security for citizens lives and livelihoods;
- create strong regional effort to inspect, review, reset and restore our FRMS;
- pursue all potential funding methods from Federal and state sources;
- give consideration to traditional and non-traditional alternatives in repair and restoration;
- implement a collaborative and communicative approach across regional and state boundaries to prioritize our efforts and resources during the challenging recovery process;
- facilitate strategic, integrated life-cycle mitigation actions to reduce the threat, vulnerability and consequences of flooding in the Mississippi River Valley;
- create or supplement a mechanism to collaboratively solve issues and implement or recommend solutions; and
- increase and improve flood risk communication and outreach.

**3. Goals and Objectives**

- Implement a consistent approach across region and state boundaries in order to prioritize agencies, authorities, and resources in the rehabilitation process
- Create a strong team to inspect, review, repair and restore our FRMS and adjacent project.
- Create an IRTF management plan
- Share responsibility for all flood plain management restoration initiatives, programs, and projects in order to reduce flood risks long term
- Supply an effective outreach program to communicate short and long term to the public, as well as, educate on the agencies' responsibilities, programs and authorities
- Pursue all potential funding methods from Federal and state resources
- Ensure continuous pre- and post-disaster collaboration
- Give consideration to all structural and non-structural alternatives in repair and restoration
- Learn about programs, identifying limitations and opportunities, and combine programs to create integrated, comprehensive and sustainable solutions
- Create a multi-agency technical resource for state and local agencies
- Improve flood risk outreach by presenting a unified interagency message to better educate and advise mutual customers as a result of gaining familiarity with each agency's missions, processes and programs
- Improve internal and external risk communication, including increased awareness of residual risk
- Identify and facilitate improvements to existing programs, policies and processes

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- Identify other collaboration opportunities to combine resources and identify gaps, minimize duplication of effort, and ensure consistency
- Catalog and share information on past and future projects and initiatives
- Prioritize current and future initiatives individually and collectively

**4. Management Plan.** The IRTF Management Plan (IRTFMP) was developed to cover the scope of the short-term efforts required for recovery from the Mississippi River Basin Flood Event. The operational boundary and the duration of the IRTF were further defined by the Commander, MVD in his request to activate the IRTF. This IRTFMP will remain in effect for the duration of the Task Force, as agreed to by its member agencies. This plan was not intended to usurp any authorities and programs currently assigned to its member states and agencies, nor deny any applying party access to existing programs for repairs and associated restoration and/or other impediments.

**5. Charter.** A Charter was also established and signed by participating agencies as solidarity and clarity of purpose. The paragraph on the signatory page reads as follows:

*The Interagency Recovery Task Force was established to create a highly communicative and collaborative forum of state and Federal agencies with common interests and authorities to affect the repair, recovery and evaluation necessitated by the historic 2011 Mississippi River flood event. The signatory state and Federal agencies will consider a wide range of traditional and innovative options to develop meaningful solutions for short and long-term restoration efforts. The following state and Federal representatives are committed to working together to effectively and efficiently serve the American public and private interests for the protection of human life/safety and economic prosperity:*

The team was purposefully assembled to be strictly intergovernmental and multiple state in nature. Participating agency representatives, listed in Section VIII. A, paragraph 2, contributed a broad range of relevant and crucial experience and information to this team effort. The Corps maintained and distributed a contact database and was responsible for organizing, coordinating and facilitating team meetings, as well as recording and maintaining final meeting minutes.

### **C. TASK FORCE ACTIONS**

Between May 28, 2011 and June 30, 2012, the IRTF held eight meetings at various locations throughout the Mississippi Valley. The first and last two meetings in this time period were conducted as webinars while the other five were one-day face-to-face meetings. Meeting agendas, presentations, and handouts are available on the Corps Regional Flood Risk Management Website (<http://www.mvd.usace.army.mil/>). Appendix J, *IRTF Annual Report (2011-12,*) provides a more detailed synopsis of the IRTF meetings, products, and actions. The remainder of this section provides a brief description and illustration of some of the highlighted IRTF 2011-12 actions.

**1. Newsletters.** A series of six IRTF newsletters and three quarterly ‘*Our Mississippi*’ newsletters were produced over the course of the past year. These newsletters served as important communication tools which quickly and effectively informed State and Federal partners, stakeholders, members of Congress, and the general public about the continued efforts and progress of 2011 flood recovery efforts.

