

# 2015 CEDS – Disaster Resilience

The Buckeye Hills region has a history of enduring disasters of two types, physical or natural disasters, and economic disasters. While both types of events produce lasting effects on communities and institutions of the region, input from the CEDS committee indicates the region is much more resilient to natural disasters than economic disasters.

## Physical Disaster Resilience

Communities in the Buckeye Hills region are historically only prone to three types of natural disasters.

- Flooding
- Strong Seasonal Storms (Derecho)
- Wildfire

According to the Ohio Hazard Mitigation Plan of 2011, between 1964 and 2011, there were 47 Presidential Disaster Declarations in Ohio, 17 of which affected counties in the Buckeye Hills region. Of the 47 declarations in the state, 31 were flood related and 18 were storm related. (Some declarations cite multiple disaster causes.)

# 47

### Presidential Disaster Declarations in Ohio Between 1964 and 2011.

Committee members felt that communities in the region are much more adept and prepared to deal with physical disaster, because the damage is tangible in nature and immediately comprehensible in a general sense. These disasters generally have a simple universal recovery strategy; rebuild or replace what was damaged or lost. These strategies are easily understandable and able to be related to any parties involved in the recovery effort. Committee members also felt that methods to prevent or recover from physical disasters were much clearer than non-physical disasters. All eight counties in the region employ a emergency management/ emergency services director, who specializes in organizing responses to physical disasters and coordinating required resources at a county level. A web survey of EMA resources revealed that only two of eight counties have hazard mitigation plans posted for public consumption on the internet. All of these resources are aimed at providing the citizens of the region with primarily disaster recovery services and service coordination during times of duress. While many of these entities plan and practice for specific man-made scenarios (chemical spills, chemical releases, terrorist

**"The impact of physical disasters is visual and immediate in nature."**

attacks) response planning for natural disasters generally includes steady state initiatives of awareness, education, and communication/information networks.

The strong storm/derecho disaster scenario will not be discussed in this section, as the nature of the threat is generally unpredictable and unavoidable. This however does not lessen the severity of impact these storms have on the region.

**Flooding** – The most prevalent and destructive type of physical disaster that has historically affected regional communities is flooding. The flooding that takes place is not only major flooding from major bodies of water like the Ohio or Muskingum River; but also sudden and severe flash flooding on creeks and streams across the district. Many areas in the region can be categorized as being in, or in close proximity to, areas defined as flood zones A, AE (100 year flood areas), or 0.2% annual chance (500 year flood areas). A large majority of the region is zone X.

**31**

**Flood Related Disaster  
Declarations in Ohio  
Between 1964 and 2011.**

Of great concern to the Buckeye Hills region in the past 3 years is not only the threat of flooding, but the looming changes proposed to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) as part of the Biggert Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012. This legislation proposes extending the NFIP for at least five years, while simultaneously requiring some significant programmatic changes. Of primary concern is the raising of flood insurance rates on all existing

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**Municipalities are within  
100 Year Floodplain Areas**

and new policy holders, as the program seeks to remain solvent following massive payouts as a result of Hurricane Katrina and other disasters. The changes seek to end rate subsidies that were traditionally available to policy holders, while at the same time significantly raising rates to reflect actual risk and repeat loss calculations.

Residents in the Buckeye Hills region and around the state have resoundingly rallied against these actions, as these changes would make it impossible for some residents to afford insurance on the homes and businesses they currently own, while also stifling economic activity in the region due to the restrictive cost of flood insurance. While the Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act of 2014 did effectively delay these changes, a lasting permanent solution has yet to be found.

**Wildfire** – The state of Ohio is made up of three Ohio Emergency Management Regions, and the Buckeye Hills district falls completely within Region 3. According to the State of Ohio Hazard Mitigation Plan, Region 3 represents the areas of highest wildfire risk in the state. As noted, the region is primarily composed of ‘abundant forested lands and grasslands.’ Social and cultural aspects of the region also contribute to a greater occurrence of wildfire as well.

# 8,235

**Wildfires in Ohio between  
2007 and 2011**

The probability of future events is captured in the ODNR wildfire rating by analyzing the following factors; weather, fuels, ignitions, and suppression response. Information gathered on these topics, along with other information including population and population density is analyzed using GIS mapping tools to produce township level hazard ratings discussed here. According to these analyses, several high risk areas are noted in the larger region, with particular high risk areas located in Meigs and Athens Counties. For more information about wildfires in Ohio, and to access additional materials cited here, please visit the Ohio EMA website at: [http://ema.ohio.gov/Documents/OhioMitigationPlan/SOHMP\\_Sec\\_2\\_7.pdf](http://ema.ohio.gov/Documents/OhioMitigationPlan/SOHMP_Sec_2_7.pdf).

