



vantage
point

Introducing TMAC-2

One of the closing suggestions of the first Technical Mapping Advisory Council to FEMA (TMAC-1), which convened from 1996 through 2000, was for an ongoing advisory group of technical users, something more permanent than its own five-year statutory span. The recommendations of TMAC-1 had helped move National Flood Insurance Program

Homeowners' Flood Insurance Affordability Act (HFIAA). That means a hefty mission for TMAC-2 members.

TMAC-2's assigned tasks are more specific than the TMAC-1 charges that originated in the National Flood Insurance Reform Act of 1994. While the 1994 Act had generally called for advice on mapping program improvements, the amount of subsequent flooding damage and high costs of recovery moved

Flood Hazard and Risk Generation and Dissemination

1. Recommend to the Administrator (of FEMA) how to improve in a cost-effective manner the accuracy, general quality, ease of use, and distribution and dissemination of FIRMs and risk data.
2. Recommend to the Administrator how to improve in a cost-effective manner the performance metrics and milestones required to effectively and efficiently map flood risk areas in the United States.
3. Recommend to the Administrator mapping standards and guidelines for Flood Insurance Rate Maps
4. Recommend to the Administrator mapping standards and guidelines for data accuracy, data quality and data eligibility.

“...flooding damage and high costs of recovery moved Congress to charge TMAC-2 with making recommendations on some very focused topics.”

(NFIP) mapping in new directions, largely due to the thoughtful consideration and commitment of FEMA's then-Director James Lee Witt. Along with posting maps and Letters of Map Change on the Map Service Center website and changing the format of Letters of Map Change so that technical information was no longer censored (due to its former commingling with private information), the launching of Map Modernization was a direct result of Witt's serious approach to TMAC-1's annual reports.

A second Technical Mapping Advisory Council (TMAC-2) was established by the Biggert-Waters Act of 2012 (BW 12), and TMAC-2's responsibilities identified in that statute were augmented by the 2014

Congress to charge TMAC-2 with making recommendations on some very focused topics that fall into three general areas with several subsets.

Future Conditions

Consult with scientists and technical experts, other Federal Agencies, States, and local communities to develop recommendations on how to:

1. Ensure Flood Insurance Rate Maps incorporate the best available climate science to assess flood risks;
2. Ensure that FEMA uses the best available methodology to consider the impact of:
 - a. The rise in sea level, and
 - b. Future development on flood risk.

Operations, Coordination, and Leveraging

1. Recommend to the Administrator how to maintain, on an ongoing basis, Flood Insurance Rate Maps and flood risk identification
2. Recommend to the Administrator and other federal agencies participating in the Council a funding strategy to leverage and coordinate budgets and expenditures across federal agencies.
3. Recommend procedures for delegating mapping activities to State and local mapping partners.
4. Recommend to the Administrator and other Federal agencies participating in the Council methods for improving interagency and intergovernmental coordination on flood mapping and flood risk determination.

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Obviously this is a big and very important job, but each of the areas of study has additional implications beyond Congress' assigned aspects that TMAC-2 is likely to bring into its studies and recommendations as well. As just one example, when considering future conditions we must remember that every map represents conditions (and the analytical tools available) at the time of the study. Aside from sea level rise, what are the effects of erosion or of changes in weather patterns? How will ultimate build-out of watersheds affect flooding? What is the cumulative effect of Letters of Map Revision based on Fill that leave land unregulated after publication of a new map treats the fill as natural grade?

TMAC-2 is a little larger than TMAC-1, but the stakeholders represented are not simply additions to the former Council. Several groups on TMAC-1 are not on TMAC-2 (Freddie Mac and Sallie Mae), and some of the new members represent groups that had been brought in as outside experts to advise TMAC-1. This means a different focus on some of the issues to be addressed, building on the groundwork laid by Map Mod and Risk Map to enter the next phase of NFIP data collection, analysis, and dissemination. I am hoping that some NFIP policy changes may come about with TMAC-2's investigations and recommendation. My particular pet peeve is the granting of Letters of Map Change based on a mere tenth of a foot difference between a nominal Base Flood Elevation and either ground elevation (for Amendments) or lowest floor elevation (for Revisions based on Fill) when the original studies were never conducted to a level of accuracy warranting such hair splitting. I would love to see that policy changed! Let's all hope that TMAC-2 has strong research skills and persuasive powers, and that FEMA earnestly considers TMAC-2's recommendations to further improve the NFIP. ■

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