The IRTF newsletters provided the Corps and our partners a vehicle to communicate the flood recovery efforts through a series of pictures and articles which captured the focus of discussions, topics of concern;

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and status of ongoing recovery efforts during the first year of post-flood recovery. The IRTF newsletters were distributed electronically to a large email distribution and posted to the RFRM website for direct public access.

The ‘*Our Mississippi*’ newsletters were also produced with a number of Mississippi River Basin flood recovery and public interest stories. The newsletters were originally designed as a Corps communication tool for the Upper Mississippi River with the intent that someday the publication could be expanded to a publication for the entire Mississippi River Basin. The 2011 Flood Event was a watershed-focused response and recovery effort and offered opportunity to expand the focus and distribution of this regional newsletter. Beginning with the fall 2011 edition, all subsequent quarterly publications have continued to both provide a diverse range of Mississippi River stories of interest and to serve as a communication tool for the 2011 Flood recovery efforts. The ‘*Our Mississippi*’ newsletter is distributed to 50,000+ subscribers throughout the Nation and reaches additional readership through electronic distributions and the ‘*Our Mississippi*’ website.

Together the IRTF and ‘*Our Mississippi*’ newsletters were effective communication and educational tools which provided the Corps and our key partners the ability to reach out to various target audiences simultaneously. There has been an overwhelming response of compliments and letters of appreciation from those receiving these newsletters, which speaks highly to the success of these two newsletters.

**2. 2012 Flood Preparedness.** A significant milestone for the IRTF and State/Federal Emergency Flood Responders was the Regional Flood Risk Management Workshop –“2012 Flood Preparedness”—held in Memphis, TN on February 23, 2012. This workshop was the idea of the IRTF and brought together a group of over 80 State/Federal agency representatives for a day-long series of presentations and discussions. Taking into account the vulnerable condition of the MR&T project and projected National Weather Service Spring forecast, the Corps mobilized a Regional 2012 Flood Preparedness Team in mid December 2011 to develop plans to manage, mitigate and communicate flood risks throughout the MR&T system for the coming flood season. This regional effort was focused on three primary endeavors: identify key risks within the MR&T, ways to minimize risk, and effectively communicate this information to partners, stakeholders and the public. The February 23 interagency workshop served to carefully coordinate, refine and communicate this team’s findings, tools and recommendations across the broad array of those public officials with shared responsibility for the protection of the lives and livelihoods from flooding events. The majority of the presentations, tools, brochures and products produced during this four month effort are currently accessible on the RFRM website under “Flood Preparedness”.

A 2012 Flood Preparedness Summary Report provided a comprehensive narrative of this collaborative effort. This document was developed to capture, in general terms, the efforts the MVD and partner agencies have undertaken to manage and mitigate risks associated with the great flood of 2011 and in preparation for the next flood event. It is intended to be used a tool and in conjunction with other products produced under OW-R in an effort to communicate both internally and externally the risks which remain to the public in the wake of one of the largest flood events on record.

Many tables have been provided within the Flood Preparedness Report in an effort to summarize and index information that the reader can easily reference and utilize in conjunction with other tools such as CorpsMap. Each damaged site included in this document has undergone extensive investigation and validation by experienced Corps personnel. The damages incurred during the great flood of 2011 includes nearly 2 billion dollars worth of damages to critical infrastructure necessary to the flood risk management and navigation systems benefiting both the Nation's population and economy. Further site specific detailed information is publicly available via the Regional Flood Risk Management and CorpsMap websites (<http://www.mvd.usace.army.mil/>) and other products such as Information Papers, Risk Management Papers, and Construction Fact Sheets.

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**3. Videos.** Two OW-R educational videos were produced during the past year. The first, “2011 Flood Fight,” premiered at the first IRTF face-to-face meeting in Memphis, TN in late June 2011. The second, “Flood Preparedness and Recovery Efforts,” was released to IRTF members in April 2012. Both of these videos were posted to YouTube and the Corps Facebook page for unlimited public access and distribution. These videos have been used in a number of National meetings and congressional briefings.

**4. Website.** IRTF members also influenced the creation and refinement of a Regional Flood Risk Management website (<http://www.mvd.usace.army.mil/>) designed to improve communication, education and access to a diverse array of Flood Risk information/resources. The RFRM website has become a central repository and link to district, regional and National FRM related resources and documents. The website was especially useful in making the many IRTF meeting presentations/minutes and products readily accessible to members and interested stakeholders. The use of social media as a RFRM communication tool has continued to grow and is directly linked through the website. We expect the MVD RFRM website will continue to evolve to better meet the informational needs of our partners, stakeholders and public.

