

JANUARY- FEBRUARY 1995

OWRB Lends Staff to Assist In Texas Flood Response

Only as south Texas floodwaters receded could local citizens and officials begin to painstakingly evaluate the widespread damage left in the wake of catastrophic flooding that claimed more than 20 lives. While the National Guard, state and federal agencies and volunteers worked to restore order, find shelter for displaced families and respond to a contingent of other problems caused by the September disaster, Texas looked to neighboring states for help.

Prompted by a formal request to the Oklahoma Water Resources Board from Wayne Fairley, with Region VI of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Donnie Blanlot traveled south to lend her hand in a cooperative effort to help communities rebuild and improve floodplain management procedures. Blanlot, who routinely coordinates National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) activities in southeast Oklahoma as a staff member of the Water Board's McAlester Office, flew to Houston on October 30.

"Upon my arrival, Wayne assigned me to a four-person disaster response team that would evaluate floodplain management practices in affected counties and recommend measures that have promise to reduce future damages," she said.

Blanlot's team also included representatives of the Texas Department of Emergency Management, NFIP and FEMA. "The majority of my work involved explaining to local officials about the availability of funds through

the federal Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and helping them obtain those funds," she explained.

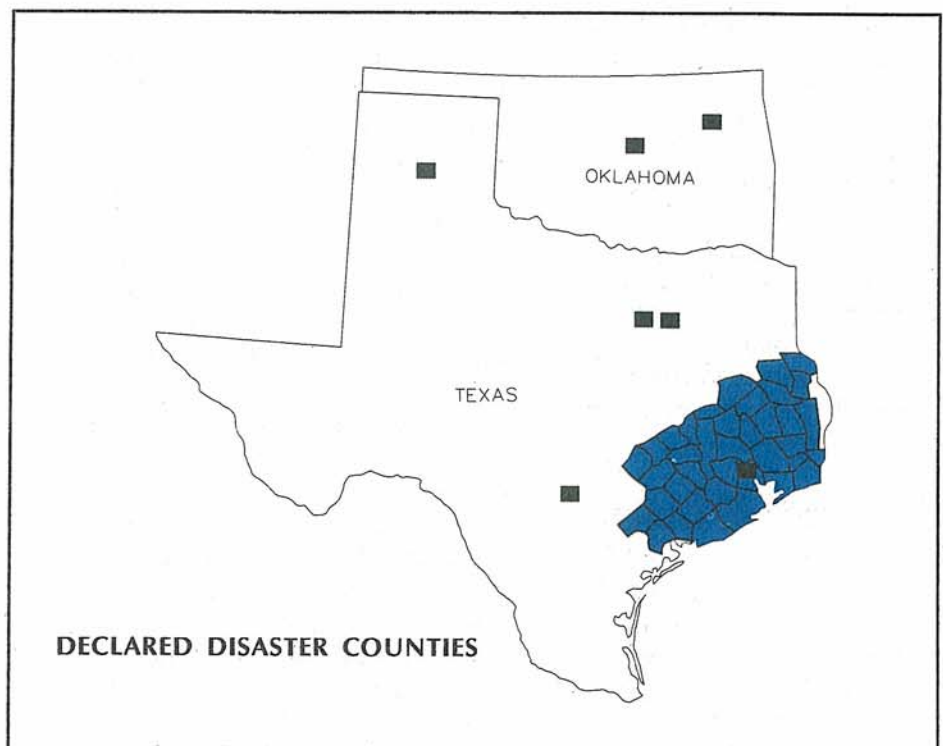
The HMGP was created in 1988 to reduce the vulnerability of communities to flooding and related natural disasters. The program facilitates a 75/25 federal/state cost-match to fund projects which reduce local flooding risks and prevent repetitive damage. A separate funding mechanism, the federal Public Assistance Program, finances actual repairs to roads, bridges and other publicly-owned flood-damaged structures.

In all, 38 counties received presidential disaster declarations. According

to Blanlot, most of the damage occurred north of Houston in Montgomery County, a result of flooding caused by overflow of the San Jacinto River. "My team was assigned a seven-county area on the western edge of the flood-damaged region. Our headquarters, which housed some 400 people, was set up in an office building assumed by FEMA. This Disaster Field Office was essentially a large, makeshift governmental agency, complete with entire sections dedicated to personnel activities, dispersal of supplies and counseling for staff and the public," she pointed out.

