



Operation Watershed Responding to the Historic Mississippi River Flood of 2011



RECOVERY OPERATIONS Interagency Recovery Task Force Meeting Minutes, 22 June 2011

Purpose. This document provides a summary of the initial face-to-face meeting of the IRFT held in Memphis, TN on 22 June 2011 to include a list of participants and state and federal agency perspectives.

Background. Interagency Recovery Task Force (IRTF) was launched to develop solutions to restore the Mississippi River Basin's flood risk management systems damaged by recent flood events. The collaborative task force, initiated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mississippi Valley Division, aims to ensure effective communication and collaboration across the many federal and state agencies that will be engaged in the recovery effort. State partners include representatives from the states of Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana. In addition to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, federal agency task force representatives include EPA, FEMA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Coast Guard. The task force's first task is to prioritize short- and long-term goals to "Reset" and "Restore" the key functional elements of the Mississippi River & Tributaries system, including levees, navigation channel, and water control structures that protects lives and livelihoods for millions of Americans. The "Reset" effort will strive to provide the rapid development and installation of initial interim measures designed to provide a basic level of protection and functionality before the next flood season, addressing floodways, dredging for navigation, and levee degradation. The "Restore" effort will strive to provide for the development and installation of permanent measures designed to return the structure to full-level protection and functionality.

Introduction and Overview. MG Michael Walsh and Ms. Karen Durham-Aguilera provided the participants with an overview of the purpose and role of the IRTF. MG Walsh addressed the Corps authority to established the IRTF and the success achieved by the Interagency Levee Task Force (ILTF) following the 2008 Midwest Floods. He views the IRTF as the regional voice for prioritization of the reset and ultimate restoration of the MR&T project to include changes to the system (i.e. establishment of additional floodways). Ms. Durham-Aguilera emphasized the success of past efforts of ILTF dating back to 2008 and the current success of the Silver Jackets Program that now exists in most states to address and communicate flood risk management across state and federal agencies. The group was shown a video that provided an overview of the 2011 Mississippi River flood and highlighted metrological impacts, actions and decision making process that occurred during this event. (Each participant will be provided a copy of the video.)

Agency Perspectives. State and other Federal Agency representatives were asks before the meeting to provide their perspectives in three specific areas:

1. Overview of your interest or authorities in flood recovery
2. General expectations for the Interagency Recovery Task Force
3. Top flood-related recovery priorities

The perspectives, attached, were utilized to share information on authorities and capabilities and to stimulate discussions of relevant issues. The following list of common themes surfaced during the meeting:

- **Focus and purpose of IRTF.** Participants had questions concerning the role and mission of the IRTF. There are competing demands to serve on multiple task forces and groups particularly during the recovery period. Specifically, the states requested more clarification and a clear understanding concern the level of commitment. This was particularly true for states that had not participated in previous task



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forces. In response MG Walsh, directed the MVD staff to develop a Program Management Plan (PgMP) and charter for the IRTF that will outline in detail the purpose of the IRTF and the role of each agency.

- **Organization structure.** The meeting provided the states an opportunity to address both authority and organizational structure. The state of Illinois has specific legislation that establishes the authority for IEMA for all phases of a disaster, not just recovery. This is not the case in most other states, but if implemented in all states it could provide a better structure to execute the IRTF mission.
- **Non-Structural Mitigation.**
 - The concept of non-structural measures/mitigation varied among the different states and Federal agencies. A comprehensive definition of the non-structure alternatives/measures needs to be developed for the task force. The Corps will provide appropriate language clarifying non-structural measures and actions.
 - Expediting the acquisition process was a reoccurring theme during the meeting. How can the process be sped up to make it a viable and timely option? Can the states acquire property and have FEMA reimburse the state at a later date? It was suggested that communities in flood-prone areas need to be approached before a flood occurs to determine if the communities is aware and receptive to the process.
- **Resource Challenges.**
 - Probably the most reoccurring theme of the meeting involved the possible limitation of resources. The possibility of no supplemental appropriations following this event will leave agencies scrambling to reprioritize existing projects and funding to meet these new demands, especially the Corps. This issue increases the importance of the mission of the IRTF.
 - One potential funding source for states could be the designation of an “enhanced” vs. “standard” that increases mitigation funding from 15 to 20 percent. Further investigation should be conducted to determine the requirements for the states to obtain an “enhanced” status.
- **Collaboration at Local and State.** How can and to what degree should the local governments/organizations, such as levee boards, become involved the IRTF? Is this simply a requirement of individual states to engage these stakeholders? This may warrant additional discussion at the next IRTF meeting.
- **Known impacts of actions-secondary/tertiary effects.** Decisions made and actions taken during the flood were done so to protect people and property that are protected by the MR&T system, but there are often second and third order effects from the timing of those decisions. One example was the people that lived in the unprotected areas upstream of the BP-NM Floodway. If the floodway is operated sooner it not only relieves the stress on the upstream system, but lowers the stages on those people living outside areas protected by flood damage reduction projects. How can those effects be addressed in future decision making? How can they be assessed or considered for future operations? Can this be adequately addressed in the Corps after action process and/or system assessment?
- **CUSEC and NDRF.** Could an existing organization/framework such as the Central United Earthquake Consortium (CUSEC) that includes all states except Louisiana or the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) be used to assist in carrying out the mission of the IRTF?