**5. CorpsMap.** CorpsMap is a geospatial web platform that until recently was available as an internal Corps system only. The MVD GIS cadre worked with both a regional OW-R management team and the National GIS team to establish one of the first External CorpsMap sites: <http://www.mvd.usace.army.mil/>. Table VIII-1 provides a rough outline of some of the key products currently being served via CorpsMap, along with a brief purpose and an anticipated update schedule.

**Table VIII-1. CorpsMap Publically Accessible Products**

Product	Purpose	Updated
<b>Project Information Paper</b>	provide general background on flood damages, potential consequences, repair options, and tentative schedule	Annually by District PM/PDT
<b>Project Risk Management Paper</b>	describe how risks at damaged locations are being addressed through construction, interim measures, and flood fight preparation	Biannually by District PM/PDT, Construction Rep and RCO
<b>Project Construction Fact Sheet</b>	provide monthly status of ongoing construction activity, key milestones, % completion, and project challenges	Monthly by PM/PDT and Construction Rep

**6. Regional Communication Plan.** IRTF member input was sought in the development of a Regional Communication Plan designed to provide structure and guidance regarding OW-R communications with partners, stakeholders, and the public. By carefully orchestrating notifications to the media and key interests regarding the status and outlook of flood damages, the Corps and partner agencies facilitated awareness of public safety, flood recovery and flood preparedness. Key messaging is focused on damages and vulnerabilities; reliability of MR&T; near-term risk management; and the shared responsibility of flood response, mitigation and risk management. Effectively communicating the coordinated flood recovery efforts among the Federal, local and State governments were designed to reduce public anxiety and promote confidence in the dedicated, purposeful and collaborative approach government agencies are taking in to reestablish the full integrity of their flood control and navigation systems. There are three major parts to this Communication Plan:

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1. Introduction - includes principles of open and transparent communication, goals and objectives, background, audience and timeline
2. Communication Strategy - identifies tools, methods, resources and protocols for communicating OW-R information methodology
3. Key Messaging - includes important facts/figures, talking points and “bridging messages”

The Regional Communication Strategy serves as a framework and guidance for both the internal and external transfer of OW-R information via CorpsMap, fact sheets, talking points, presentations, press releases, social media, and website. It will also highlight some of the key participants and groups with whom regular communication is required (e.g. stakeholders, levee districts, congressional, IRTF, State emergency managers, etc). It is important that this shared responsibility be well coordinated and controlled to ensure our communications are responsive, purposeful, and consistent. Research from past hurricane and flood disasters in 2008 and 2009 taught the Corps to better communicate safety information, flood risk management strategies, and recovery assistance to the public. Based on those lessons learned, the goal is to proactively connect stakeholders and the public with fact-based and timely information, and reaching a diverse target audience: partners, stakeholders, agencies, businesses, local communities. Natural disasters cannot be specifically planned for; however, communication tools that will continue to be updated can be put into place

**7. Post-Flood Reports.** Although several of the member agencies have recently completed Post-flood reports and are still developing such reports. While the IRTF meetings have had presentations on these evaluative reports, the reports themselves have largely remained internal to the respective state or Federal agency. Upon review and approval, these reports will be made available to fellow partners and the public.

#### **D. PARTNER PERSPECTIVES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

The efforts by the IRTF in 2011 to 2012 have served to improve working relationships, increase flood risk understanding and implement critical flood preparedness actions. Group discussion covered a broad and challenging array of tactical and strategic Flood Risk/Recovery responsibilities and challenges. Member agencies leveraged authorities, experience and resources to put the region on an aggressive and attainable path to recovery, increased flood risk awareness and recommendations for future flood preparedness. The regularity and focus of IRTF meetings and interactions were appropriately paced with the tempo and challenges of the recovery process.

A great deal was learned from the 2011 flood season, particularly in the areas most damaged by the flood. That knowledge is being applied to both Federal, state and local recovery efforts to ensure timely restoration of FRM and navigation systems. Effective FRM requires the integration of mitigation planning, preparedness, response, and recovery programs and activities into a coordinated FRM “life-cycle” framework. The conceptual framework for implementing the FRM program is focused on ensuring programs and authorities of Federal, state, local, and tribal partners are coordinated and synchronized so that the combined actions achieve effective management of the flood risk. The Corps is a key contributor in “driving down” the Nation’s flood risks through its programs to

1. plan structural and nonstructural projects to manage flood risks;
2. inspect the condition of existing FRM infrastructure;
3. provide technical and planning support to states and communities;
4. conduct emergency measures to alleviate flooding consequences; and
5. rehabilitate levees and other FRM infrastructure damaged by flooding.



