

RESULTS OF FLOOD BUY-OUT

Earlier this year, the Essex County Planning Office, the County's Housing Assistance Program, and the Lake Champlain/Lake George Regional Planning Board all combined efforts to apply to the Flood Hazard Mitigation Program on behalf of Essex County residents who wished to participate in the flood buy-out program. This program, 75% financed by the federal government, purchases flood damaged properties and turns the land into non-intensive open-space use.

Buy-outs must be sponsored by a municipality. If an application is approved, the municipality purchases the property, removes houses and other structures, and attaches land use conditions that prohibit further "development." The municipality can keep ownership of the land or dispose of it, as long as it is never used for a residence or business. The land could be used for agriculture, or for a park or public access to a river.

In this case, Essex County government sponsored all the submitted applications and will own those properties approved by the flood buy-out program. Fortunately, the State came up with the 25% funding portion that otherwise would have been the responsibility of the individual applicants.

Forty-five total applications were submitted. Of these, only 16 were approved, none of which are on the Boquet. Approved applications include 15 homes/properties in the "Grove" east of AuSable Forks (four homes were so badly damaged by the flood that they were condemned), and one home belonging to Forest & Helen Snow on West Church St. in AuSable Forks. This is not entirely a happy ending for those applicants who were approved. Many of the approved applicants cannot replace their home, especially if they are elderly and had an older, low-value home. They must now take what little money is realized from the buy-out and try to re-locate.

Eighteen residences were "weight-listed," meaning they were approved by an independent review panel of the State Emergency Management Office but there was insufficient federal money to carry through with the buy-outs. Only one resident on the Boquet was in this category: James L'Epsicopo on the Elizabethtown/Wadhams Road. AuSable properties included 9 homes on Intervale Avenue in AuSable Forks, 7 homes in Upper Jay, and Eric Williams' home near the Jay covered bridge.

Eleven applications were never forwarded to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Six of these were residents on the Boquet River: David Sherman and Dennis Moore in Wadhams, Tucker Coon in Elizabethtown, and Vic Putman, John Goodroe and Frank Fields in Lewis. The reasons for denying flood buy-out status include: insufficient documentation of the historical frequency of property flooding, the extent and value of flood damage, and the comparative cost of mitigation practices such as raising a building or constructing a berm.