

Building Community Resiliency through Buyout Program



Along with many other Colorado Communities, Boulder County was impacted by the September, 2013 historic rain event. Flood waters and landslides caused substantial damage to entire communities, displacing thousands of residents from their homes. Unlike many other flood events, Boulder County's climate, and varied topography that ranges from the plains to the mountains with elevation gradients ranging from 5,000 to 14,000 feet, compounded the flood effects and created unique flood recovery challenges. The initial devastation prompted President Obama to declare the County a national disaster area.



The President's disaster declaration opened Federal (FEMA) funding assistance up to affected areas within the floodplain. Simultaneously, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) approved County funds to hire a Disaster Consultant, appoint a Flood Recovery Director, open a Recovery Center, and assemble recovery staff. Initial funding and leadership helped assemble a series of Flood Recovery programs to form a one-stop shop Center. The Buyout Program was within this mix. The Program's situation in the Center was key. It helped to quickly establish direct, sustaining relationships with affected property owners, provide high transparency, and foster a collaborative environment to pool resources, minimize duplication of benefits, problem solve quickly, and ultimately reduced the amount of unmet needs. No amount of anticipation could minimize the number of hurdles the program overcame though. The first major issue was that FEMA funds couldn't cover the acquisition of the full roster of properties that were interested in the program. Staff, backed by Commissioner support, harnessed Community Development Block Grant for Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding to fill this gap. Next, it was found that the amount of staff time, and cost acquisition and restoration estimates were heavily underestimated. The estimates were based off other community's experience with comparable disaster damage, but could not initially take into account all the intricacies involved in determining duplication of benefits, or the unique needs of each property and property owner's economic situation. A one-size fits all approach could not be applied to this program.

The Buyout program took unwavering dedication to successfully provide property owners an option to sell their high hazard properties to the County at pre-flood values. This provided an alternative to insurmountable restoration costs, and afforded suitable replacement housing without substantial economic hardship. It permanently mitigated hazards and minimized risks from future floods through deed restricting the acquired properties as undeveloped land in perpetuity, and then by removing all possible improvements and inorganic debris from the properties, returning them

to their pre-developed state, complete with a property-specific restoration plan and native seed mix to properly

Completed Restoration.



revegetate disturbed areas.

The program's goals have been achieved. Hazards within the floodplain and along unstable slopes have been substantially reduced. At final completion, the Buyout Program will have put ~100 acres back to a pre-developed state, alleviated stressful economic pressures on owners of the 47 properties purchased, and removed ~2,818 tons of building material from floodplains and high hazard slopes. The ripple effect is already spawning stronger economic, environmental, and social stability within the County.