



# FEMA

## Acquisition & Relocation Project Protects Riverside Community

**Fort Fairfield, ME** – The spring of 2005 witnessed a massive ice jam and flooding on the Aroostook River in northern Maine. This time, the residents of Fort Fairfield remained high and dry; in the past, they had to flee their homes and wait anxiously for the water to recede. The business district also escaped the recent flood.

“This event (2005) was of longer duration than any in recorded history,” said Tony Levesque, Fort Fairfield’s community development director and code enforcement officer. “We closed some roads and the bridge several times and water in some driveways limited the access to the homes...but there was no property damage to homes or the business district,” Levesque noted.

The community withstood the event thanks to extensive flood mitigation measures adopted by the Town of Fairfield over the past 10 years. The town government led the initiative, with the help of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and several local, non-profit, state, and federal agencies.

Funding came from a variety of sources including the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Community Development Block Grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, state and local sources, and a grant from the Aroostook Band of the Micmac Tribe.

A flood warning system enhanced the town’s preparedness. It was developed in cooperation with the National Weather Service and local power companies. The system alerted local officials to dangerous situations within minutes and warned the community quickly.

The Aroostook River is near the Canadian border in northern Maine. In a typical winter, the river is blanketed with snow and can be frozen two feet thick or more for months. Periodically, the region experiences a warm spell. When the temperature rises above freezing, the ice begins to break up and jams form. Ice jams, rain, and melting ice and snow create a serious flood hazard. In the past, homes and businesses flooded, residents fled their homes, and there were daring rescues, including one in which people were evacuated in the bucket of a front-end loader. This destructive jam-and-flood scenario occurred six times from 1988 to 1994.

The Aroostook River, clogged by an ice jam and unable to accommodate runoff from unseasonably warm weather and heavy rain, overflowed its banks in 1993. A federal disaster declaration resulted, prompting local officials to seek a solution to stop this destructive cycle. In 1994, an ice jam and flooding event again resulted in a federal disaster declaration. The town responded by developing a two-pronged attack on the problem. First, local officials resolved to develop a project aimed at acquiring or relocating 46 homes near the river that were continually at risk of flooding. The project was awarded funding under the HMGP. The second solution was to build a dike to protect vulnerable sections of the business district.



Aroostook County,  
Maine



### Quick Facts

- Year: **1994**
- Sector: **Public**
- Cost: **Amount Not Available**
- Primary Activity/Project: **Acquisition/Buyouts**
- Primary Funding: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**