

March 19, 2008

Dear Marana Resident:

It won't be long before the Town of Marana has a better idea of where it stands with FEMA. It's a decision that will affect thousands of residents.

Late last summer, FEMA tried to unilaterally place much of Northwest Marana in the floodplain without detailed study. Town management, council and personnel took objection and began a process that caused FEMA to reverse course and withdraw its proposed maps, allowing the Town the time to perform a study.

The most important part of the decision process soon will be in place. Earlier this year, the Town contracted with CMG Drainage to perform a large-scale drainage study of the areas affected by the FEMA remapping and their associated watersheds, mainly the Tortolita Mountains. That area is where FEMA contends that flood waters will originate and run through Northwest Marana.

A preliminary analysis of the true floodplains is scheduled to be submitted to the Town, Pima County Flood Control District and Pinal County Flood Control District in May for review. Once the local jurisdictions agree on the analysis, it will be forwarded to FEMA headquarters in June.

All of this is taking place because FEMA has spent the past three years redefining what should be considered a levee. The tragedy of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 added impetus to the project. FEMA has been reluctant to consider the Central Arizona Project canals, Union Pacific railroad tracks and Interstate 10 as providing flood protection. That's why their proposed mapping places much of Northwest Marana - mostly west of I-10 - in the floodplain.

We believe the study will show that most of the potentially affected area is not prone to sheet flooding off the mountains because these levee-like structures do provide protection. In recent weeks, FEMA has seemed to be more willing to work with us on this issue, mostly thanks to Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords' and Senator Jon Kyl's involvement.

I hope to tell you later this year that everything has worked in our favor and that the drainage study has proven that FEMA's assumptions, which were made without proper study, were wrong. It will be a few months before anything is official, but we are moving toward a resolution.

-- Marana Mayor Ed Honea