

Officials eye future of Suncook

Flood aid is focus of state, federal meeting

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State and federal officials who met yesterday to determine the lingering problems from last month's floods said they need to decide the Suncook River's future, clean up debris across the state and monitor 75 damaged dams.

The Bureau of Emergency Management called for the meeting to identify where flood aid should go. Steve Couture, the state rivers coordinator, said he is looking for \$200,000 to study the future of the Suncook, which overwhelmed an Epsom sand pit and flowed through a new channel during the May floods. He said the studies would help determine what can be done to the river and how much it would cost.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency last week rejected Couture's application for money. Couture said he will look at funding sources from other federal agencies. FEMA official David Knowles said that the federal agency can reimburse states and towns for reconstruction costs but may not pay for studies.

Couture did not know how much river construction would cost, but he said it would be cheaper to leave the river where it is than to put it back.

"It would be the most expensive levee project in modern history, at least in New Hampshire," Couture said.

Gov. John Lynch has estimated that flooding caused more than \$3 million in damage to businesses and more than \$14 million in damage to public property. More than 600 state and local roads were closed, and three dams were breached.

Towns in seven counties, Merrimack, Rockingham, Hillsborough, Strafford, Belknap, Carroll and Grafton, can apply for aid from FEMA, which reimburses 75 percent of public costs, such as road, culvert and municipal building reconstruction. The state and towns typically split the remaining costs. Grafton County became eligible for aid yesterday, said Michael Poirier, chief planner for the state Bureau of Emergency Management.

Towns seeking FEMA aid, except those in Grafton County, must submit requests by June 30. Grafton County towns have until July 20, said Peter Thomas, a FEMA officer. FEMA officials inspect a town's damage and survey costs only after a town has submitted its request.

Poirier warned that state agencies need to look at debris in rivers and lakes, such as

floating trees and dislodged sand, which could further damage roads and dams.

"We've had three major floods in the last three years, and no debris has been picked up," Poirier said.

He said that residents in Epsom, Pembroke and Allenstown, downstream from the Suncook River's shift, have had up to four feet of sediment from the Suncook River on their lawns. The river washed away about 150,000 cubic yards of sediment from the sand pit it now flows through, state geologist Chad Wittkop said.

Jim Gallagher, an engineer for the state Department of Environmental Sciences, said that most of the 75 damaged dams suffered from erosion, though none of the dams was in imminent danger. State inspectors have surveyed all but 10 of the 642 dams in the areas affected by the floods.

DES requested \$1.8 million from the state Tuesday to repair the seven dams that had the most damage, including the Pittsfield Mill Dam, Pleasant Lake Dam in Deerfield and the Buck Street Dam in Pembroke, Gallagher said.

After October's floods, inspectors found that 35 dams were damaged, Gallagher said. But he cautioned that some of the dams may have already had damage before the floods.

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