

March 18, 2009

Flood Seminar Seeks to Avoid Future Devastation

Two national experts will join more than a dozen Wisconsin researchers and government officials in April in Madison at a symposium aimed at helping Wisconsin communities avoid devastating floods like those that inundated the Midwest last year.

Gerry Galloway, of the University of Maryland, and Ray Burby, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will highlight the symposium "From Sandbags to Sanity: The Policy Implications of the Midwest Floods of 2008," to be held Monday, April 20, at the Monona Terrace convention center.

Galloway led the White House report on the 1993 floods that broke the record for flood damages in the 20th century and awakened Wisconsin and the nation to the continuing threat floods pose. More than 50 people died in 1993 and \$15 billion dollars of damage were suffered in that event, including along the Black River and Mississippi River in Wisconsin.

Galloway is to speak about lessons from that disaster, as well as his study of international flooding, to explain ways that local, state and federal governments can work closely to reduce flood damages and enhance the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains

Burby will present a set of principles for government programs to persuade homeowners to retrofit their dwellings to reduce the risk of flood damage. He is to present a case study from the "My Safe Florida Home" program as an example.

Conference organizer professor Donald Moynihan of the UW-Madison La Follette School of Public Affairs said the symposium will help Wisconsin communities and the state improve policies and crises response related to flooding emergencies like those experienced last year which caused millions in damage and turned more than 30 counties into designated disaster areas.

"During Wisconsin's floods in 2008, local emergency responses and recovery practices varied widely," Moynihan said. "By sharing what has and has not worked in similar occurrences around the country and by considering ways to standardize responses, Wisconsin communities can react more efficiently and take steps to prevent damage."

The April 20 symposium will put current information in the hands of local and state policymakers. "With better information about hydrology to climate change and intergovernmental collaboration, practitioners can decide what is best for their communities," Moynihan added.

"By sharing the most recent research insights into crisis management and floodplains, we can help state policymakers and local government officials better prepare for and respond to the type of flooding and related catastrophes that Wisconsin experienced in 2008," Moynihan says. "The symposium and the networks we develop will build a solid platform for launching useful and important interaction on multiple levels of government across the state when collaboration is necessary to address a crisis."

The seminar will offer panel discussions on topics suggested by UW-Madison experts, the national Association of State Floodplain Managers, Wisconsin Emergency Management, and Gov. Doyle's special Wisconsin Recovery Task Force. People attending the symposium will hear answers to these questions:

What factors led to the location of property in risky locations? How can such risk be mitigated?

What are the public health risks associated with flooding?

What were the broad implications of the 2008 flooding for Wisconsin's agriculture and the

economy?

How does the lack of investment in public infrastructure interact with flood risk?

What do we need to know to better plan? In particular, what information is required by county boards, emergency government managers, homeowners, farmers, floodplain managers and others?

What are the policy lessons to be learned? Are these the same lessons that were proposed in the aftermath of the 1993 Midwest floods? If so, why were the 2008 floods so bad? What are the barriers to implementation?

How will emergency management responsibilities evolve in coming decades? Will federal budget limitations lead to a more central role for state and local governments and other stakeholders?

The project is funded by the Ira and Ineva Reilly Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Endowment, now in its seventh year, which supports projects that advance the Wisconsin Idea through collaborations with communities and outside organizations. Additional support is being provided by the UW-Madison Water Resources Institute and the Center for World Affairs and the Global Economy.

The symposium will enhance the newly released Wisconsin Recovery Task Force and the work of a special legislative committee on emergency management headed by Sen. Robert Jauch (D-Poplar) and Rep. Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan).

The day-long conference is free and open to the public, but registration is required and limited to 150. To register, call Bridget Pirsch at 608-265-2658 or email her at pirsch@lafollette.wisc.edu. The deadline is Wednesday, April 15.

For more information on the conference, contact Terry Shelton, 608-262-3038 or shelton@lafollette.wisc.edu. Information is also available on La Follette's website at <http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/publicservice/floods/index.html>