

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

This section provides a general introduction to the Southeastern NC Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. It consists of the following five subsections:

- ◆ 1.1 Background
- ◆ 1.2 Purpose
- ◆ 1.3 Scope
- ◆ 1.4 Authority
- ◆ 1.5 Summary of Plan Contents

1.1 BACKGROUND

Natural hazards, such as floods, hurricanes, and wildfires are a part of the world around us. Their occurrence is natural and inevitable, and there is little we can do to control their force and intensity. We must consider these hazards to be legitimate and significant threats to human life, safety and property.

The Southeastern NC Region is located in the coastal plain and coastal areas of southeastern North Carolina and includes the counties of Brunswick, New Hanover, Onslow and Pender. This region is vulnerable to a wide range of natural hazards such as hurricanes, flooding, severe thunderstorms, and wildfires. It is also vulnerable to human-caused hazards, including chemical releases, hazardous material spills, and infectious disease. These hazards threaten the life and safety of residents and visitors in the Southeastern NC Region, and have the potential to damage or destroy both public and private property, disrupt the local economy and impact the overall quality of life of individuals who live, work, and vacation in the Southeastern NC Region.

While the threat from hazardous events may never be fully eliminated, there is much we can do to lessen their potential impact upon our community and our citizens. By minimizing the impact of hazards upon our built environment, we can prevent such events from resulting in disasters. The concept and practice of reducing risks to people and property from known hazards is generally referred to as *hazard mitigation*.



FEMA Definition of Hazard Mitigation:

“Any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk to human life and property from hazards.”

Hazard mitigation techniques include both structural measures (such as strengthening or protecting buildings and infrastructure from the destructive forces of potential hazards) and non-structural measures (such as the adoption of sound land use policies and the creation of public awareness programs). It is widely accepted that the most effective mitigation measures are implemented at the local government level, where decisions on the regulation and control of development are ultimately made. A comprehensive mitigation approach addresses hazard vulnerabilities that exist today and in the

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

foreseeable future. Therefore, it is essential that projected patterns of future development are evaluated and considered in terms of how that growth will increase or decrease a community's overall hazard vulnerability.

A key component in the formulation of a comprehensive approach to hazard mitigation is to develop, adopt, and update as needed a local hazard mitigation plan. A hazard mitigation plan establishes the broad community vision and guiding principles for reducing hazard risk, and further proposes specific mitigation actions to eliminate or reduce identified vulnerabilities.

Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties first joined together in 2015 to develop the initial version of this plan. Prior to that, each County was operating under individual County-level hazard mitigation plans. Onslow County and participating municipalities in the County joined this plan for the 2021 update. The process followed to update the plan is detailed in Section 2: Planning Process.

This plan documents the region's sustained efforts to incorporate hazard mitigation principles and practices into routine government activities and functions. At its core, the plan recommends specific actions to minimize hazard vulnerability and protect residents from losses to those hazards that pose the greatest risk. These mitigation actions go beyond simply recommending structural solutions to reduce existing vulnerability, such as elevation, retrofitting and acquisition projects. Local policies on community growth and development, incentives for natural resource protection, and public awareness and outreach activities are examples of other actions considered to more holistically reduce the Southeastern NC Region's vulnerability to identified hazards. The plan remains a living document, with implementation and evaluation procedures established to help achieve meaningful objectives and successful outcomes over time.

1.1.1 The Disaster Mitigation Act and the Flood Insurance Reform Acts

In an effort to reduce the Nation's mounting natural disaster losses, the U.S. Congress passed the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) in order to amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. Section 322 of DMA 2000 emphasizes the need for state, local and Tribal government entities to closely coordinate on mitigation planning activities and makes the development of a hazard mitigation plan a specific eligibility requirement for any local or Tribal government applying for federal mitigation grant funds. In short, if a jurisdiction is not covered by an approved mitigation plan, it will not be eligible for mitigation grant funds. These funds include the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and the Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program, both of which are administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under the Department of Homeland Security. Communities with an adopted and federally-approved hazard mitigation plan thereby become prepositioned and more apt to receive available mitigation funds before and after the next disaster strikes.

