

December 6, 2021

David Cohick, Director
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Testimony to the House Majority Policy Committee
Maintaining our Creeks and Streams to Prevent Flooding

Good Afternoon and thank you for allowing me to speak you today.

I am sure you saw earlier today during your tour, the amount of debris in our creeks and streams. You have seen first-hand the issues and with that I would like to focus my testimony on three mitigation programs that were done in previous years in Tioga County.

My name is David Cohick and I am Director of Emergency Services for Tioga County.

I have work for Emergency Services for the past 36 years and during my Tenure have received Ten Presidential Declarations for Flooding Disasters. Some large scale, State wide events and some local to Tioga County Alone. Mitigation efforts have taken place after every flood but were limited on scope and scale due to allowable permitted work and funding. Cleaning Debris from under bridges and 50 feet on either side is not enough.

1996 was a bad year for flooding in Tioga County. We had Flooding and Flash Freeze in January, and in November a flooding event in Tioga County alone. We received two Presidential declarations for flooding that year. One of the biggest issues was debris in our streams. Working with the local municipalities, Department of Environmental Protection, Penn DOT and other state and local agencies we did limited gravel removal in several areas in the County. The Tioga Commissioner rented 2 Bulldozers from Regional Equipment, the townships provided staff or volunteers to operate these D-9 Bull Dozers. DEP provided limited permits for selected locations. When the work was completed in a particular location, Penn Dot Moved the D9 Bull Dozers to the next location. This was a very successful project, however the project locations, funding and permitted work was very limited.

In 2008, after another year of severe flooding in Tioga County and the region, Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission (NTRPDC), put together a flood clean-up project. After receiving a grant, the planning commission hired 100 workers dislocated by the flood and dislocated workers. This project worked in coordination with emergency management departments, conservation districts, townships and boroughs and local land owners, all along affected areas. Ten crews from the region, consisting of 9 laborers and 1 crew leader per crew, removed organic debris from area streams and creeks utilizing hand tools such as: chain saws, bow saws, come-a-longs, mattocks, etc. to remove trees and vegetation in and along streams. Two Crews were assigned to Tioga County. The crews worked in narrow strips in and on either side of the creek to ensure organic debris would not create problems with future flooding. Organic material was burned in a safe manner along side the creek. Insurance and workman's compensation were provided to each worker as well as all hand equipment, safety gear and training. Project work area were requested from each municipality and coordinate through the above-

named partners. All work was completed without the necessity of Permits as this was organic debris removal only.

Another project that was a success, yet very limited, was permitted work in the certain streams to remove gravel bars from the streams. This material was moved to an onsite gravel crusher for processing. This debris, once crushed, was utilized by the local municipality for road repair and maintenance. I think funding and permitting should be made available for continuing project like this and the ones previous mentioned.

Lastly, I would like to talk about Presidential Disaster declarations of Emergency. In order for a county to receive Public or Individual Assistance, the County has to meet or exceed damage based on Per Capita for the County and the State. The Current figures are \$4.10 Per Capita for County and \$1.63 Per Capita for State. For Tioga County that is just over 163 Thousand (\$163,284.50) and for the State is Just over 21 million (\$21,194,416).

Tioga County exceeded that amount in our Spring Flooding in Roseville area and at over 8 million dollars in Public Damage, easily exceeded that County dollar amount during our August Flooding. Even though we met the criteria for the County, we did not meet the Per Capita Damage for the State. We did not qualify for assistance, based on the above criteria.

Storm Damage is based on individual storm systems.... If the county had severe storms over a three-week period, and \$10 Million dollars of damage per storm, we would not qualify for assistance.

Storm Damage is based on individual states.... The August Flooding was extensive in Northern Tioga County and also in Southern Steuben County, NY. Steuben County Qualified for a Public Assistance Declaration and Tioga County did not. This was the same storm. If this one storm had been in Tioga and Potter Counties we would have qualified for assistance. Other Federal programs such as, Small Business Administration Declarations (SBA's) are based on contiguous counties. We did receive a SBA declaration for the August flood and with that declaration, residents and businesses, in Tioga, Potter, Bradford, Lycoming Counties and Steuben and Chemung Counties in NY we are also eligible.

Thank you for your time and support. With your assistance we could reinstitute some of these previous mitigation efforts and hopefully you can assist in encouraging the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with changing some of the Criteria for Declarations in these localized storms.