

SECTION II: PLANNING PROCESS

PLANNING PROCESS

44 Code of Federal Regulations

44 CFR §201.6(b):	Planning process. An open public involvement process is essential to the development of an effective plan. In order to develop a more comprehensive approach to reducing the effects of natural disasters, the planning process must include:
44 CFR §201.6(b)(1):	An opportunity for the public to comment on the plan during the drafting stage and prior to plan approval;
44 CFR §201.6(b)(2):	An opportunity for neighboring communities, local and regional agencies involved in hazard mitigation activities, and agencies that have the authority to regulate development, as well as businesses, academia and other private and nonprofit interests to be involved in the planning process; and
44 CFR §201.6(b)(3):	Review and incorporation, if appropriate, of existing plans, studies, reports, and technical information.
44 CFR §201.6(c)(1):	Documentation of the planning process used to develop the plan, including how it was prepared, who was involved in the process, and how the public was involved.

The 2025 LMS Update

The Hardee County LMS Working Group prepared the 2025 LMS update with assistance from the Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), which began in September 2024.

The Hardee County LMS Working Group utilized the mitigation planning process recommended by the Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) to complete the update. A Local Mitigation Plan Crosswalk, located in Appendix F, provides a detailed summary of FEMA's minimum standards of acceptability for compliance with The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) and notes the location of each requirement within the LMS. Part 201 of the 44 Code of Federal Regulations is the standard for the requirements.

The LMS update process identified additional hazards, updated the risk assessment using the most recent and best data available, and evaluated existing mitigation goals, projects, and programs for overall effectiveness. The hazard analysis includes the hazards from the 2020 LMS hazard profile, information from the 2023 Florida Enhanced State Hazard Mitigation Plan effective through August 22, 2028, and hazards identified in other emergency management plans for Hardee County. The LMS follows FEMA's 2023 Crosswalk and the associated planning guidance.

The LMS Working Group is preparing the 2025 LMS update using and incorporating relevant content from the 2020 Hardee County Local Mitigation Strategy. The LMS Working Group updated relevant sections of the LMS.

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- **Public Involvement**

To facilitate increased public involvement, the LMS Working Group attended different events during the drafting and review stages of the document to provide the opportunity for public information and input. The LMS Working Group facilitated coordination with jurisdictions for access to their websites and encouraged the use of social media.

- **Plan Format**

The document was reformatted in several areas. New Appendices have been added to provide further information. The final document will be ADA Accessibility formatted so jurisdictions may place it on their websites.

- **Hazard Identification**

The LMS extends the hazards analysis to include domestic security incident/civil disturbances, agricultural disruptions, cyber-attacks, and transportation incidents.

- **Goals and Objectives**

The LMS Working Group reviewed goals and objectives and determined the need for reorganization and amendments.

- **Mitigation Project List**

To meet the requirement the project list includes a comprehensive range of projects for each hazard and is not a “grant wish list,” the project list includes ongoing projects and long-range projects as identified by the LMS Working Group.

- **Project Prioritization**

The LMS Working Group reviewed the SAFE-T and STAPLEE systems and decided to combine elements of both systems to generate an approach that works best for Hardee County.

For the 2025 LMS update, staff met with local planners, agencies, and other organizations to gather information and review concepts. The LMS Working Group held public meetings throughout the update process to review the existing LMS and discuss potential amendments. The meetings included representatives from jurisdictions and community organizations. Attendees provided input at key stages of the process. Appendix E includes sign-in sheets and meeting summaries for each of the LMS Working Group meetings.

Each jurisdiction within the county has continued their participation in the LMS since its adoption in 2020. Representatives from each jurisdiction came to various Working Group meetings and provided valuable input for identifying and prioritizing mitigation actions. Since the adoption of the LMS in 2020, no new jurisdictions have been formed within the county. Those participating jurisdictions are:

- Hardee County (unincorporated)
- City of Bowling Green
- City of Wauchula
- Town of Zolfo Springs

All jurisdictions wishing to participate in and share in the benefits deriving from the LMS program must complete and file a fully executed resolution which conforms to the adoption standards jointly

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established and amended by the Hardee County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and the LMS Working Group. An example Resolution is located in Section VII.