"We met early each morning to review files for the county scheduled for visit that day. Then we would contact the local communities to set up the meeting times and places and collect all relevant information on flood insurance poli-

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cies and claims, repetitive loss, and community status in the National Flood Insurance Program.

"At the meetings, we discussed local flood damages, potential projects that could prevent damages and various other floodplain management issues. Then we presented an overview of available funding programs to help mitigate future flood problems," she said.

Because many of the damaged communities did not have mitigation strategies in place (including plans and specifications for projects that would likely reduce subsequent flood damages) and federal monies are available for only a brief time following the disaster declaration, Blanlot's team worked 12-hour-plus days.

"Much of our time was spent helping folks complete permit applications as quickly and as accurately as possible to expedite the rebuilding process. On one particular day, we prepared more than 300 permit applications for citizens who sustained damages to properly rebuild in flood-prone areas. Our team members also provided much information to community and county officials to increase their chances of receiving funds, most of which would go to more heavily damaged areas," Blanlot added.

Of her week-long stay in Texas, Blanlot said that the one resounding issue or problem she encountered was one of disaster preparedness -- or, in many cases, lack of it. "The south Texas flooding situation reflects something we stress in Oklahoma-- cities and towns with frequent flooding problems should participate in hazard mitigation planning efforts prior to disasters rather than during post-disaster recovery periods. Regardless, the experience I gained there was invaluable and will assist us in preventing and responding to potential flooding disasters in Oklahoma." □

OFMA Elects Officers

At its fourth annual conference in September, the Oklahoma Floodplain Managers Association elected nine new officers. They are chairman, Pat Hoggard, City of Tulsa; vice-chairman, Albert

Ashwood, State Department of Civil Emergency Management; secretary, Donnie Blanlot, State Water Resources Board; and treasurer, Carolyn Schultz, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The five OFMA region representatives are Region 1, Robbie Williams, City of Edmond; Region 2, T.J. Davis, City of Sand Springs; Region 3, Johnny Shepherd, Durant/Bryan County Civil Defense; Region 4, Joe Elles, Ardmore Emergency Management; and Region 5, Rod Shaw, Soil Conservation Service.

The conference, held at Lake Murray State Lodge, focused on hazard mitigation. Specific topics of discussion included the Federal Hazard Mitigation Grant Program; floodplain mapping; ongoing study of flooding problems in the Cache Creek Basin; the Clean Water Act Section 404 dredge and fill program; Tulsa's stormwater utility fee; and the Community Rating System.

The Floodplain Man-

ager of the Year award was presented to Ken Morris, State Coordinator of the National Flood Insurance Program. Edmond Mayor Randal Shadid was named Elected Official of the Year. Special awards for promoting floodplain awareness and the OFMA went to Mike Morgan, meteorologist for Oklahoma City's KFOR-TV, and Donnie Blanlot. □



Oklahoma City Meteorologist Mike Morgan of KFOR-TV, receives an award for promotion of floodplain awareness from Robert Bigham, former OFMA chairman.

OWRB, FEMA Set Floodplain Workshops

The OWRB and Federal Emergency Management Agency will host five workshops in March to provide continuing education for local officials on various aspects of floodplain management.

While the workshops are specifically designed for Oklahoma members of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), all interested persons are encouraged to attend. The one-day workshops, held each year throughout the state, serve to inform community officials and leaders of NFIP regulatory and administrative requirements, flood loss reduction techniques and related aspects of wise floodplain management.

Workshop dates and locations are listed to the right. To register, call the OWRB at 405/231-2576.

March 1 -- Okmulgee
Okmulgee Noble Center
1801 East 4th

March 2 -- McAlester
Days Inn
1217 George Nigh Expressway

March 7 -- Omega
Chisholm Trail Vo-Tech
Highway 33
(between Watonga & Kingfisher)

March 8 -- Oklahoma City
Metro Tech
1900 Springlake Drive

March 9 -- Lawton
Cameron University
Shepler Center

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