

## **2009 IAFSM AWARDS**

This year was not an easy year to pick our awards recipients, especially a floodplain manager of the year. We had dozens of floodplain managers who did extraordinary, exemplary work to reduce flood losses and improve floodplain management across this state.

### **FLOODPLAIN MANAGER OF THE YEAR – GREG THORPE**

Greg is a Certified Floodplain Manager from Rock Island County Illinois which was declared a disaster area 4 times in 2008. The water level on their main stream gauge dropped below flood stage for less than 14 days over most of last year.

Greg was instrumental in co-coordinating a team of 2 who did over 300 initial damage assessments, working for 33 hours in a 48 hour period in below freezing weather, in rubber boots, on Saturday and Sunday. Even though Rock Island County has done hundreds of mitigation projects, over 30 Substantial Damage Declarations were made from one flood alone.

Greg was a driving force behind the Countywide mitigation plan. He organized all 16 communities on a county wide basis, and took into consideration each individual jurisdictions' Hazard Mitigation needs. This plan was approved by FEMA and adopted by the community on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009.

This community is also a CRS class 7. Greg worked overtime to make sure the required annual actions were made to retain this Class 7 designation.

In 2008, Greg put together an Illinois-Iowa Building Inspector's floodplain management conference, and had over 75 participants. He also worked to train surveyors on how to fill out EC's correctly and how to file the new E-LOMA's.

Greg is an indispensable part of a County flood plain management system that was 10 years in the making and is arguably one of the best in the entire nation (not just the state).

### **FLOODPLAN MANAGER OF THE YEAR #2 – JERSEY COUNTY (Mike Prough, Cindy Cragmire, Kusumaker Bhusal and Rion Kolosieke)**

No secret here.....Jersey County has won about every award you can win. The County went from almost being kick out of the NFIP in 1994, to being the best in the nation 10 years later. Mike Prough was both the state and the national floodplain manager of the year. The Jersey County story is nothing short of amazing.

This year, they surpassed even themselves! IN 2008, Jersey County went thru hours and hours of hard work and frustration this year trying to force compliance on nearly 300 flooded USACE lease cabins. The County fought major battles to get these repetitive loss properties elevated, and to get the USACE to accept some responsibility to flood

losses on Federal property. During the summer of 2008, over 800 emails alone were sent to the USACE! Hundreds of inspections were completed on USACE lease cabins. Public meetings were held with cabin owners. Today, over half of the cabins are being elevated above the flood elevation. This success is entirely due to Jersey County.

The county has also taken on environmental issues rarely faced by other communities. When USACE lease cabins were found to be dumping raw sewage directly into the river, the County stepped in to correct this problem. Again with little or no support from the USACE or the State, nearly all the sewage issues are being corrected.

Based on insurance claims data alone, Jersey County is the state's most flood prone county. But...no county in the state can show such a greater reduction in savings that Jersey County. Therefore, once again, Jersey County is getting the IAFSM Floodplain Manager of the Year award.

Several other local officials have done extraordinary work following all the statewide floods this year. They deserve honorable mention:

Mike Harsted (LaSalle County)  
Mike Suttfin (Ottawa)  
Jim Burger (Putnam County)  
John Hammond (Woodford County)  
Dawn Anderson (Grundy County)  
Joye Baker (Adams County)  
Revonne Butler (Henderson County)  
Matt Wahl (Peoria County)  
Alan Ninness (Saline County)  
Chad Attkinson (Machesney Park)  
Joel Nasser (Watseka) – 47 of 49 sub dams are elevated.  
Don Pallissard (Kankakee County)  
Gloria Schleef (Iroquois County)  
Brian Eber (Rockford)

## **OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD – STU RICHTER**

Stu Richter retired this year after serving his term limits as IAFSM Chairman. Those of us who know Stu for a long time know all too well his corny jokes. When Stu ran for chair...we were all worried. Really worried.

Stu has excelled. He has organized meetings, run board meetings, directed the budget, set up new committees, and eliminated other committees. Although this may seem like standard fare and what is expected of the Chairman, Stu took over the office on the same year French and Mary Lu Wetmore moved away. French and Mary Lu had been the organization and administration of IAFSM for nearly 25 years. Suddenly, IAFSM found themselves “kicked out of the nest”. We were on our own. It wasn't an easy job for someone to step in and organize volunteer labor to fill this void. It was a lot of work!!!

