

LOOK UPSTREAM

MARCH 2004

Look Upstream, a series of monthly articles provide information on flooding in the Cypress Creek Watershed and Harris County. These explain what we have learned about what has not been done and what is being done and/or should be done to reverse the direction of escalating flood dangers to neighborhood communities and homes.

Flood maps for Harris County currently fail to show all areas subject to flood dangers. These have been going through an extensive 2 1/2 year technical review process starting after Tropical Storm Allison wreaked havoc flooding over 73,000 homes. Of these, 2 of every 3 homes were not insured. And this was not the worst storm to hit the Harris County area in 100-years and we believe the history of weather and worsening drainage capacity are creating exposure to more of the same in the foreseeable future.

The technical process to develop the new maps included recalculating the location of the flood plain areas. This engineering has now reached the stage where the new flood plain maps will be released for review / comment / appeal beginning this month. These "working maps" will be accessible on a web site created to inform the public about the TSARP (Tropical Storm Allison Recovery Project) - www.tsarp.org. The Cypress Creek Watershed will not be included in the first 5 watershed FIRMs (Flood Insurance Rate Maps) released the 2nd week of March. It and the other 16 watersheds in Harris County will be issued later this year.

By looking at the location of your property as shown on the FIRM, you can learn if it is within what is called, "the 100-year flood plain"; the area adjacent to our bayous, creeks and tributaries where the experts estimate storm water from a major storm event (approximately 12.7 inches of rain in 24 hours) will rise prior to receding as drainage occurs. The area within the outline of this "100-year flood plain" will flood. It is important for everyone to understand that within this area, the lower elevations will flood more frequently - some existing homes in the Cypress Creek Watershed have flooded up to 5 times in the last 15 to 20 years. Some 160 homes are no longer flooding because they have been purchased by the government under the "Home Buy-out Program" and demolished after the owners moved out. Note: By referring to what is called the "Riverine Flood Profile" you will also be able to determine if your property is expected to flood more frequently during storms causing flooding at lesser depths but occurring at greater frequencies. These are categorized as the 10-year and 50-year flood events. You will need to know the elevation of your foundation and will need to access this through other official sources as it is not shown on the FIRMs.

Old timers who have spent their life in Harris County tell us flooding has become worse in the last 15 - 20 years. The reason is new subdivisions, shopping centers, roads, etc are replacing forests and farm land with concrete and asphalt. In last month's issue of the Look Upstream articles we advised the readers that in December, 2003 our coalition submitted a formal request to the Chief Engineer, Harris County Flood Control District, recommending the outflow rate from detention ponds be reduced in Harris County to the same rate as required for developments in Ft. Bend County. A decision on this recommendation has not yet been received. If it is not approved, the outflow rate will apparently remain as it has been for the last 20 years - this being 10 times greater than is required by Ft. Bend County regulations.

All things considered, the home owner community throughout Harris County will be pleased to learn that on March 1st a recommendation was submitted to the special Flood & Drainage Committee recently appointed by Mayor Bill White advising that the outfall rate for detention on property within the City of Houston regulatory area be reduced to the same rate as what CCFCC is advocating for the unincorporated areas in Harris County.

Look Upstream articles are provided to your neighborhood newsletter editor by CCFCC as a public service. Questions will be welcomed at all times.

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