



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Submitted on:
(COB Stamp)

Department Name: Public Works/Flood Control
Department No.: 054
Agenda Date: July 15, 2025
Placement: Departmental Agenda
Estimated Time: 30 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Directors, Flood Control and Water Conservation District
Board of Supervisors

FROM: Department Director: Chris Sneddon, Public Works Director
Contact: Walter Rubalcava, Deputy Director – Flood Control

SUBJECT: Supplement Special Flood Hazard Areas in County Code Chapter 15A with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Maps and Associated Preliminary Products for Santa Barbara County, First and Third Supervisorial District

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board, acting jointly as the Board of Supervisors and the Board of Directors of the Flood Control and Water Conservation District:

- a) Consider and approve the recommendation of the Floodplain Administrator to supplement the areas of special flood hazards identified in County Code Chapter 15A with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Maps and Associated Preliminary Products, with a Preliminary Issue Date of March 26, 2024, and revision date of May 15, 2025, for portions of Santa Barbara County;
- b) Rescind the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Interim Advisory Flood Maps for Santa Barbara County, added on June 19, 2018, in lieu of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Maps dated March 26, 2024, and revised on May 15, 2025; and
- c) Find that the proposed action is an administrative activity of the County, which will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment and is therefore not a "project" as

defined for purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under State CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b)(5).

Summary Text:

This item is to consider and approve recommendations by the Floodplain Administrator (Flood Control District Deputy Director) to supplement the special flood hazard areas defined in County Code Chapter 15A. County residents currently receive a 20% discount on their annual National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) flood insurance due to the County's favorable rating in the Community Rating System program, in part due to the County's adoption of standards higher than the minimum federal requirements and using the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) maps recommended for adoption.

The Interim Advisory Flood Mapping was approved by the Board on June 18, 2018, which was developed by FEMA as a result of the Thomas Fire and the January 9, 2018, Debris Flow. If the recommended actions are approved, the Interim Advisory Flood Mapping would be rescinded and replaced with the recently updated Preliminary FEMA maps. These changes would affect the unincorporated areas of Montecito, Carpinteria, as well as the Santa Ynez Valley and serve as the best available information for these areas. The preliminary FEMA maps would become permanent upon the FEMA's publishing of the final maps, which are expected to be issued by FEMA in 2026.

Discussion:

The Interim Advisory Flood Mapping was completed to better identify the flood hazards that resulted from the Thomas Fire and the subsequent Debris Flow. Since the watersheds within the Thomas Fire Burn Area have recovered over the last 7 years, it is recommended that the Board approve the use of the preliminary FEMA maps until the final maps are issued.

The preliminary FEMA maps are available to view at <https://www.countyofsb.org/2158/FEMA-Remapping>. The preliminary maps were developed using the latest computer modeling standards, new topography, and updated hydrology to reflect changed conditions since issuance of the previous maps in the 1970s and 2018.

FEMA released the preliminary maps to the public on March 26, 2024. A Public Open House Event was held on July 9, 2024 to inform the public. Upon receiving and addressing comments, FEMA released updated maps on May 15, 2025. The preliminary maps covered areas below the Thomas Fire; areas of the Santa Ynez Valley, including portions of the Chumash Reservation Lands; and the Cities of Carpinteria, Santa Barbara, Solvang, and Buellton. Of note, neighboring jurisdictions and agencies administer these maps separately in coordination with FEMA.

Until the issuance of the final maps, staff will continue to use both the existing and the preliminary FEMA maps (issued March 26, 2024, and May 15, 2025, respectively) and default to the more conservative of the two until the issuance of the final maps in 2026. The preliminary FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) dated March 26, 2024, and May 15, 2025, and associated preliminary

products are included as attachment A. The associated preliminary Products include computer modeling and data input, and Flood Insurance Studies.

The recommended action is an administrative government activity to approve the use of the preliminary FEMA maps. This adoption of the preliminary maps would not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment as specified in CEQA Guidelines 15378(b)(5). The activity is not related to any particular development; and possible future projects subject to Chapter 15A will be subject to CEQA compliance as applicable.

Background:

Santa Barbara County is a participant in the NFIP and FEMA's Community Rating System program. In being a participant in the NFIP; the County is eligible for disaster assistance and additional federal grant programs. This also requires homes located in FEMA designated flood risk areas to have flood insurance if their mortgage is with a federally insured lending institution. However, any homeowner regardless of location is eligible to purchase flood insurance.

As a participant in the NFIP and the Community Rating System program, the County has adopted floodplain management standards to protect new development and rebuilding of destroyed structures, in conformance with federal requirements.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

There is no fiscal impact associated with the proposed actions.

Special Instructions:

Direct the Clerk of the Board to email a copy of the minute order of these actions to Christina Lopez at clopez@countyofsb.org.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Preliminary FIRMs dated March 26, 2024, and May 15, 2025, and Associated Preliminary Products (Flood Insurance Studies).

Contact Information:

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