Multi-Jurisdictional Participation

To satisfy multi-jurisdictional participation requirements, FEMA requires the County and jurisdictions to perform the following tasks:

- Participate in mitigation planning workshops;
- Provide data for the Hazard Analysis and Risk Assessment, as needed;
- Identify completed mitigation projects, if applicable; and
- Adopt the LMS.

Each of the jurisdictions listed below contributed to the planning process and are seeking approval of the LMS.

- Hardee County
- City of Bowling Green
- City of Wauchula
- Town of Zolfo Springs

Each municipality in the County may adopt the LMS once FEMA and Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) have approved the LMS document. All other participants in the LMS must submit a letter of commitment supporting the LMS. The list of participants is included in Appendix A and the LMS Working Group Roster is included in Appendix E.

Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) Working Group

The LMS Working Group is a partnership of government entities, public and private organizations, and individuals with a shared interest in producing proactive initiatives for prevention and protection from hazards. The LMS Working Group serves as an umbrella organization coordinating all mitigation programs and activities, supplies staffing for sub-committees, and is the primary forum for exchanging information and mobilizing the expertise and resources of the community. The LMS Working Group helps collect and disseminate information and policies relevant to the community. The LMS Working Group is the lead coordinating and facilitating body for hazard mitigation in the County and continues to serve as the focal point for community and private and public involvement in hazard mitigation activities. The LMS Working Group includes representatives that implement or have expertise in the different activities that could prevent or reduce the severity of the impacts from hazards identified in the LMS. These departments include but are not limited to utilities, law enforcement, fire, building, code enforcement, engineering, land use and planning, public works, emergency management/public safety, public information, environmental protection/public health, parks and recreation, county/city management, and housing/community development.

The LMS Working Group assesses risks within the county and maintains an updated list of potential mitigation initiatives that will reduce risks associated with hazards that are most likely to occur in respective communities. The LMS Working Group meets no less than four times a year with

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additional meetings schedule as dictated by need. All business conducted by the LMS Working Group is submitted for approval to the voting members and is passed or defeated by majority vote.

For someone to be a member of the LMS Working Group, participation is required. Many of the members commit additional time and resources to develop a mitigation strategy that protects life, property, and the environment as well as strategies that contribute to the economic well-being of the county. This plan contains the annually updated list of the committee members and their jurisdictions/association as of the writing of this plan. The Membership Roster is located in Appendix E.

FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) dictates that each jurisdiction and their representatives must show participation in the planning process to qualify for HMGP, Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) and Flood Mitigation Assistance Program (FMA) funding.

The Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) and the FEMA define LMS requirements. The State requires the LMS must provide the processes for application, project selection and distribution of funds under the HMGP. Under the Florida Administrative Code, the LMS Working Group must meet several conditions to maintain compliance. Requirements include:

- The LMS Working Group shall be charged with the responsibilities of designating a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson; developing and revising the LMS as necessary; setting an order of priority for local mitigation projects and submitting an annual LMS update to the Florida DEM by the last working weekday in January of each year.
- No later than the last working weekday of each January, the Chairperson of the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) shall submit to the FDEM, a list of the members of the LMS Working Group and its designated chairperson and vice-chairperson.
- The Working Group shall invite, at a minimum, representatives from various agencies of county government, representatives from all interested municipalities in the county, representatives from interested private and civic organizations, trade and commercial support groups, property owner associations, water management districts, regional planning councils, independent special districts and non-profit groups.
- The county shall submit documentation that indicates within the preceding year it has issued a written invitation to each group as specified above in the previous bullet.
- As required under State Statute, meetings are open to the public. There are several methods available to us to advertise the meetings:
 - Newspaper advertisements
 - Publication on the Hardee County website
 - Email list notification
 - Social media
 - Announcements at other area meetings
- All Stakeholders are invited to be part of the LMS Working Group in a variety of mediums. This intention is to reach as many individuals as possible. Care has been taken to avoid the “digital divide” by not just relying on electronic means to communicate LMS activities.

