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Date: 2/24/2016 10:12:00 AM

Subject: FYSA- Media Monitoring Report for DR 4241 SC 02/24/16

Attachments: 022416 MM Report for DR-4241-SC.docx

FYSA- Media Monitoring Report for DR 4241 SC 02/24/16

NEWS CLIPS

SOUTH CAROLINA-DR-4241

Feb. 24, 2016

Issues:

- None.

Summary:

- Coverage of legislative action on Dam coverage and new flood maps in Myrtle Beach. Concern continues over inaccessible homes due to flooding.

Analysis:

- None

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Lawmakers hesitant to crack down on dam owners after flood (The State)

Speaker's effort to tighten law crumbling

House committee doesn't want to burden property owners

Chances of passage dwindling in Legislature

By SAMMY FRETWELL

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COLUMBIA, SC

Four months after a massive flood exposed flaws in South Carolina's dam safety program, support for strengthening the law is eroding as legislators grow increasingly nervous about backlash from dam owners. House Speaker Jay Lucas had proposed more frequent inspections of dams in heavily populated areas, increasing penalties for people who don't keep dams safe and requiring owners of high hazard dams to post bonds that would pay to remove the structures if the earthen embankments become dangerous to people. But private dam owners are complaining — and members of a House panel agreed Tuesday to scale back the legislation Lucas proposed in late 2015.

The House agriculture subcommittee voted unanimously to reduce the frequency of inspections proposed by Lucas, limit penalties for dam owners who violate the law and drop altogether the plan to post bonds to fund removal of shaky dams.

Subcommittee members said it's wrong to react to a rare flood with a bundle of complicated regulations that would hurt average property owners. Many property owners have complained at hearings in recent weeks, saying they can't afford to comply with stricter rules.

"We have all acknowledged the fact that what took place in October was a very unique situation," Rep. Russell Ott, D-Calhoun said. "Many people have called it a 1,000-year event. And I just certainly don't want us, for lack of a better word, to have a knee-jerk reaction to something that we certainly hope we'll never see again." Whether the amended bill can get through the Legislature this year is a major question. The four-member agriculture subcommittee spent more than three hours on the bill Tuesday and plans to propose more amendments when the legislation gets to the full committee Thursday. The bill also needs House and Senate approval — and the upper chamber has numerous other major bills to deal with before the Legislative session ends in late spring.

"If we are surfacing this many questions with four members today, what is going to happen when we get to 124 (House members)?" Ott asked. "It's a lot to try to digest. There are going to be a lot of questions."

Ott noted that some of the changes aren't as strong as Lucas proposed, but are tougher than existing state law. Lucas, R-Darlington, said the bill was an attempt to improve South Carolina's dam safety effort.

"It appeared that dams were not being regulated or classified correctly," Lucas said. "We just really wanted to take a look at how we were doing things and see if there was a way to do it better."

The committee's vote Tuesday follows a storm in early October that broke records across the state for rainfall and flooding. During the storm, dozens of dams across South Carolina broke, sending water gushing downstream and toward neighboring property. In the Columbia area alone, about 45 dams, both regulated and unregulated, failed.

As the storm subsided, many people questioned why South Carolina had not been more vigilant in making sure dams could withstand the heavy rain. South Carolina's dam safety program for years had been one of the most poorly funded in the country, routinely operating on a budget of \$200,000 or less. Many inspections were not done because the state did not have enough manpower, DHEC officials acknowledged. South Carolina has about 2,400 regulated dams and up to 20,000 that are not regulated. Almost all of them are privately owned, community dams.

Since the early October flood, DHEC has asked for an additional \$595,000 to get the dam safety program to a minimal level of service so that more dams could be inspected. The Lucas bill was proposed to strengthen the law like other states have done.

The bill approved Tuesday in some cases tones down what Lucas had proposed, but in others, appears to weaken existing state oversight.

The agriculture committee's decision, for instance, drops some dams from state oversight by increasing the size of the dams that would fall under regulation. Instead of regulating dams of at least 25 feet high, the bill increases the height to 30 feet.

At the same time, the bill would require state regulators to conduct many inspections that dam owners now are required by law to do. That could cost the Department of Health and Environmental Control substantial dollars, DHEC's David Wilson said.

Other proposed changes include:

- Reducing the frequency of regular dam inspections proposed in the Lucas legislation. Instead of requiring annual inspections for high hazard dams, such inspections would be required every two years.

- Reducing how often the owners of high hazard and significant hazard dams must update emergency action plans. Instead of requiring the plans to be updated every year as the Lucas legislation proposed, the plans would have to be updated only every two years for high hazard dams.

Dropping a proposal in the Lucas legislation to require a bond, or financial assurance, to pay for a high hazard dam to be removed at the owner's expense if it posed a hazard downstream.

Dropping part of the existing law that allows citizen complaints to trigger a preliminary inspection of a dam suspected of being unsafe.

Thousands of Horry County properties added to flood zones (Myrtle Beach Online)

About 18,000 properties considered high risk for flooding

Many homes in Bucksport, Conway added to zones

Changes will require many homeowners to purchase flood insurance

Charles D. Perry: [843-626-0218](tel:843-626-0218), [@TSN_CharlesPerr](https://twitter.com/TSN_CharlesPerr)

By Charles D. Perry

BUCKSPORT-When Harold Phillips looked over his postcard from Horry County Government on Tuesday morning, he wondered what impact the small paper would have on him.