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It is important to bear in mind that responsibility of managing the Nation's flood risks does not lie exclusively with the Corps or any other single Federal or non-Federal entity. Rather, responsibility is shared across multiple Federal, state, and local government agencies, with a complex set of programs and authorities, and private citizen choices/actions.

In May 2012, IRTF members were presented with three "Lessons Learned" oriented questions as means to record their feedback on the May 2011 through May 2012 IRTF experience. Responses to these questions were submitted in writing and provided verbally during the July 14, 2012 teleconference. Responses to the three questions have been summarized without attribution to individuals or agencies. The following views/quotes emphasize many of the key lessons learned as expressed by individual representatives.

*Did the IRTF experience provide added value to your State or Federal agency and our shared public/stakeholders?*

Overwhelming positive response from IRTF members indicated the experience was very beneficial and "value-added." Many members provided specific examples of how they were able to beneficially use the information provided during the regular meetings. A brief listing of some of the examples provided by members included: synchronization of repairs; leveraging resources and expertise; identification of common risks/uncertainties; helped focus coordination/response; allowed direct linkage to other affiliations or endeavors; kept respective key leaders well informed; better understanding/appreciation for MR&T system; development of new communication and forecasting tools; understanding of complexities and challenges of repair effort; platform to discuss state perspectives and priorities; common vision and purpose; set an important precedent and model for interagency collaboration; learned a great deal about member agencies.

*What improvements or enhancements to the IRTF concept would you recommend?*

Recommendations included the following: conduct equitable balance of webinar and face-to-face meetings; need to have better state representation and participation; annual workshop excellent idea; incorporate more mitigation alternatives into discussions; working groups could help focus certain issues/challenges; would be good to expand topics of discussion and incorporate natural disaster simulation exercises; watershed planning efforts would benefit from an IRTF approach.

*What are the top flood risk management challenges facing our region/nation today?*

This question provided a number of insightful observations and responses from the members. Topping the list of most common responses were: flood risk awareness/education/communication; aging FRM infrastructure; and Federal/State funding levels. Also included in response were the following in no particular order: timely natural disaster recovery; standard protocols for flood inundation mapping and availability; routine FRM interagency workshops or exercises; relevant/understandable stream stage/streamflow data; unified approach to FRM preparation/mitigation; interagency collaboration; stalled out watershed planning efforts.

In summary, the following selection of views/quotes expressed by IRTF members capture some of the individual or collective Lessons Learned on a variety of topics/issues brought into the IRTF forum:

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*“The IRTF has provided tremendous education and serves as an excellent model for value-added interagency collaboration, it is one we should do all we can to emulate and keep going.”*

*“It is unfortunate that it has taken a natural disaster to bring us all together in such a collaborative fashion, we should have been doing this years ago!”*

*“The effort and information exchange that has gone into these IRTF meetings have been very impressive and educational.”*

*“It has been particularly useful for me to hear the many state/federal perspectives on so many important interrelated issues.”*

*“The experiences shared at the meetings helped me see how each agency was connected (and sometimes disconnected) to and from the flood response and recovery process.”*

*“The IRTF process allowed the states to remain informed on the status of impacts and recovery efforts and provided a platform to discuss state perspectives and priorities.”*

*“The CorpsMap and NWS extended 28-d forecasts are two products that would likely not have come about, or been shared as extensively, without the IRTF discussion and dialogue.”*

*“The experience of the 2011 Flood and IRTF have really opened a number of eyes to the importance and value of an integrated systems approach and interagency collaboration to successful Flood Risk Management”*

Given the very positive and reinforcing feedback from member agencies it was agreed that the IRTF should not immediately disband while the challenging recovery process continues. Many expressed strong support for the continued evolution of this model forum for interagency collaboration that can facilitate meeting our shared responsibility in all aspects of the FRM life cycle and possibly other regional issues as well. An important and recurring comment during the IRTF lessons learned discussion was that the IRTF concept should serve as a model for a number of other challenging regional issues that also have shared responsibility across multiple Federal and state agencies. It is expected that the local, regional, state, and Federal members of the IRTF will continue to provide safety, security, and quality-of-life measures to American citizens and industry.