



COCONINO COUNTY ARIZONA FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT



Para Español, ver atrás

October 29, 2019

Dear Museum Flood Area Resident,

On behalf of the Coconino County Flood Control District (FCD) and the City of Flagstaff (City), we would like to again thank you and your neighbors for your cooperation and community spirit during the Museum Fire, and especially during installation of emergency flood mitigation measures in your neighborhood. More than 600,000 sandbags and 6,600 linear feet of barriers were installed throughout the Museum Flood area by the FCD's team in just over two weeks. This was a monumental undertaking, one which would have been impossible without your support.

As we move from the driest monsoon season on record into autumn, we want to provide you with a brief update regarding the importance of keeping these emergency flood mitigation measures in place as well as some possible long-term on-forest flood mitigation projects that are underway or being considered for the Museum Flood area. Please note that, for the reasons outlined below, **the FCD and City strongly recommend keeping your flood mitigation in place through the 2020 monsoon season.**

Emergency Flood Mitigation Measures

First and foremost, it's very important to understand that the threat of flooding is real and that your property will remain at high risk for post-wildfire flooding for several years. Although we are fortunate to have not experienced any flooding this summer, it is equally important to note that the National Weather Service classified the 2019 monsoon season as the driest since record keeping began in 1898 (as recorded at the Flagstaff Airport). The San Francisco Peaks area received only about 20 percent of its normal rainfall amount during this monsoon season. The Museum Fire Burn Scar received only about 2.5 – 3.7 inches of rainfall during the 2019 monsoon season, which is about 35 percent of normal monsoon precipitation. In addition, rainfall that did fall on the burn scar was light to moderate in character and therefore did not create significant post-wildfire flooding downstream.

Given this very dry monsoon season, some residents might wonder if they need to keep their emergency flood mitigation measures in place. They should. Those considering removing their measures also need to consider the following:

- ❖ Because of the historically dry 2019 monsoon season, the flood mitigation measures in your neighborhood were not tested against anything close to normal rainfall conditions.
- ❖ The placement of flood mitigation in your neighborhood was based on science and the lessons learned from the Schultz and Slide fires. The science included a previously conducted FEMA-funded County-wide post-wildfire flood risk study, which created a flood model for the Spruce Avenue watershed (the watershed impacted by the Museum Fire). This watershed was identified



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at high risk for wildfire and post-wildfire flooding, which would impact many residences and businesses downstream.

- ❖ All property owners who signed a Cooperator Agreement (CA) for the installation of sandbags or barriers committed to keeping these mitigation measures in place for a minimum of three months following the end of the 2019 monsoon season (which officially was September 30).
- ❖ We do not yet know how winter snow or spring rain runoff might impact the flood area. A rain-on-snow event could cause very serious flooding in the Museum Flood Area. In fact, the worst flooding experienced in the greater Flagstaff area historically has been caused by rain-on-snow events, which have impacted many areas such as Oak Creek, Fort Valley, Mountain Dell and parts of Flagstaff. As such, the FCD and City **strongly recommend keeping your flood mitigation in place through the 2020 monsoon season.**
- ❖ Because of the nature of water, flood mitigation should be contiguous – not piecemeal - with no gaps. The mitigation installed in the Museum Flood Area was mostly designed to convey floodwaters downstream and out of your neighborhood. Removal of any section of this mitigation from an individual property may compromise the effectiveness of this system and could result in adverse flooding effects on adjacent properties, for which the private property owner who removed the mitigation could be held responsible for any damage.
- ❖ The City of Flagstaff is aware of concerns regarding the impact of installed flood mitigation on upcoming snow removal operations in the neighborhoods. The City team is working to create a modified snow removal operations strategy that will help to minimize the impact of installed mitigation on snow removal operations. The County is committed to assisting the City with those operations if needed.

Please Do Not Dispose of Your Sandbags Early!

Based on the information above, the FCD and City again strongly encourage all property owners to keep their sandbags in place and not to dispose of them **until after the 2020 monsoon season.** We suggest that if sandbags must be removed to allow for winter parking that you stockpile them on your property and cover them with plastic during the winter season. The sandbags will then be there for use during next summer’s monsoon season or if we have a rain on snow event over the winter. If you do this, then it’s also a good idea to take a photo or draw a diagram of the sandbags before moving them, this will help to act as a guide for their proper reinstallation in the future.