The notice said his property could be affected by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's recent updates to the flood zones in Horry County.

The message surprised the 68-year-old Bucksport native, who still lives in the small community nestled between U.S. 701 South and the Waccamaw River. He had heard stories from older residents about floods so bad that folks needed boats to get around, but that was long before the county improved its roads and drainage systems. Phillips had never experienced flooding in Bucksport. Not during Hurricane Floyd in 1999 or even during October's deluge, when many Waccamaw River communities found themselves underwater.

"I've never seen it," he said. "We had a lot of rain, but we didn't flood."

Yet Phillips' land is among the more than 18,000 Horry County properties being added to federally-drawn flood zones, a change that will force many homeowners without flood insurance to purchase that coverage.

FEMA officials recently revised the flood maps for the area, adding more details and data. The updates factor in construction and development, shifts in the floodplain and environmental changes.

County officials on Friday sent out notices to 65,000 property owners whose land has traditionally fallen in high-risk flood zones. The notices also went to those whose land is being added to the flood zones. FEMA and county officials have scheduled special meetings on March 2 and March 3 to discuss the new maps. Residents can also check horrycounty.org to see if their properties will be affected.

While the changes will impact areas throughout the county, officials said Bucksport and Conway are seeing many homes added to the flood zone.

As a group of elderly women left the Bucksport Senior Center Tuesday afternoon, a few asked manager Debra Alston if she had received a postcard from the county. When she told them she hadn't, one woman pulled hers from her purse.

"They're very concerned about it," Alston said.

County officials have already begun receiving calls about the proposed changes. As of Tuesday morning, more than 60 people had phoned the code enforcement office.

"It's going to be a big issue," said Steve Gosnell, the assistant county administrator over infrastructure and regulation. "There's a lot of changes, a lot of impact to folks in low-lying areas."

The greatest impact to affected residents will be in their insurance costs.

Standard homeowners' insurance policies don't cover flood damage. But by law, federally regulated mortgage lenders must require flood insurance for properties with a high risk of flooding.

"People are going to be required to get flood insurance," County Administrator Chris Eldridge said. "This is all about money."

How much a homeowner's flood insurance costs depends on several factors, including whether someone lives close to the river or in a low-lying area, said Faye Bradham, principal agent with Bradham Insurance Agency in Conway.

"We all live in a flood zone," she said. "Some of the zones are better than others."

County officials said about 18,000 properties are being added to high-risk flood zones, including many homes. If those homeowners don't have flood insurance, Bradham said, those with mortgages will be required to purchase it.

Although banks won't issue loans for houses not covered by flood insurance, residents who own their homes outright or paid cash for them have the option to decline that insurance.

However, Bradham said, she requires people turning down flood insurance to sign an agreement saying they chose not to take a flood policy even though they were in a flood zone.

"It's just common sense," she said. "You live in a flood zone, you need to buy it."

Residents affected by the recent flood zone changes can appeal FEMA's findings, but that process requires providing technical and engineering data that proves a home isn't in a flood-prone area.

"You can't just say 'I don't like it,' " Eldridge said. "You have to pay an engineer to challenge what they have. So it's not an easy process."

Although some homeowners may suspect the expanded zones stem from October's flooding, county officials insist FEMA has been modernizing flood maps for more than a decade.

"It did not start yesterday," said Harold Edge with the county's code enforcement division. "A lot of our folks in the county are probably going to think that this is the result of the floods that began in October of last year. But I'll assure you this started a long time before that."

The fall flooding, however, has forced many homeowners, even those not inside a high-risk zone, to consider flood insurance.

"[It's] something that everybody is worried about," Horry County Councilman Johnny Vaught said. "This rain just keeps coming. You walk out in the yard and pour a bucket of water out and it's still sitting there two days later because the ground's so saturated."

Karl Moore, a 53-year-old truck driver, said he's recently been looking for homeowners insurance for the Bucksport house he bought with cash.

While he's not required to have flood coverage because he has no loan, Phillips said he's thinking about buying some.

"I want to make sure I'm secure," he said. "I need to get insurance anyways."

Should anyone seek flood insurance, Bradham cautioned that any policies written won't take effect for 30 days. The time to take action, she said, is now, when the county notice arrives. Not when water is lapping at the backdoor.

"You need to be doing something," she said. "You can't just let it go and say, 'No, I didn't know about it.' "



(click thumbnail to play)

FEMA on WPDE (ABC) - Myrtle Beach, SC

02/23/2016 08:27:55

Good Morning America (News)

... because the roads are completely under water. fema only provides assistance for damage done inside homes. we spoke with homeowner lisa trovato she says her home is several feet off ...



(click thumbnail to play)

FEMA. on WBTW (CBS) - Myrtle Beach, SC

02/23/2016 18:03:01

News 13 at 6 (News)

... hydrologists and all kinds of professionals to prove that fema's decision was wrong" city leaders have mailed out more than 65,000 postcards to people ...



(click thumbnail to play)

FEMA on WOLO- COL (ABC) - Columbia, SC

02/24/2016 05:19:56

Good Morning Columbia (Other)

... month's of working with the insurance companies and fema... they're finally seeing some light at the end of the tunnel. the studio is now preparing for the school's grand reopening ...

