

Three Forks, Montana

Floodplain mapping updates to the Jefferson and Madison River watersheds highlighted severe flood risk throughout Three Forks, MT (2023 pop. 2,034). Approximately 80% of the city’s structures lie within the regulatory floodplain and its northern residential neighborhood was remapped into the floodway.

In 2020 the City of Three Forks and FloodWise formed a project team with city staff, Montana state agencies, and Great West Engineering. Together the partners identified a cost-effective, nature-based solution: a \$5.5 million conveyance channel that reduces flood risk from the Jefferson River for nearly the entire community.

In 2024, the project team officially secured a \$4.2 million FEMA Flood Mitigation Assistance grant, with Montana’s new Resiliency Fund providing the nonfederal match. The city established a Special Improvement District (SID) in 2023 to fund the project’s operations and maintenance.

Partnership Outcomes

- Staff from the City of Three Forks, Great West Engineering, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and FloodWise co-presented about the mitigation project at the National Assoc. of State Flood Plain Managers conference in New Orleans, LA, and the Assoc. of Montana Floodplain Managers annual meeting in Missoula, MT.
- The Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation presented preliminary flood risk maps to the community. FEMA contractors, Great West Engineering, Gallatin County Disaster & Emergency Services, and FloodWise attended.
- FloodWise led a ripple effects mapping workshop in March 2025, which demonstrated that the collaborative approach strengthened relationships, deepened shared understanding, and improved project outcomes.



FloodWise, Three Forks city staff, and Great West Engineering co-presented information about the city’s innovative flood mitigation project at national and statewide meetings in 2025. (Photo by Headwaters Economics)

Next Steps

- Great West Engineering has finalized the mitigation project’s design and is securing final permits.
- The City of Three Forks is working to secure easements from the impacted landowners.
- Construction is tentatively scheduled to begin in the summer of 2026.

- ◆ FloodWise Community since August 2020
- ◆ Project services paid by FloodWise to date: \$121,402
- ◆ Other funds secured: \$5,536,500



FloodWise Community Assistance is a program of Headwaters Economics that provides free technical assistance and customized research to help reduce flood risk and strengthen communities. <https://floodwise.headwaterseconomics.org/>