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BENTON COUNTY NEWS RELEASE

February 15, 2017

Public Feedback and Participation Invited for Benton County 2017 Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

The Benton County Office of Emergency Management is currently working with the University of Minnesota Duluth – Geospatial Analysis Center (GAC) to prepare an update of the County’s “Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan” (MHMP). The plan is a requirement of the Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) and must be updated every five years in order to maintain eligibility for certain federal disaster assistance and hazard mitigation funding programs.

Development of the plan is under direction of the County’s Emergency Manager in cooperation with a planning team of representatives from County departments, local municipalities (city and township), school districts, and other key stakeholders such as utility providers. The planning team is responsible to provide feedback required for the plan update, including the ranking of hazards and identification of strategic, cost-effective mitigation activities that may reduce future losses for the County and individual jurisdictions. Some mitigation activities may be eligible for future FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) grant funding, such as: localized flood reduction measures, property acquisition and relocation/conversion to open space, infrastructure retrofits, wildfire mitigation, and safe room construction or retrofits to provide immediate life-safety protection for people vulnerable to tornado and severe wind events.

About the Plan

The Benton County MHMP is a multi-jurisdictional plan that covers Benton County, including the cities of Rice, Sauk-Rapids, Foley, Gilman and portions of St. Cloud and Sartell. The Benton County MHMP also incorporates the concerns and needs of townships, school districts, and other stakeholders participating in the plan.

Benton County is vulnerable to a variety of potential natural disasters, which threaten the loss of life and property in the county. Hazards such as tornadoes, flooding, wildfires, blizzards, straight-line winds, ice storms, and droughts have the potential for inflicting vast economic loss and personal hardship.

According to Benton County Emergency Management Director, Jim McDermott, “Hazard mitigation planning is a central part of our emergency management program. Understanding the natural hazards that can cause serious impact to our communities and taking action to reduce or



eliminate the impact of future disasters makes us more resilient. Hazard mitigation helps us to break the cycle of damage and repair caused by things like flooding, ice storms, and severe wind events that can damage property, stress economies, and threaten life safety in our county.”

Examples of hazard mitigation include actions such as improvement of roads and culverts that experience repetitive flooding; construction of safe rooms at campgrounds, parks, trailer parks or schools to protect lives in the event of tornados or severe wind events; burying powerlines that may fail due to heavy snow, ice or wind storms; ensuring timely emergency communication to the public through warning sirens and mass notification systems, and conducting public awareness and education campaigns to help people to be prepared to take safe action before, during, or following a hazard event.

Public Feedback and Participation is Encouraged

As part of the planning process, gathering input from the public is an important and required step. Benton County seeks to gather feedback from residents and businesses from across the County to incorporate into the plan:

- What are the natural hazards you feel pose the greatest risk to your community?
- Have you experienced a previous disaster event?
- What concerns do you have, and what sorts of mitigation actions or projects do you feel would help to reduce the damages of potential future events for your personal property, your community, or the County as a whole?

The public is strongly encouraged to submit your comments, concerns, or questions regarding natural disasters and potential mitigation actions to be included into the plan update process. Please submit your feedback to Benton County Emergency Manager, Jim McDermott: (320) 968-8105 or jemcdermott@co.benton.mn.us .

The public will have a continued opportunity to participate in the MHMP update in the coming months. A draft of the plan will be posted on the County website for public review, which will be followed by two public meetings held within different parts of the county. Future news releases will be shared with the media to notify the public of these opportunities.