Major federal flood insurance legislation was passed in 2012 under the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act (P.L. 112-141) and the subsequent Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act (HFIAA) in 2014 which revised Biggert-Waters. HFIAA established the requirement that a FEMA-approved Hazard Mitigation Plan is now required if communities wish to be eligible for any of the FEMA mitigation programs. These acts made several changes to the way the National Flood Insurance Program is to be run, including raises in rates to reflect true flood risk and changes in how Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) updates impact policyholders. These acts further emphasize Congress' focus on mitigating vulnerable structures.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The Southeastern NC Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan has been prepared in coordination with FEMA Region IV and the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management (NCEM) to ensure that the Plan meets all applicable FEMA and state requirements for hazard mitigation plans. A *Local Mitigation Plan Review Tool*, found in Appendix C, provides a summary of federal and state minimum standards and notes the location where each requirement is met within the Plan. Additionally, the plan was developed in accordance with updated FEMA Region IV Review Standards that were provided in February of 2020.

1.2 PURPOSE

The purposes of the Southeastern NC Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan are to:

- ◆ Completely update the existing Southeastern NC Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan to demonstrate progress and reflect current conditions;
- ◆ Integrate Onslow County and the municipalities in the County into the Southeastern NC Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan;
- ◆ Increase public awareness and education;
- ◆ Maintain grant eligibility for participating jurisdictions;
- ◆ Update the plan in accordance with Community Rating System (CRS) requirements, where applicable; and
- ◆ Maintain compliance with state and federal legislative requirements for local hazard mitigation plans.

1.3 SCOPE

The focus of the Southeastern NC Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan is on those hazards determined to be “high” or “moderate” risks to the Southeastern NC Region, as determined through a detailed hazard risk assessment. Other hazards that pose a “low” or “negligible” risk will continue to be evaluated during future updates to the Plan, but they may not be fully addressed until they are determined to be of high or moderate risk. This enables the participating counties to prioritize mitigation actions based on those hazards which are understood to present the greatest risk to lives and property.

The geographic scope (i.e., the planning area) for the Plan includes the Counties of Brunswick, New Hanover, Onslow and Pender as well as their incorporated jurisdictions. **Table 1.1** lists each of these counties and their participating jurisdictions.

TABLE 1.1: PARTICIPATING JURISDICTIONS IN THE SOUTHEASTERN NC REGIONAL HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

Brunswick County	
Bald Head Island	Northwest
Belville	Oak Island
Boiling Spring Lakes	Ocean Isle Beach
Bolivia	Sandy Creek
Calabash	Shalotte
Carolina Shores	Southport
Caswell Beach	St. James
Holden Beach	Sunset Beach
Leland	Varnamtown
Navassa	
New Hanover County	
Carolina Beach	Wilmington
Kure Beach	Wrightsville Beach
Onslow County	
Jacksonville	Richlands
Holly Ridge	Swansboro
North Topsail Beach	
Pender County	
Atkinson	Surf City
Burgaw	Topsail Beach
Saint Helena	Watha

1.4 AUTHORITY

The Southeastern NC Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan has been developed in accordance with current state and federal rules and regulations governing local hazard mitigation plans and has been adopted by each participating jurisdiction in accordance with standard local procedures. Copies of the adoption resolutions for each participating jurisdiction are provided in Appendix A. The Plan shall be routinely monitored and revised to maintain compliance with the following provisions, rules, and legislation:

- ◆ Section 322, Mitigation Planning, of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as enacted by Section 104 of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-390);
- ◆ FEMA's Final Rule published in the Federal Register, at 44 CFR Part 201 (201.6 for local mitigation planning requirements and 201.7 for Tribal planning requirements);
- ◆ Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-264), Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-141) and the Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act of 2014.

1.5 SUMMARY OF PLAN CONTENTS

The contents of this Plan are designed and organized to be as reader-friendly and functional as possible. While significant background information is included on the processes used and studies completed (i.e., risk assessment, capability assessment), this information is separated from the more meaningful planning outcomes or actions (i.e., mitigation strategy, mitigation action plan).

