

Three Forks, Montana

2023 Accomplishments

Recent floodplain mapping updates to the Jefferson and Madison River watersheds demonstrated that flood risk in Three Forks, MT, was higher than previously understood. In the new maps, nearly the entire town is located within the floodplain and part of the town is in the floodway.

FloodWise Community since August 2020

Project services paid by FloodWise to date: \$121,401

2023 FloodWise Deliverables

Over the last three years, FloodWise has helped the City of Three Forks identify a solution to their flood risk and secure federal funding to help pay for it. In 2023 after being notified that the city was selected for a \$4.2 million FEMA Flood Mitigation Assistance grant, the project team finalized the location of the project, worked through FEMA's preliminary permit requirements, and engaged the community, including impacted landowners. Key accomplishments in 2023 were:

- Facilitated monthly meetings with project team.
- Coordinated site visits for U.S. Senator Tester and key FEMA representatives.
- Elevated Three Forks' story to the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.
- Assisted with local match funding for FEMA grant.

Stakeholder Engagement

In 2023, FloodWise Community Assistance facilitated monthly meetings with the project team, which includes representatives from the City of Three Forks, Montana Department of Resources and Conservation, Great West Engineering, and Headwaters Economics. At the beginning of the year, FloodWise created meeting agendas and talking points to assist city staff with their conversations with landowners who are impacted by the project and will need to provide easements.

Leadership Visits to the Project Site

In March 2023, U.S. Senator Jon Tester visited Three Forks with his staff to learn about the project and discuss how his team can assist with implementation. FloodWise created a handout about Three Forks, its flood risk, and the mitigation project for Senator Tester's team.

On August 9, Three Forks hosted representatives from FEMA Region 8 and Montana Department of Emergency Services. City staff Kelly Smith and Crystal Turner discussed the flood risk and project logistics at City Hall. Then the group headed to the site of the mitigation project where Jeremiah Theys from Great West Engineering pointed out key landmarks of the future project.



On August 31, Three Forks hosted another team from FEMA for a site visit. Attendees included Nicole Aimone, Director of the Mitigation Division at FEMA Region 8, and Katherine Fox, Deputy Administrator for FEMA Region 8.

Three Forks Featured in U.S. Senate Testimony

On May 2, Headwaters Economics Executive Director Patty Hernandez was requested to testify in Washington, DC, at the hearing on “Reauthorization of the National Flood Insurance Program: Improving Community Resilience” for the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. In her testimony, Patty explained the flood risk in Three Forks and highlighted the success of the project team in identifying and implementing a solution. She noted the need for more technical assistance and funding to help rural communities like Three Forks address flood risk. Patty’s testimony can be read online at <https://www.banking.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Hernandez%20Testimony%205-2-23.pdf>.



Funding Secured for Local Match

Since the beginning of the partnership with Three Forks, FloodWise has worked with the city to develop a funding strategy to construct the project and maintain it over the long term. FloodWise helped secure a FEMA Flood Mitigation Assistance grant that included a 25% local match. FloodWise worked with Great West Engineering to assess different options for meeting this requirement. The city chose to create a Special Improvement District (SID) to fund the local match and long-term maintenance of the project. In 2023, FloodWise created community outreach materials about the new SID fee, which appeared for the first time on the November 2023 tax bill.

Next Steps

- Finalize FEMA’s preliminary grant requirements and receive official award notification.
- Great West Engineering to begin finalizing design and acquiring necessary permits.
- Secure landowner easements.
- Start construction on conveyance channel in Fall 2024.

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/>