

Editor's Overview

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To the general public the national response to the 1993 midwest floods abated after the offers of assistance to flood victims, many of whom have returned to normal routines in their homes and businesses. However, the 1993 flood was of sufficient magnitude and duration to motivate a continuing debate over the nation's approach to flood hazard management. The Spring 1994 issue of *Update*, published soon after the flood event, sought to describe the lessons from the 1993 experience. The search for lessons was also underway by a White House appointed task force under the leadership of BG Gerald E. Galloway, Jr. In June 1994, after several months of work, the report *Sharing the Challenge* was published. *Sharing the Challenge* has become the focal point of a national continuing review of flood hazard management programs. The White House continues to ponder which of the many recommendations of *Sharing the Challenge* it will implement. Meanwhile, efforts will be made in the new Congress, as they were in the last Congress, to incorporate some of the recommendations into legislation.

This issue of *Update* is dedicated to exploring the messages of *Sharing the Challenge* and presenting different perspectives and reactions to that report. The Galloway and Kelmelis papers set the stage by briefly describing the report's approaches and its findings. As one reads the Galloway summary, the struggle of the task force to find a middle ground on many of the most controversial issues (for example, the role of wetland drainage in affecting flood events and the proper federal role in flood hazard management) is evident. Many of the findings and recommendations of *Sharing the Challenge* had to be reached in a very limited time. Kelmelis describes the approach used to gather the necessary data in this short time, but urges others to continue to study the area using the data gathered.

The direct responses to *Sharing the Challenge* begin with the paper by Doug Placencia, chair of the Association of State Flood Plain Managers. His concern is to assure that non-structural solutions to flood risk management be advanced more vigorously than they have in the past. He identifies four recommendations of *Sharing the Challenge* that he deems necessary if the Federal government programs are to work with local and state programs to advance land settlement tools and incentives to reduce exposure to flooding. He seems to express some frustration that this report may, like others in the past, not have much effect on Federal policy. As the memory of the flood fades, he calls for a continued push to advance the recommendations of the report in both the administration and in the Congress.

The paper by John Robb is unique among those in this issue, because he unabashedly defends the historical flood control programs and suggests that more of the same is needed for the future. What is striking about Robb's paper is that he sees *Sharing the Challenge* as anything but balanced in its recommendations. For him the report is a call to evacuate flood plains and re-flood wetlands without a full and honest accounting of the negative environmental and economic consequences of such action. He concludes his paper by noting that those who continually ignore the benefits that have come from management of the river are doing a disservice to the nation.

The paper by Constance Hunt finds in the Galloway report, in contrast with Robb, an opportunity to bring both improved environmental benefits and flood hazard reduction by restoration of wetlands and flood plains in the basin. She makes several assertions about the hydrologic and environmental benefits from restoration, in many ways echoing *Sharing the Challenge*, but does find some fault with that report's institutional recommendations. She cites the "absolutely essential" need for community involvement and support, but one must wonder how John Robb's views can be reconciled with the themes of Hunt's paper.

The paper by Jon Kusler of the Association of State Wetland Managers fills in what Hunt finds missing in *Sharing the Challenge* -- detailed suggestions for wetland and flood plain restoration programs. Kusler puts emphasis on acquisition of lands to be restored (as against regulation) so opposition to restoration by landowners might be mitigated, although he does not specify where adequate funds for acquisition might be found.

Jerry Rasmussen provides a technical overview of restoration strategies that might be pursued under the general and more specific institutional frameworks discussed in the preceding papers. The need for such solid technical

recommendations is important if we are to make progress on understanding the cost and necessary institutional requirements for restoration. However, it is worth noting that the blanket condemnation of all past flood control policy that introduces the

Rasmussen paper is the kind of language that makes it difficult to build the necessary coalition for restoration, even where it may be warranted.

Ken Potter's paper, like that of Rasmussen, treats the restoration issue from a technical standpoint. Because *Sharing the Challenge* has focused so much attention on whether the historic landscape alternatives (and hence restoration) could influence events like the 1993 flood, the Potter paper may be the most significant in this issue. Potter offers the possibility that the hydrologic modeling which has been done, and the results that are debated, may be based on flawed approaches. Potter argues that unless continuous simulation modeling is used, estimates of the flood damage reduction costs and benefits of restoration of the landscape may be in error.

The last three papers focus more directly on *Sharing the Challenge*. Eric Lichtenberg's paper is important because it is the most critical of the core logic of *Sharing the Challenge*. I am sympathetic with Lichtenberg's paper and have made similar arguments myself (Shabman, 1994a; Shabman 1994b). Indeed, I concur with Lichtenberg's assessment that *Sharing the Challenge* avoided rather than grappled with some of the most fundamental issues: Why do people locate in flood prone areas? In what sense can a use of a flood prone area be socially desirable? If we continue to skirt these key questions, then agreements on policy strategies toward flood plain land use may escape us.

Raymond Burby's paper provides a necessary "reality check" for those who assert that certain policy reforms will or won't "work" to achieve hazard reduction goals. Burby's comprehensive synthesis of the literature leads to a critical conclusion: We must continue to close gaps in our knowledge or the ability to define and implement flood plain management policies and programs will be limited.

If we have much more to learn from more research, then Gilbert White suggests what the research should be -- post-audits of policy experiences. White suggests other needs, some of which are similar to Lichtenberg's, on disaster relief and insurance. He also comments on needed improvements in federal-state relationships and in recognition of environmental values. White does not say so directly, but it seems that he is less than optimistic that *Sharing the Challenge* will bring forth change in Federal policy.

One final observation may be in order. Since the publication of *Sharing the Challenge* and the preparation of these papers, there have been significant shifts in political power in the Federal government. Almost all of these papers seem to begin from the premise that there will continue to be some significant federal role in flood risk management and that role will be some mix of project construction, flood insurance, disaster aid, and restoration funding. Different authors may have advocated different mixes of approaches, but the Federal presence in flood risk management is expected to remain. Perhaps such a presence will continue, but a major Federal retreat from the area, with flood risk management more fully in state and local hands, might be the future condition. If a radically limited Federal presence does result, what aspects of *Sharing the Challenge*, which focused so much on the Federal role, will remain relevant?

References

Shabman, Leonard. 1994a. "Responding to the 1993 Flood: The Restoration Option." *Update*, Spring 1994, 5 pp.

Shabman, Leonard. 1994b. "An Historical Perspective and Proposed National Response to the 1993 Flood." Paper prepared for the Lincoln Land Institute Conference on Community Land Policy and River Flooding, September 1994 (available from the author).