

SECTION 7: CONCLUSION

Hazard mitigation reduces the vulnerability of the citizens of the State of Wisconsin to natural hazards. The state has made a commitment to hazard mitigation, with floods as its top priority. Floods are the most costly natural hazard in the state. Acquisition of flood-prone structures is an effective way to prevent flood damage and to minimize human suffering associated with flood damage. Since 1990, Wisconsin has received funding to acquire and remove approximately 865 residential and commercial structures from flood-prone areas and floodproof or elevate another 75 structures using FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance programs. In addition to the dozens of other flood mitigation projects, WEM has also overseen 23 grants for the construction of safe rooms that protect over 5,000 people from severe weather hazards, including tornadoes. The majority of the safe rooms were constructed during this plan update cycle. Communities, using state, federal, and local hazard mitigation program funds, have also conducted flood awareness programs, repaired dams and levees, and constructed storm sewers and detention ponds to reduce the likelihood of future damage.

Wisconsin is subject to other hazards besides floods. Tornadoes, high winds, hail, thunderstorms, wildfires, and extreme temperatures are natural hazards that have caused significant loss of life and property. While not as many Wisconsin agency programs are focused on these hazards as floods, the resources are significant. For many of these other hazards, prevention is the biggest part of mitigation. Through strong building codes, inspection and code enforcement, severe damage and loss of life as a result of building failure is minimized. Likewise, weather warning systems, hazard awareness programs, insurance, and public health advisories can reduce loss of life and property by giving the public access to information that can help them take protective measures. Finally, careful consideration of potential hazards when building facilities for utilities, health care, and public use ensures that government and public facilities are truly long-term investments. Together with the many flood mitigation programs, these are Wisconsin's core strengths for reducing the public's vulnerability to natural hazards.

State agency programs that address hazards through mitigation have matured under the trying circumstances of the Great Midwest Flood of 1993 and the subsequent major flooding of 2008. No doubt the mitigation efforts of the last 25 years have saved millions of dollars in damages from the Wisconsin floods of 2007, 2008, 2016, and most recently 2018. Many challenges have been met, yet many challenges remain including how we address changing future weather patterns. With respect to flooding, many people in Wisconsin are subject to basement flooding and sewer backups. Too few people have flood insurance or understand it. Stormwater flooding is common and becoming more common as development increases. With respect to tornadoes and windstorms, many communities would benefit from performing a shelter assessment, especially for schools and health care facilities, to evaluate their capability to shelter people sufficiently during high wind events.

Although the top priority for mitigation will remain the acquisition and demolition of flood-vulnerable structures, with a focus on repetitive loss and severe repetitive loss properties, other

mitigation and hazard awareness issues need to be addressed. The long-term challenge for public planning, development, public safety, and emergency management professionals at every level of government is making disaster resilience in Wisconsin a way of life and getting individuals to recognize their true risk.

This Plan update demonstrates that state agencies are willing to take a leadership role to promote hazard mitigation, and disaster resilient communities. However, ultimately all mitigation is local. Participation in state and federal mitigation programs is at the discretion of each community and its citizens. Therefore, the state will continue to encourage local mitigation planning so local problems will have local solutions.

Wisconsin Emergency Management and our state agency partners have updated this State of Wisconsin Hazard Mitigation Plan, as a state disaster-prevention planning tool, to help the state and all its citizens understand and combat the effects of natural disasters. This Plan update is also designed to fulfill the requirements of 44 CFR Parts 201.4 and 201.5. Ultimately, the Plan shows a solid history of hazard mitigation in Wisconsin, an appraisal of concerns, and the commitment of state agencies to adopt policies and take actions that will address these concerns.