**Combined Physical Hazard Risk Assessment** – In order to help quantify the risk rating of the entire region against the threat of flooding and wildfire, a basic combined hazard risk assessment has been completed by Buckeye Hills staff. The purpose of this analysis is to provide a general framework for natural disaster risk scenarios based on available data, and historic likelihood of occurrence. This analysis provides a risk rating from 0 to 5 for townships in the region based on the following criteria; ODNR wildfire threat level, existence of floodplain areas, existence of high value structures (fire stations, police stations, EMS facilities, and schools) in medium or high risk fire areas, and the existence of those high value structures in floodplain areas. Based on this criteria, 19 of Buckeye Hills 120 townships have an elevated rating of 4 or higher. Based on this determination, the population of these areas is over 104,000, meaning 40% of the population of the Buckeye Hills region lives in areas with elevated risks for natural disasters. Maps illustrating the natural disaster considerations used in this analysis are included at the end of this document.

Combined Physical Hazard Risk Assessment		
County	Township Name	Hazard Risk
Athens	Athens	4
Athens	Trimble	4
Athens	Troy	4
Athens	Waterloo	4
Athens	York	4
Hocking	Falls	5
Hocking	Good Hope	4
Hocking	Starr	4
Meigs	Salisbury	5
Meigs	Chester	4
Meigs	Sutton	4
Noble	Center	4
Noble	Noble	4
Noble	Olive	4
Perry	Harrison	4
Perry	Pike	4
Perry	Reading	4
Washington	Belpre	4
Washington	Lawrence	4

## Economic Disaster Resilience

The Buckeye Hills region also has a history of recovering from economic disasters. In comparison to physical or natural disasters, these are often more difficult to identify, and much more difficult to recover from. Often times one of these situations can be unfolding quietly, unbeknownst to those in the local community, as often times the circumstances mitigating these disasters are developed elsewhere. Economic disasters that have befallen the region in the past include ‘bust’ economic phases following periods of heavy natural resource extraction (timber, coal, oil, gas), closings or reductions of major employers, and fluctuation of commodity prices.

**"Most rural counties are dominated by a few large employers existing in proximity to a natural resource."**

Based on discussions with members of the CEDS committee, and other local economic development representatives, there was a general consensus that communities in the Buckeye Hills region do not employ a formal strategy to prepare for or recover from an economic disaster. Members felt that this rural region was not unlike other rural regions of the country, where communities are dominated by large employers, and those large employers are located in close proximity to a needed operational resource. As such, unfortunately there is little in the

way of responsive state solutions in place should one of those institutions fail, or access to that necessary resource become challenged.

What the Buckeye Hills communities have engaged in, perhaps unknowingly of the defined concept, are many steady state initiatives. Below are several examples.

- Communities are generally engaged in comprehensive planning efforts aimed at building capacities among active parties, and generating information related to a variety of topics. (Comprehensive economic development planning, transportation planning, hazard mitigation planning, etc.)
- Local economic development officials and local governments are actively working to attract economic development opportunities to the region, in order to diversify the regional economy.
- JobsOhio and its network partners are conducting business retention and expansion activities in conjunction with local parties in the region. These activities are helping all parties better understand the needs of companies in the area, define industry clusters where the Buckeye Hills region has a competitive advantage, and secure resources to ensure local communities are able to capitalize new and expanding opportunities.
- The network of local community colleges and career centers are providing important workforce training opportunities in response to opportunities and trends in the regional economy.
- Buckeye Hills maintains and operates a geographic information system that provides readily available information regarding development sites, demographics, environmental conditions, economic data, and analysis to parties in the region on an as needed basis, free of charge.
- Communities in the Buckeye Hills region are also practicing strategies for safe and smart development that help lessen the risk of heavy or repetitive losses due to flooding or other natural disasters.

While this is not an exhaustive list of all disaster prevention (physical and economic) activities taking place in the region, this is meant to illustrate the spirit of cooperation present in the Buckeye Hills region. The common goal is to ensure that all communities are able to withstand physical and economic disasters and continue to thrive in the future.