Turning Water into Wine in Napa Valley

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Napa County, California

Napa Valley, CA – Napa Valley produces some of the best American wines, but until flood mitigation techniques were implemented in 1997, there was great risk involved. In 1986 and 1995, major floods threatened the valley's 200 wineries. In 1997 however, the Citizens for Napa River Flood Management (CNRFM) decided to take a different approach to the flooding problem, breaking with the tradition of flood control, instead favoring flood management. Whereas in the past, engineers tried to halt flooding, the new approach aims to work with the natural floodplain to better absorb excess flooding. As Karen Rippey of the Friends of the Napa River said, "This plan is designed to manage the river, not control it."

Napa Valley is a well-known tourist destination, drawing more than 5 million visitors annually, but the area is prone to flooding. Between 1862 and 1997, the valley saw 27 major floods. The largest occurred in 1986, with 20 inches of rain falling in 48 hours, causing over $140 million in damages, three fatalities, and requiring the evacuation of 7000 people. A flood of similar size occurred in 1995, damaging businesses and residences and causing over $100 million in damages.

Napa County has the third-highest amount of flood damage claims in the State, owing to the flooding common to the area. In 1996, the CNRFM was formed, enabling residents to take a more active role in preventing flood damage. The group approved the Napa Project, a plan designed to work with the natural environment to help prevent further losses from flood damage.

The plan, leveraging seed money from a $7 million grant from FEMA's Hazard Grant Mitigation Program, is expected to take five years at a cost of $220 million, money that will be made back in an estimated 11 years by avoiding property damage. In addition, the people of Napa City approved a 0.5% increase in the sales tax to help pay for the project. Napa City has applied for a $20 million grant from the Federal Highway Administration to replace three bridges. The US Army Corps of Engineers will also be responsible for building 13 new bridges in the area.

Now that Napa has taken an active role in protecting itself from flood damage, citizens and business owners like Herb Schmidt, VP for Public Affairs at Robert Mondavi Winery, feel much more at ease: "We believe that the success of this project will allow visitors to focus their attentions on the beauty of all our wines and our valley rather than the worry of potential flooding."

Activity/Project Location	
Geographical Area:	**Single County (County-wide)**
FEMA Region:	**Region IX**
State:	**California**
County:	**Napa County**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector:	**Public**
Hazard Type:	**Flooding**
Activity/Project Type:	**Acquisition/Buyouts; Floodplain Management**
Activity/Project Start Date:	**03/1999**
Activity/Project End Date:	**03/2004**
Funding Source:	**Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP); Local Sources; State sources; Other FEMA funds/ US Department of Homeland Security**
Funding Recipient:	**Local Government**
Funding Recipient Name:	**City of Napa**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost:	**$220,000,000.00 (Estimated)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal Disaster?	**Yes**
Federal Disaster #:	**1046 , 03/12/1995**
Value Tested By Disaster?	**No**
Repetitive Loss Property?	**Yes**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1:	**http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/floodplain/index.shtm**
Reference URL 2:	**http://www.napaflooddistrict.org**

Main Points

- Between 1862 and 1997, the valley saw 27 major floods.
- The group approved the Napa Project, a plan designed to work with the natural environment to help prevent further losses from flood damage.
- The plan, leveraging seed money from a $7 million grant from FEMA’s Hazard Grant Mitigation Program, is expected to take five years at a cost of $220 million, money that will be made back in an estimated 11 years by avoiding property damage.