



Dark Hollow Dam Debate: Voluntary Buyouts -- A Permanent and Effective Solution

FACT SHEET #4 — The Proposed Dark Hollow Dam and Neshaminy Creek Stormwater Management

As a result of extensive public input to the Steering Committee, one of the flood damage reduction options being considered by NRCS is stormwater management coupled with structure buyout and removal from the floodplain.

Structural solutions, such as dams, have been the answer to flooding across the country throughout this century. The federal government has spent \$140 billion in federal tax monies preparing for and recovering from natural disasters over the past 25 years. The Army Corps of Engineers has spent more than \$25 billion on levees, dams, riprap, channelization and other structures in an effort to minimize flood damages. However, annual flood losses have more than doubled (in constant dollar terms) from what they were in 1900 and continue to rise. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is deeply in debt and already had to be bailed out by Congress (\$1 billion forgiven).

A report by the National Wildlife Federation, "**Higher Ground: A Report on Voluntary Property Buyouts in the Nation's Floodplains**", July, 1998, lays out a compelling argument for nonstructural measures and the restoration of the functions of floodplains. The report documents the movement towards voluntary buyout and relocation, purchase of flooding easements and wetlands, and the implementation of wise floodplain management. Voluntary buyouts allow participating home and business owners to move out of harm's way and restore the natural flood protection capacity of floodplains, providing benefit to neighboring and downstream communities. The investment being made in the nonstructural solutions is already repaying itself, providing a permanent solution that is extremely cost-effective. The old-fashioned dam approach is not only very expensive and not very effective, in some cases dams have

According to the report, Middletown Township and Bristol Township are among the top 300 prime candidates in the U.S. for a voluntary buyout program because of their large number of repetitive loss properties. Pennsylvania is in the top 10 list of states with the largest payments made for repetitive loss properties. NFIP rules require that properties which sustain substantial damage (many of these are repetitive loss properties) be removed from the floodplain. The report criticizes the NFIP for not enforcing its regulations and, instead, continuing to repair substantially damaged properties with our taxes.

The best news is that there is funding now available for nonstructural solutions and more is on the way. FEMA (through Project IMPACT) and the Army Corps (through its new Challenge 21 program), along with other federal and state programs, are funding voluntary buyouts and floodplain restoration to control floods and improve stream water quality in the nation's waterways. 50 to 75% of NRCS's funds that are to be spent on the

Delaware Riverkeeper Network
300 Pond Street, Second Floor
Bristol, PA 19007
tel: (215) 369-1188
fax: (215) 369-1181
drkn@delawareriverkeeper.org
www.delawareriverkeeper.org

Neshaminy can, according to their rules, be used to fund nonstructural solutions, buyouts and floodplain restoration; the rest can be spent on retrofitting existing basins and stormwater systems.

Voluntary buyouts are an important and effective tool in reducing flood damages -- they remove at risk homeowners from harm's way; restore floodplains allowing them to once again perform their flood control function; and they help improve water quality as well.

Three Principles of Voluntary Property Buyouts

People in distress receive meaningful assistance by the voluntary purchase of their property, at predisaster fair market value, so that they can use the funds to acquire new housing on higher ground out of harm's way.

Where they are appropriate, voluntary buyouts are a cost-effective use of public funds because in return for one-time purchases, any future expenditure of disaster relief and recovery funds on the properties is prohibited.

People and the environment benefit because all property acquired in voluntary buyouts reverts permanently to recreational and open space uses or natural wetlands and floodplain functions.

Quoted from "Higher Ground: A Report on Voluntary Property Buyouts in the Nation's Floodplains" by the National Wildlife Federation, July 1998.