Building Resilience in the Lamoille Watershed

Since 1953, Lamoille County has had the highest number of federally declared disasters in Vermont, with flooding events the most frequent disaster and resulting in the greatest damage to private property, public infrastructure, and water quality. These floods are responsible for millions of dollars in damage to private and public properties and carrying tons of pollutants to Lake Champlain through the Lamoille River. Precipitation analyses and predictions indicate that more intense, localized storms are occurring with greater frequency.

Spring 2011 flooding severely impacted communities along the Lamoille River. Since then, they have been taking creative steps to guide change and build more resilient futures, and are ready to engage in this project individually and collectively, through public and private channels.

The project Building Resilience in the Lamoille Watershed, led by Lamoille County Planning Commission and funded by the High Meadows Fund, utilizes a multi-faceted approach to building resilient communities. The municipal approach includes a Flood Model with Mitigation Strategies to identify flooding risks and patterns and target areas for restoration, conservation, or infrastructure adaptation. The Flood Model will build on existing work in Jeffersonville, expanding the model to the Lamoille Watershed communities of Cambridge, Johnson, and Wolcott. The Flood Model will explore potential mitigation actions both within and outside of villages; for example, how flood restoration in a rural area might affect a downstream village.

The business approach includes an Outreach Activities Series to increase local knowledge and build hands-on skills. Activities include business owner resiliency workshops using VT Small Business Development Center curriculum, and tradesperson resiliency trainings using classroom and practical experience to teach FEMA approved mitigation methods.

An inclusive process targets a variety of stakeholders including municipal officials, homeowners, farmers, business owners and associations, state agencies, and educators. Building on Jeffersonville’s current work, stakeholders will form a watershed wide Community Resilience Organization (CRO). The CRO will guide the flood modeling analysis and subsequent prioritization of flood mitigation actions; in the future, the CRO will further develop and pursue funding sources to implement high-priority actions.

Short-term outcomes include:
1) Trained contractors to meet FEMA requirements for flood proofing existing development
2) Increased inter-municipal cooperation and collaboration
3) Better understanding of upstream-downstream dynamic and potential impacts
4) Flood modeling to prioritize mitigation strategies
5) Outreach materials with statewide applicability

**Long-term outcomes include:**
1) More flood proofed buildings  
2) Community actions such as conserved or restored floodplains, updated land use bylaws, and flood adapted infrastructure  
3) Continued watershed wide coordinated flood-mitigation planning and action  
4) Flood Mitigation Master plan for the Lamoille River

In the future, this project can be expanded to a statewide level so that other communities can continue to flourish as Jeffersonville, Cambridge, Johnson, and Wolcott have. Flood resiliency is not the sole responsibility of a municipality; it requires public and private investment, energy, and partnership.

For more information, contact Seth Jensen, Lamoille County Planning Commission Principal Planner at (802) 851-6337 or via email at seth@lcpcvt.org