



# SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 BACKGROUND

Across the United States, natural and human-caused disasters have led to an increased level of deaths, injuries, property damage and interruption of business and government services. The time, money and efforts to recover from these disasters exhaust resources, diverting attention from important public programs and private agendas. After suffering the effects of many natural hazards and acknowledging the risk of human-made hazards, and with over 100 statewide or county-specific gubernatorial and presidential disaster declarations since 1954, Northumberland County recognized the need to develop a long-term approach to reducing its vulnerability to hazards.

In 2012, Delta Development Group, Inc. was contracted to create the 2012 Northumberland County Hazard Mitigation Plan. In 2016, under the direction of the Northumberland County Department of Public Safety, the Northumberland County Planning Team (comprised of County and local officials) began to review of the 2012 Hazard Mitigation Plan for review and updates. After review, it was determined that it was necessary to create a completely new Northumberland County Hazard Mitigation Plan due to the amount of errors that was found and new information needing to be added. The final plan was created in 2017. This document represents the culmination of the multi-jurisdictional planning process that involved numerous stakeholders across the County. The planning process consisted of the following steps:

- Identification and prioritization of the hazards that may affect any part of the County
- Assessment of the vulnerability of any part of the County to said hazards
- Identification of the mitigation actions that can reduce said vulnerability
- Development of strategies for implementing said actions, including identifying the agency or agencies responsible for that implementation

Federal and state governments have utilized mitigation concepts to minimize environmental degradation and to reduce loss of life and property associated with natural hazards. However, mitigation was most often applied in a post-disaster environment. In an effort to increase public awareness and to reduce the costs associated with disaster preparedness, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) developed the National Mitigation Strategy. It represents a sustained effort to reduce hazard vulnerabilities through public outreach and partnership development, and was created with input from federal agencies, state and local governments, and the general public.

*Hazard mitigation* is a phrase that describes actions taken to prevent or reduce the long-term risks to life and property from hazards. Pre-disaster mitigation actions are taken in advance of a hazard event and are essential to breaking the typical disaster cycle of damage, recovery and repeated damage. With careful selection, mitigation can be long-term, cost-effective means of reducing further loss.

Throughout the review process, the general public was given several opportunities to comment on the existing Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) and provide suggestions for the

updated final version. Two public meetings were advertised (see section 3.3) and conducted to give residents an opportunity to provide input directly to the planning team.

The following hazards were identified by the planning team as those which present the highest risk to select municipalities or the entire County:

- Winter storms
- Flood, flash flood and ice jams
- Drought

To mitigate against the effects of these hazards, the planning team identified the following goals for hazard mitigation over the next five years:

- Increase public awareness and education about existing and potential hazards in Northumberland County
- Protect the citizens of Northumberland County from the impacts of natural and human-caused hazards
- Protect public and private property from the impacts of natural and human-caused hazards
- Mitigate the potential for injury/death and damage from natural and human-made hazards in Northumberland County
- Increase local government awareness of hazard mitigation programs
- Improve emergency services and capabilities in Northumberland County to protect citizens from natural and human-caused hazards

This HMP is the result of several months of work by the citizens and officials of Northumberland County to develop a pre-disaster, multi-hazard mitigation plan that will not only guide the County toward greater disaster resistance, but will also respect the character and needs of the community.

## 1.2 PURPOSE

The purpose of this HMP is to minimize the effects of natural, technological and human-caused hazards on the people, property, environment and business operations within Northumberland County. This document exists to provide the background information and rationale for the mitigation actions that the planning team and municipal representatives have chosen to implement.

This document is governed by the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) and its implementing regulations (44 CFR §201.6, published on February 26, 2002). Local jurisdictions must comply with the DMA 2000 and these regulations in order to remain eligible for funding and technical assistance from the state and federal hazard mitigation programs. Local mitigation plans must include, at a minimum, (1) an action plan to mitigate hazards, risks and vulnerabilities, and (2) a strategy to implement those actions.

### **1.3 SCOPE**

The implementation actions within this MHP apply to Northumberland County and any municipality that adopts this HMP as their own. However, only those municipalities that have participated in the plan's creation process will remain eligible for state and federal funding for implementing the HMP. For the purpose of this planning process, municipal participation was defined as the submission of municipality-specific information (e.g. completing a Risk Assessment Update Worksheet or Capability Assessment Survey), and attendance by a municipal official at a planning or public meeting conducted as part of the planning process.

### **1.4 REFERENCES**

Existing plans and studies were reviewed and integrated in the updated HMP. The County Comprehensive Plan, located in the Pennsylvania e-Library website, was incorporated into multiple aspects of this HMP. Information from the Comprehensive Plan and other documents were used to formulate the County profile, to identify the history of individualized hazards, and to detail the population projections in Northumberland County. For a list of all resources, refer to Appendix I.