Stu did not hesitate and he had done an amazing job. IAFSM is stronger now than we ever have been. Much of that is due to Stu Richter's organization and leadership skills.

## **STORMWATER MANAGEMENT AWARD**

This year's winner is the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission. The Commission has been the lead coordination agency in the Peoria Area for the purposes of appropriate stormwater management practices/programs and has effectively coordinated very complex issues between Federal, State, and local governmental agencies.

In the early 1990's the Commission was instrumental in the development and marketing of a regional erosion and stormwater control ordinance. This ordinance is still in use by most governments in the Tri-County Area today.

Tri County RPC has developed the Mossville Bluffs Watershed Plan. This program includes a program to convince residential property owners to implement Stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) on their properties such as rain barrels and bioretention filters. The program also includes strategic tree thinning, log check dams, and bank stabilization to reduce the incredible amounts of gully and stream erosion that contributes to pollution of the Illinois River while claiming private property and threatening homes and structures. A Natural Resources Task Force was formed to provide guidance in the execution of the grant activities, thus using volunteer help of private and public sector experts to carry out the work and develop the ideas. The other is for the Farm Creek Watershed, on which her agency is coordinating with the Village of Morton and the USDA Forestry Agency.

Tri County has assisted with speakers and insight on the two IAFSM Stormwater Workshops held in the Peoria area.

Tri County is a major force on the IL River Valley Council of Governments (IRVCOG) Stormwater Committee, which is comprised by the municipalities in the Tri-County area and which has developed a Unified Stormwater Ordinance. The Agency provides much needed encouragement/confidence to government officials so that they hold their ground with developers and regulate improvements for stormwater management

Tri County has created a Regional Stormwater Management Plan under the prevue of the Illinois River Valley Council of Governments (IRVCOG). This program has guided a group of local government professionals through a very complex process to create a document that addresses a variety of water related issues and provides reasonable solutions for the urbanized and rural areas of the Tri-County Area.

Tri-County Regional Planning Commission has been a leader in the area of Stormwater Management. Their efforts to develop programs and secure necessary funding for implementation are unsurpassed in the Peoria Area. Their commitment to the improvement of water quality is at the top of the class in the State of Illinois and deserves recognition by the IAFSM

Honorable Mention – Downers Grove

In 2006, the Village of Downers Grove prepared a Stormwater Master Plan (Plan). The Plan recommended developing a Watershed Infrastructure Improvement Plan (WIIP) to study and identify stormwater system deficiencies in each of the Village's watersheds and to guide future infrastructure improvements. Three days after the Plan was finalized the Village received nearly four inches of rain in one hour. The Village immediately began implementing Plan recommendations

The plan was completed during the first half of 2007. The Watershed Plan identified and prioritized dozens of stormwater improvement projects throughout the Village with a total estimated construction cost of \$340M. Village staff presented the plan to Village Council and the public in fall 2007. Village staff successfully convinced their council and public of the importance of proper stormwater management and the need to improve the Village's stormwater infrastructure to reduce future flood damages. The Village obtained funding and in January 2008 began designing and constructing many of the recommended stormwater improvements.

Nine projects were built in 2008, ten are currently being designed or constructed, and six, including three which will cumulatively provide 40 acre-feet of detention, are scheduled for design or construction in 2009. Therefore, Downers Grove deserves, at a minimum, honorable mention.

### **MITIGATION AWARD – Village of Lisle**

The Village of Lisle purchased around 25 single family homes in the floodplain, demolished them, and used the land to build a stormwater basin that provides both detention and compensatory storage for development and redevelopment of properties in downtown Lisle. Complicating the project was the fact that the basin was located in the floodplain; DuPage County required FEQ modeling and some creative engineering was needed to deal with the challenges of the floodplain and the close proximity of Route 53. The basin was designed to be more than a plain oval basin; it has an interesting shape, with a peninsula jutting out into the basin, and includes a great deal of native landscaping. The Village was also awarded an OSLAD grant to add a walking trail, pergola, gazebo, interpretive signs, and a children's play area with a nature theme. The site will include features such as a green roof and hopefully some pervious concrete. (I was going to save this one until the project is further along; the basin is in and functioning, it's weathered two very large storms already, and the plantings are in place, but the OSLAD improvements won't be done until 2010.)