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Section 2: **Planning Process**, provides a complete narrative description of the process used to prepare the Plan. This includes the identification of participants on the planning team, and how the public and other stakeholders were involved. It also includes a detailed summary for each of the key meetings held, along with any associated outcomes.

The **Community Profile**, located in Section 3, provides a general overview of the Southeastern NC Region, including prevalent geographic, demographic and economic characteristics. In addition, building characteristics and land use patterns are discussed. This baseline information provides a snapshot of the planning area and helps local officials recognize those social, environmental and economic factors that ultimately play a role in determining the region's vulnerability to hazards.

The Risk Assessment is presented in three sections: Section 4: **Hazard Identification**; Section 5: **Hazard Profiles**; and Section 6: **Vulnerability Assessment**. Together, these sections serve to identify, analyze and assess hazards that pose a threat to the Southeastern NC Region. The risk assessment also attempts to define any hazard risks that may uniquely or exclusively affect specific areas of the Southeastern NC Region.

The Risk Assessment begins by identifying hazards that threaten the Southeastern NC Region. Next, detailed profiles are established for each hazard, building on available historical data from past hazard occurrences, spatial extent, and probability of future occurrence. This section culminates in a hazard risk ranking based on conclusions regarding the frequency of occurrence, spatial extent, and potential impact highlighted in each of the hazard profiles. In the vulnerability assessment, NCEM's Risk Management section's loss estimation methodology is used to evaluate known hazard risks by their relative long-term cost in expected damages. In essence, the information generated through the risk assessment serves a critical function as participating jurisdictions in the Southeastern NC Region seek to determine the most appropriate mitigation actions to pursue and implement—enabling it to prioritize and focus its efforts on those hazards of greatest concern and those structures or planning areas facing the greatest risk(s).

The **Capability Assessment**, found in Section 7, provides a comprehensive examination of the capacity of the participating jurisdictions in the Southeastern NC Region to implement meaningful mitigation strategies and identifies opportunities to increase and enhance that capacity. Specific capabilities addressed in this section include planning and regulatory capability, staff and organizational (administrative) capability, technical capability, fiscal capability, and political capability. Information was obtained through the use of detailed survey questionnaires for local officials and an inventory and analysis of existing plans, ordinances and relevant documents. The purpose of this assessment is to identify any existing gaps, weaknesses or conflicts in programs or activities that may hinder mitigation efforts, and to identify those activities that should be built upon in establishing a successful and sustainable local hazard mitigation program.

The *Community Profile*, *Risk Assessment*, and *Capability Assessment* collectively serve as a basis for determining the goals for the Southeastern NC Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, each contributing to the development, adoption and implementation of a meaningful and manageable *Mitigation Strategy* that is based on accurate background information.

The **Mitigation Strategy**, found in Section 8, consists of broad hazard mitigation goal statements for the region as well as an analysis of hazard mitigation techniques for the Southeastern NC Region to consider in reducing hazard vulnerabilities. The strategy provides the foundation for a detailed **Mitigation Action**

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Plan, found in Section 9, which links specific mitigation actions for each county department or agency to locally-assigned implementation mechanisms and target completion dates. Together, these sections are designed to make the Plan both strategic, through the identification of long-term goals, and functional, through the identification of immediate and short-term actions that will guide day-to-day decision-making and project implementation.

In addition to the identification and prioritization of possible mitigation projects, emphasis is placed on the use of program and policy alternatives to help make the Southeastern NC Region less vulnerable to the damaging forces of hazards while improving the economic, social and environmental health of the community. The concept of multi-objective planning was emphasized throughout the planning process, particularly in identifying ways to link, where possible, hazard mitigation policies and programs with complimentary community goals related to disaster recovery, housing, economic development, recreational opportunities, transportation improvements, environmental quality, land development, and public health and safety.

Plan Maintenance, found in Section 10, includes the measures that the Southeastern NC Region will take to ensure the Plan's continuous long-term implementation. The procedures also include the manner in which the Plan will be regularly evaluated and updated to remain a current and meaningful planning document.