

# Custer City & Custer County, South Dakota

## 2023 Accomplishments

Severe rainstorms cause sudden flash floods across Custer County, South Dakota (pop. 8,360). French Creek runs parallel to the main street of Custer City, the county seat. In August 2019, the city and county experienced significant flooding resulting in damage to critical infrastructure and evacuations. The majority of Custer County has been designated by FEMA as a Community Disaster Resilience Zone (CDRZ) as of 2023.



Photo: Custer County Search and Rescue

FloodWise Community since July 2023

Project services paid by FloodWise to date: \$26,000

## 2023 FloodWise Deliverables

- Engaged stakeholders regarding community flood resiliency, specifically looking at regional flood risk mitigation solutions. This included facilitation of monthly stakeholder flood mitigation meetings.
- Scoped the problem, contracted consultant, and funded an engineer to research previous community flood-related studies and commence hydrologic and hydraulics (H&H) study of the French Creek Watershed.
- Performed two site visits with community stakeholders.
- Assisted engineer in identifying preliminary flood mitigation projects.
- Assisted Custer County and Custer City in writing and submitting a \$495,205 grant proposal to FEMA's BRIC program.

## Stakeholder Engagement

FloodWise Community Assistance reached out to Custer County and Custer City in the spring and offered to assist with flood mitigation. By mid-summer a Memorandum of Understanding was signed and meetings were underway to define problems and determine goals. It soon became clear that solutions lay in a regional watershed approach to flood mitigation. FloodWise Staff conducted a site visit, reached out to potential partners, and facilitated meetings. Stakeholders who regularly participate in meetings now include Custer County, Custer City, East Custer Water and Sewer District, Custer Co. Highway Department, U.S. Forest Service, and business and community representatives. SD Office of Emergency Manager and Black Hills Council of Local Governments personnel attend on occasion.



Map: RESPEC

## Hydrologic and Hydraulics Study

FloodWise hired RESPEC engineering consultants to conduct an H&H study of the French Creek Watershed to identify and prioritize flood mitigation projects that will reduce the risk of future flooding to the community. This model will be instrumental in competitive proposals for state and federal grants to fund prioritized flood mitigation solutions such as: constructed wetland/floodplain, stream restoration, new culverts, and remodeled infrastructure that will ultimately improve hydrological function as well as residents' safety.

## Grant Proposal for Custer County

Much of Custer County is a FEMA-designated Community Disaster Resilience Zone due to its high levels of social vulnerability and natural hazard risk. FloodWise staff helped Custer County prepare the complex grant proposal required to apply for FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program. The proposal requests \$495,205 to complete a scoping project to prioritize projects, conduct feasibility and benefit-cost analyses, and design engineered solutions. This work builds on the hydrologic and hydraulics study funded by FloodWise in 2023. The goal of the county's scoping project is to be shovel-ready for future FEMA-BRIC applications.



Photo: RESPEC

## Next Steps

- RESPEC will complete the H&H study and the community, and the project team will prioritize flood mitigation projects.
- Continue monthly stakeholder engagement meetings.
- Present H&H findings to the community in a public meeting.
- If the Custer County FEMA-BRIC grant is awarded, the prioritized projects will continue into feasibility analysis, conceptual design, full design, and construction grant application.
- If the grant is not awarded, we will continue to seek funding for the projects while working with partners to implement as much of the mitigation plan as possible.

## About FloodWise Community Assistance & Headwaters Economics

FloodWise Community Assistance is a program of Headwaters Economics that provides free technical assistance to decrease flood risk and strengthen communities.

Headwaters Economics is an independent, nonprofit research group whose mission is to improve community development and land management decisions. <https://headwaterseconomics.org/>