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- **Navigation vs. Flood Damage Reduction.** The IRTF is focused on the restoration of navigation as well as flood damage reduction system as it evident by the inclusion of MARAD and USCG. There is currently no funding for dredging the 21 shallow draft ports/harbors in the lower Mississippi River. The flood will obviously increase the dredging requirements on the main stem of the lower river from Cairo to the Gulf. This issue becomes complex when the national vs. regional benefits are weighed.
- **Factoring resiliency into recovery opportunities.** This is a difficult issue that has been address in some forums in the past. The Corps FCCE Program views this as a betterment that must be funded by the local sponsor. The criteria on what resiliency and how much are always obstacles in arriving at a standard for structures. This issue requires much more discussion before a way forward is developed.

Parking Lot Items. There were several relevant issues/concerns brought up to the group that falls outside the recovery umbrella of the IRTF. These items will be recorded and addressed by members of the TF if the information is readily available or passed to the appropriate source of resolution.

- **Federal flood fight assistance for private ports.** Should the Federal government reevaluate providing flood fight assistance to privately owned and operated ports/harbors (i.e. Greenville, Natchez, etc.) if it will result in an overall savings of government funds? Spend flood fight dollars and save recovery dollars such as the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)? Can laws be changed and, if so, what laws and/or policies need to be changed?
- **FEMA Inspectors.** The states asked if FEMA could combine the inspection requirements for the Individual Assistance Program and the NFIP thus sending one person to meet the requirements of both programs. FEMA reps explained that the substantial damage inspection is the responsibility of the locals and the IA Program assessment is FEMA responsibility.
- **Catastrophic (Contingency) Plan**– During the 2011 flood, the Governor of Mississippi request several flooding impacts for levee breeches in several reaches of the MR&T Levee System. The state converted these simulated levee failures in a catastrophic levee breach plan that addressed the consequences and evacuation requirements. Although, no failures occurred in the MR&T system, the state viewed this as a successful coordination and planning effort and recommended that other states may benefit from the process. The states did ask if the Corps could provide probabilities of levee failures. MVD staff stated that too many variables existed for failures, but the probabilities of overtopping could be provided.



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Action Items.

- Development of IRTF charter and PMP. Scott Whitney, MVD
- Expansion of CUSEC mission to all hazards approach. Proponent: Mr. Mike Womack, Director, MEMA, will bring the issue to the CUSEC board during the next scheduled meeting on 12-13 July and provide the IRTF with the results of the discussion.
- Dissemination of Catastrophic Levee Breach Plan to other IRTF states. Proponent: Mr. Mike Womack
- Non-structural process. Provide any recently identified methods that could help expedite buyouts. Proponent - FEMA HQ.
- Definition of non-structural alternatives. Proponent: Scott Whitney, MVD
- Status of national levee database. Proponent - Office of Homeland Security, HQUSACE
- Small ports/harbors list (shallow draft) – Proponent: Scott Whitney, MVD
- Dissemination of 2011 Mississippi River flood video - Proponent: Scott Whitney, MVD

Next Steps:

- Finalize meeting location and date for next IRTF. Preliminary date of 16 August 2011 aboard the MV Mississippi in Memphis, TN.
- Encourage participation from all IRTF states and key federal agencies that were not in attendance.
- Disseminate draft PMP and charter to the IRTF.