Please note that disposal of sandbags is exclusively each property owner’s responsibility. Sandbags cannot be put in City trash cans or placed curbside for City bulk pickup. Sandbags can either be taken to the Cinder Lake Landfill at 6770 Landfill Road or, if they are in good shape, returned to the sandbag station at 2625 N. King Street. Please note that sandbags also can be cut open so that the cinders can be spread in areas such as unpaved portions of the property such as driveways or in garden areas. Please do not dump the cinders in the street gutters. The City of Flagstaff recommends



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that residents keep gutters and storm water inlets clear of trash, debris and sandbags to allow for efficient drainage. Clogged drains should be reported to the City's Stormwater Inspector at (928) 213-2474.

Protect Your Sandbags!

Sandbags are susceptible to the elements, especially the ultraviolet (UV) rays of sunlight. A good way to help prolong the life of your sandbags is to cover them in dark plastic sheeting (clear plastic sheeting will not protect against UV rays). Thicker sheeting will last the longest and also help protect your sandbags against rain and snow. Plastic sheeting in a variety of color and thicknesses is available at any hardware store.

Long-Term Flood Mitigation Projects

In addition to 24/7 flood monitoring, the FCD and City teams continue to work on the feasibility of flood mitigation projects for the Museum Flood area, including the following:

- ❖ The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) recently recommended to the Coconino National Forest Supervisor that she award \$217,000 for implementing on-forest alluvial fan stabilization above Mt. Elden Estates. Supervisor Liz Archuleta successfully advocated at the RAC meeting for funding this key flood mitigation project. The funds come through the Secure Rural Schools and Roads Act. We received about half of the funds that were available and nearly all the funds that were requested. The funds are contingent upon completing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) evaluation and determining there are no impacts or impacts that can be mitigated. The NEPA should be done by the USFS and the RAC indicated that this work should be prioritized. The County and City's leadership will communicate with the USFS nationally, regionally and at the local forest levels about the importance of completing the NEPA process as soon as possible so that construction can take place this coming spring. There will be no further RAC funds because the act has not been reauthorized by Congress.
- ❖ The FCD's consultant, Natural Channel Design, is preparing a conceptual plan for implementing alluvial fan stabilization (like the on-forest project) for the 40-acre private parcel north of Mt. Elden Estates. The FCD has secured permission from the property owner to evaluate the opportunities for alluvial fan stabilization and our consultant has walked the area with a representative from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS has the authority to fund watershed restoration on private property; however, this is contingent upon the private property owner applying for the funding and reaching agreement with the NRCS. Once a draft plan that meets the NRCS' requirements is prepared, the FCD and our consultant will meet with the private property owner.
- ❖ The Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project recently secured \$700,000 in Supplemental Project Agreement (SPA) funding from the USFS to conduct remedial activities on the Museum Fire Burn



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Scar. These activities include removal of burned hazard trees, removal of all remaining slash debris piles and some trail remediation work.

- ❖ The USFS recently completed helicopter mulching operations over the Museum Fire Burn Scar. These operations used ground-up pine trees from two of the log decks from earlier forest restoration projects.

These projects are great news for Museum Flood area residents. However, it remains extremely important to remember that flood measures would help to mitigate but will not eliminate the flood threat in your area. As we learned from the Schultz Flood, the threat of flooding will remain in your neighborhood for years to come. As such, **the FCD and City strongly encourages all property owners to purchase and maintain flood insurance.**

Please know that the Coconino County Flood Control District and City of Flagstaff will continue to work hard on your behalf to help mitigate flooding in your neighborhood to the fullest extent possible. If you have any questions or concerns, then please email our staff at museumfloodinfo@coconino.az.gov. More information also is available at www.coconino.az.gov/MuseumFire/FloodArea. Thank you for your continuing support.

Sincerely,

Liz Archuleta
County Supervisor
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Coral Evans
Mayor
City of Flagstaff

Art Babbott
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