Disaster recovery response to Tropical Storm Alberto

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Tropical Storm Alberto hit the State of Georgia in July 1994 and, as a result, about a third of our state suffered flood and rain damage. Fifty-five of the 160+ counties of Georgia had been declared federal disaster counties. Most of the damage was concentrated in the south-western part of the state, especially along the Flint River.

Recovery program

The recovery efforts included administering a US$2.475 million flood recovery grant program; coordinating with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Georgia Trust and other state agencies in comprehensive relief efforts; and working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 review process. The Georgia program is similar to the relief programs in the State of California and in the Midwest. Funding is designed for the repair of historic properties that ‘fall through the cracks’ - that is, that do not receive money from FEMA or from private insurance. The Georgia Historic Preservation Division currently has seventy grant projects in place that are aiding over one hundred historic structures and archaeological sites. We are repairing public buildings like courthouses, private residences, commercial buildings and museums.

Recovery experiences

The Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) had no past experience in disaster response. This flood was a 500-year disaster for Georgia, and is considered the worst natural disaster in Georgia's recorded history. The Georgia Historic Preservation Division

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was organized and quick in its response efforts, and also fortunate that it could call the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Midwest State Historic Preservation Officers for guidance.

![Figure 20.1. Aerial view of the 1920s Radium Springs Casino, Albany, Georgia, inundated by floods in July 1994. (Photo: Jim Lockhart 1994).](image)

This provided for a head start on which steps to take and which to avoid. The Georgia SHPO was also able to access FEMA's Programmatic Agreement from the Midwest and adapt it quickly for the state.

One of the first hurdles we had to overcome in recovery work was lack of documentation. The flooded areas were for the most part rural and over a large area and there was little survey work or National Register listings in these areas. This made organized damage assessment difficult. Compensation came from information provided by regional preservation planners, main street directors and local government contacts. Often this information was not on paper or on a computer.

It was beneficial to go into the field with representatives of other state agencies. This was beneficial not only to the SHPO, but to the disaster victims as well, since the information presented was coordinated. The Governor's Office of Georgia formed an interagency flood recovery team that included Historic Preservation Division, FEMA, the Georgia Emergency Management Agency and other state agencies. The team visited different cities in the state and discussed the Historic Preservation Division's flood recovery grants, the US Small Business Administration loans, FEMA aid and the application procedure for the aid. Packets were handed out so that the information was delineated for them.
During Georgia's recovery efforts, it has become apparent that technical information and education is crucial before, during and after a disaster. Historic material was lost because disaster victims did not know how to deal with water damage to their resources. Often this occurred immediately after the disaster, before technical information could reach them. A chronic problem that existed was the failure of building owners to allow their structures to dry out before repair and replacement; as a result, the work often had to be redone. The Georgia Historic Preservation Division is currently planning, in coordination with the Alabama State Historic Preservation Officer, technical information workshops in the flood areas for architects, building inspectors and home owners in the flood regions, so that they will have better knowledge in the future. As part of our grant administration, we have hired two contract architects to aid grant recipients in this area. Our architects live in the flood regions, and they provide assistance with every part of the repair process.

**Montezuma, Georgia**

Montezuma has a population of about 4,500. It is a flood town in Georgia and is a good example of how historic preservation and disaster recovery can work; the recovery efforts here are still in progress. In July 1994, Montezuma received 20 inches (50 cm) of rain in 24 hours; the breaking of the levee bank resulted in the entire downtown of Montezuma being underwater.
Figure 20.3. Historic home in Albany, Georgia, following Tropical Storm Alberto in July 1994. The flood waters washed out part of the foundation all causing the collapse of the wooden structure (Photo: Jim Lockhart 1996).

This town has been very focused on taking advantage of the resources that are available and has been receptive to historic preservation and understand its advantages. The people of Montezuma have learned a lot about preservation since the flood.

All the buildings downtown are privately-owned commercial buildings with no flood insurance. The first step the merchants took was to apply for Small Business Administration loans so that they could re-open their businesses. They next sought grant money from the Georgia Historic Preservation Division. Since the entire Central Business District in Montezuma was underwater, we were able to give the city a block grant for facade repair. This grant gave us a chance to provide comprehensive improvement to an entire commercial district.

There are about 45 buildings in downtown Montezuma that are contributing to a potential National Register District. The National Register Nomination is presently being completed.

Many of the facades have extensive brick and structural damage resulting from the flood. The block grant will repair this type of damage, but beyond this, the town is interested in going one step further with about five buildings downtown. The non-historic aluminum facades will be removed to expose the original intact facades underneath.

Beyond this, the town is also taking advantage of aid from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Georgia Trust. They are both offering to help the town with economic development, heritage tourism and other incentives. Historic Preservation Division's Certified Local Government coordinator is working with them to implement appropriate zoning and to obtain Certified Local Government status.
Figure 20.4. Aerial view of the Commercial Area of downtown Montezuma, Georgia, inundated by floods following Tropical Storm Alberto in July 1994. (Photo: Jim Lockhart 1996).

Figure 20.5. Conservation management action following the flooding of Montezuma, Georgia, allowed the rehabilitation of the damaged structures. A façade rehabilitation block grant allowed the restoration of historic structures and the removal of metal slipcover on commercial buildings. (Photo: Jim Lockhart 1996).
Figure 20.6. Following the flooding by Tropical Storm Alberto of Montezuma, Georgia, the city was the recipient of a US$ 600,000 Flood Recovery Grant to rehabilitate over 40 commercial buildings. (Photo: Jim Lockhart 1997).

All of this activity in Montezuma is a result of flood recovery efforts. This town is an example of how preservation benefits flood recovery, and how Georgia's Historic Preservation Division recovery program is succeeding.