

MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Preliminary Flood Map Appeal Period Begins

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has initiated a formal 90-day appeal period for filing appeals, protests and comments regarding the preliminary digital flood insurance rate map (DFIRM), commonly referred to as floodplain maps. The preliminary DFIRM identifies properties determined through computer-modeling and other analysis to have a one-percent chance of flooding in any given year.

The 90-day appeal period will run from December 17, 2008 through March 17, 2009. Appeals, protests and comments may be submitted by the City, County, individual property owners, or other concerned parties. The Miles City and Custer County points of contact are:

City of Miles City – Community Development and Planning
Attn: Steve Craddock
17 S. 8th St.
Miles City, MT 59301

Custer County Floodplain Manager
Stu Schipman
1010 Main Street
Miles City, MT 59301

FEMA and the state will have an indeterminate amount of time to respond to and resolve any issues following the appeal period. According to the state map modernization coordinator Celinda Adair, “The state’s appeal period officially begins February 17, 2009 and ends March 17, 2009, however the state has made an allowance to accept and review all submittals received by FEMA during their 90-day appeal period.” The state will review all submittals and provide comments and feedback to FEMA.

Following the release of the preliminary DFIRM at the end of September, the City of Miles City hosted an open house on October 11. Then, in mid-November, a three-day community outreach event was held at which staff from FEMA, the State of Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and other agencies presented information regarding how the proposed map was developed, the review and adoption process, and how to file appeals, protests and comments about the DFIRM with FEMA and the State of Montana.

According to Miles City Mayor Joe Whalen, the City is considering filing an appeal of the preliminary DFIRM pertaining to at least two aspects of the map that have community-wide impacts. “We are concerned with several instances where adjacent

properties have substantial variation in base flood elevations as depicted on the map,” Whalen stated. “We are also concerned that the area designated as ‘floodway’ on the map doesn’t accurately depict the route that the majority of flood water would take when passing through the city.”

If significant changes are made to the preliminary DFIRM in response to issues raised during the appeal period, a new map will be prepared and the review and adoption process will start over again. If no changes or only minor changes result from the appeal process, FEMA will finalize the DFIRM. Once FEMA finalizes the map, the City of Miles City and Custer County will have a six-month period to update local floodplain management ordinances. The State of Montana will also adopt the map after it is finalized by FEMA. The DFIRM will go into effect six months after the map FEMA finalizes the map.

The draft DFIRM identifies areas associated with high, moderate or low risk of inundation by a 100-year (one-percent) flood. Properties in high risk areas must be covered by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to be eligible for federally-insured mortgages and other federally-funded programs. Withdrawal by the City or County from the NFIP program would result in the loss of local access to federally-funded mortgage programs and other federal grant and loan programs for public infrastructure.

The Miles City flood hazard map is being updated in conjunction with a nationwide effort to modernize floodplain maps for floodprone communities. Many floodplain maps, including Miles City’s, have not been updated in 25 years. The map modernization project, begun by FEMA in 2004, utilizes recent research and more sophisticated computer programs to identify flood risks. Because the new flood hazard maps are digital, the more accurate flood risk information will also be more easily-accessible for both communities and individual properties.

Presentations to neighborhood, civic or business groups may be arranged by calling the Miles City Planning Office at 234-3493. Individuals who would like to be added to the City’s event notification e-mail list to receive periodic updates can e-mail their contact information to **scraddock@milescity-mt.org**.

The preliminary DFIRMs, brochures about the National Flood Insurance Program, and directions for preparing and submitting comments are available for viewing at City Hall, the Miles City Library and the Custer County Courthouse. This information is also available on the City of Miles City website at **gov.milescity.net** and on the FEMA website at **www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/fhm/bfe** .

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