

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
FEMA Region III
One Independence Mall, Sixth Floor
615 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106-4404



FEMA

June 30, 2020

Mr. Christopher J. Belleman, P.E., CFM
Executive Director
Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority
P.O. Box 1909
Kingston, Pennsylvania 18704

Community: Luzerne County, Pennsylvania
Community Number: N/A

Re: Levee Certification Acceptance – Kingston to Exeter Levee System

Dear Mr. Belleman:

As you know, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is updating the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) for Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. An important goal of this process is to provide accurate, up-to-date flood hazard information to people living and working landward of levee systems. Because the conditions of watersheds and levees change over time, the level of flood hazard reduction provided by a levee system also changes. To be accredited on a FIRM and mapped as reducing the hazard posed by the 1-percent-annual-chance flood (base flood), a levee system must meet and continue to meet the minimum design, operation, and maintenance standards of Title 44 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 65.10 (44 CFR 65.10).

The purpose of this correspondence is to acknowledge that the Positive Levee System Evaluation Report submitted by the Baltimore District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE-Baltimore District) in March 2014 for the Kingston to Exeter Levee System meets the minimum requirements of 44 CFR 65.10, and to outline the next steps in the flood mapping process.

BACKGROUND

The Kingston to Exeter Levee System is labeled as a Provisionally Accredited Levee (PAL) on the effective FIRM for Luzerne County, Pennsylvania dated November 2, 2012. In accordance with the PAL agreements signed by the Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority (LCFPA) and affected communities between December 2009 and March 2010, the PAL designation expired on March 11, 2012. On March 20, 2013, FEMA notified LCFPA officials that the PAL agreement for the Kingston to Exeter Levee System had expired and that FEMA would initiate a study of the levee-impacted area once updated mapping guidelines were released. In February 2014, the USACE-Baltimore District completed a Positive Levee System Evaluation Report for the Kingston to Exeter Levee System, finding that the levee system meets the requirements necessary for accreditation. The submission was certified by Ronald J. Maj, Chief, Engineering Division, Baltimore District Levee

Safety Officer, on March 12, 2014. FEMA reviewed the documentation and data submitted in the report and determined they meet the minimum certification requirements of 44 CFR 65.10. FEMA accepts this levee certification and will show the Kingston to Exeter Levee System as reducing the hazard from the base flood on the updated Luzerne County FIRM.

FLOOD MAPPING PROCESS

FEMA is finalizing a preliminary Flood Insurance Study (FIS) and FIRM for Luzerne County and will update the preliminary FIS and FIRM to reflect the accreditation of the Kingston to Exeter Levee System. The preliminary FIRM will designate the flood zone landward of the levees as Zone X (shaded) to show the area with reduced hazard due to an accredited levee system. Properties located within this Zone X (shaded) area are not required to carry flood insurance. A note will be placed on the FIRM warning of the flood risk that still exists. Interior drainage areas behind the Kingston to Exeter Levee System with depths of one foot or more will be mapped as Special Flood Hazard Areas.

The next steps in the flood mapping process will provide Luzerne County and the affected communities an opportunity to review the updated maps and to meet with FEMA to discuss any questions. Updated FIRM panels are expected to be issued in Fall 2020, and a Community Coordination and Outreach meeting to discuss the updated maps will be held soon after.

Note that this certification is recognized for this map update only. Future map updates may require the levee to be recertified by the levee owner or sponsor. In addition, the levee owner or sponsor may be requested at any time to provide design, construction, operation, and maintenance documents to support any activity on the levee after the date of this certification. Any deviation from the documentation and data submitted to FEMA could result in the levee system no longer being mapped as reducing the hazard from the base flood on future maps. If at any point information is provided to FEMA that shows the levee no longer meets accreditation requirements, FEMA will contact the levee owner and/or sponsor and the affected communities about revising the levee's accreditation status.

LEVEES AND FLOOD RISK

While FEMA may map the Kingston to Exeter Levee System as reducing the risk from the base flood, it is important to note that levees are only designed to provide a specific level of flood hazard reduction. They can be overtopped or fail in larger flood events. They require regular maintenance and periodic upgrades to retain their level of flood hazard reduction. When levees do fail, they fail catastrophically, and the damage may be more significant than if the levee was not there.

Everyone should understand the risk to life and property that exists behind levees – a risk that even the best flood-control system cannot eliminate. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was created to reduce flood damage by identifying flood risks, encouraging sound community floodplain management practices, and providing flood insurance to lessen the financial impact of flooding. Through the NFIP, all property owners in participating communities can insure against future flood losses.

Thank you for your efforts and collaboration with FEMA to complete this process. The FEMA lead for this project is Nikki L. Roberts, P.E., Branch Chief, Risk Analysis. Ms. Roberts may be contacted either by telephone at (215) 931-5575 or by email at Nikki.Roberts@fema.dhs.gov. Please do not hesitate to contact her if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "April Cummings". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

April Cummings
Director, Mitigation Division
FEMA Region III

cc: Tim McGinley, Chair, Board of Commissioners, Luzerne County
Lucy Morgan, Emergency Management Coordinator, Luzerne County
Ted S. Martin, State NFIP Coordinator, DCED
Thomas S. Hughes, State Hazard Mitigation Officer, PEMA
Bill Bradfield, CFM, NFIP Program Manager, PEMA
Robert T. Graves, Chief, Completed Projects Section, DEP
Leon Skinner, Emergency Management, USACE-Baltimore District
Jehu Johnson, Levee Safety Program Manager, USACE-Baltimore District
Representative Matt Cartwright, U.S. Congressman, 8th District of Pennsylvania
Senator Pat Toomey, U.S. Senator for Pennsylvania
Senator Bob Casey, U.S. Senator for Pennsylvania