### **JOURNALISM OR PUBLIC EDUCATION AWARD – SCARCE**

Kay McKeen and SCARCE (School and Community Assistance for Recycling and Composting Education). The organization's mission is: "To inspire people, through education, to care for and preserve the Earth's natural resources, while working to build sustainable communities." Their web site is [www.s-c-a-r-c-e.org](http://www.s-c-a-r-c-e.org). They are an amazing organization. A part of what they do involves educating teachers, students, and the public about watersheds, native plants, and floodplain. She has two watershed models that she loans out to schools for use in the classroom. She also has a grant that allows her to run a workshop for teachers, where they build a groundwater model (which costs \$500 if you buy a commercial one), and the teachers get to take it with them for use in their classroom. The workshop includes a book with numerous classroom activities

using the model. During the summer, she ran bus tours looking at sustainable buildings, and talked quite a bit about naturalized landscaping and best management practices, green roofs, LEED accreditation, etc. Ask her about flooding in her back yard--she is the best ad ever for the benefits of native landscaping as opposed to our traditional turf grass--she did it in her own back yard and mitigated flooding on her own property--she practices what she preaches! She and her outstanding organization have touched many lives, and they are an excellent example of positive public education.

## **LEGISLATION AWARD**

Once again this year, we don't have a legislation award. However, we do have a STRONG contender for the worst legislation award. It should go to the Illinois legislative delegation who forced professionals to ignore identified levee deficiencies and flood risk. This year IAFSM sent a letter to the entire Illinois Congressional delegation. It included the this request:

"We ask that you do NOT support any attempt to withhold documented levee deficiencies. We ask that you do NOT support any delays in the true risk identification (mapping) effort. We also ask that you allow the experienced floodplain and levee experts in the field to uphold their professionalism and their ethical responsibilities."

## **LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD – Don Vonnahme**

The Lifetime Achievement Award is given to someone who's actions have changed the floodplain landscape of the entire State of Illinois. This year's recipient's work can be seen in every corner of the state. For over 40 years, he has worked (and continues to work) to reduce flood losses and improve water quality in this state. His leadership and guidance has inspired an entire generation of floodplain managers who followed in his steps. To list all of Don' Vonnahme's achievements could fill an entire newsletter alone. Therefore, we will just list the highlights.

### **EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT**

1964	Graduate of University of Illinois; Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering (Specialties: Hydraulics, Hydrology, Economics) Married to Barbara
1964 - 1966	U.S. Army (Korea); Operations Officer, 609th Ordnance Company
1966 - 1973	Hydraulic Engineer; Division of Water Resources; IL Dept of Transportation
1973 - 1976	Office Manager/Design Engineer; Metcalf & Eddy/Alstot, March & Guillou
1976 - Aug '82	Deputy Director; Division of Water Resources; IL Dept of Transportation
Aug '82 - July '95	Director; Division of Water Resources; IL Dept of Transportation
July '95 - April '03	Director; Office of Water Resources; IDNR

April 30, 2003 - Present Advisor to Director; Office of Water Resources; IDNR

October 23, 2003 Retirement

- Registered Professional Engineer in Illinois and Missouri

### **APPOINTMENTS/ASSIGNMENTS**

- **Chairman** of Illinois State Water Plan Task Force
- **Co-Chairman** of Illinois Drought Task Force
- **Chairman** of Decision Making Standard Committee of the Council of Great Lakes Governors and Premiers
- **Illinois Commissioner** to Great Lakes Commission (A **past Chairman** of the Commission)
- **Illinois Commissioner** to Ohio River Basin Commission (A **past Chairman** of the Commission)
- **Illinois Representative** to Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (Current **Vice Chairman** of the Association; a **past Chairman** of the Association)
- **Member of Board of Directors** of Interstate Council on Water Policy (A **past Chairman** of the Council)
- **Member of Board of Directors** of National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies (A **past Chairman** of the Association)
- **Member of External Advisory Committee** to University of Illinois, Water Resources Center

### **AWARDS**

- **Governor's Superior Achievement Award (1971)** - Governor Richard Ogilvie
- **Top 10 Public Works "Leaders of the Year" for 1985** - American Public Works Association
- **Excellence in Flood Hazard Management (1985)** - Association of State Floodplain Managers
- **Government Professional Development Award (1986)** - Illinois Society of Professional Engineers
- **Government Professional Development Award (1987)** - National Society of

## Professional Engineers

- **Professional Engineering Management Award (1993)** - Illinois Society of Professional Engineers
- **Education and Public Service Award (1998)** - Universities Council on Water Resources