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Appendix E includes the LMS Working Group Membership Roster, sign-in sheets, notices, agendas, presentation materials, and minutes. All meetings of the LMS Working Group are open to the public.

Participation Requirements

Since the LMS Working Group writes the LMS using input from all stakeholders, it is important to make sure there is representation from the entire Hardee County community. Each stakeholder has different participation requirements and the LMS Working Group encourages all stakeholders to participate in the process.

Jurisdictions

County, municipal, and government agency participation is critical to the success of the LMS. To retain LMS voting rights, qualify for Federal mitigation assistance consideration, and otherwise remain a member in good standing, FEMA requires all jurisdictions to conform to the following standards:

- Participation of the representative or alternate in the LMS Working Group meetings; and
- Have an officially executed resolution adopting the revised LMS on file with the County. A jurisdiction must have an officially adopted resolution to be eligible for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Flood Mitigation Assistance Program (FMAP), and Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) funding programs.

The LMS Coordinator will notify all jurisdictions of meetings via email at least one week in advance and will provide meeting summaries thereafter.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), Other Governmental Entities, and Stakeholders

The LMS Working Group encourages participation by non-governmental organizations (NGO), other governmental entities, and stakeholders. To qualify for LMS grant sponsorship, NGOs, and other governmental entities must:

- Have a duly executed letter of commitment to the LMS on file with the County; and
- Actively participate in and support LMS activities.

The list of Identified participants is included in Appendix A.

The Public and Private Participants

An important component of the LMS and the success of the hazard mitigation initiatives is the participation of both the public and the private sector in the planning process. It is recognized that this participation is crucial to the economic recovery of a community following a disaster. Government entities use the input of the private sector to gain the perspective and insight necessary to adequately address the needs of business and industry. In turn, businesses and industries gain an increased awareness of the importance of preparedness and mitigation and receive technical assistance for business continuity planning, valuable support, and contact information for additional information. The LMS Working Group encourages participation from the chambers of

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commerce, economic development, private utilities and communication companies and large employers.

The list of Identified participants is included in Appendix A.

EOC Operations Group

The LMS Working Group acts under the direction of the Office of Emergency Management pursuant to the Board of County Commissioner's adopted resolution. The local emergency planning process is coordinated through various committees and programs. This process provides a forum to meet with the changing needs of the group.

Notification

Each regularly scheduled and publicly noticed LMS Working Group meeting held during the 2025 Hardee County LMS update process included an opportunity for the current Working Group members to identify new or potential stakeholders. As required by the Florida Administrative Code 27P-22.004, the LMS Coordinator, on behalf of the Working Group, will send out invitations by mail, email, and/or phone call to those identified agencies/organizations that may have a stake in the LMS planning process. Additional individuals or representatives' groups within, and around Hardee County, will also be identified and invited accordingly.

LMS Working Group meetings are held on a quarterly basis. These meetings are open to the public and are generally advertised through notices on the county website, newspaper, email, other committee meetings, and social media.

Public Involvement, Citizen Input, and Stakeholder Involvement

In addition to LMS Working Group meetings, Hardee County encouraged more open and widespread participation in the mitigation planning process by extending its local outreach efforts through community events and information provided through websites and social media, with the option to provide anonymous comments and to use social media. Providing information at public events helps increase public involvement. These efforts provide opportunities for local officials, residents, businesses, academia, and other private interests in the County to be involved and offer input throughout the local mitigation planning process.

As citizens become more involved in decisions that affect their safety, they are likely to gain a greater appreciation of the hazards present in the community and to take steps necessary to reduce their impacts. Public awareness is a key component of any community's overall mitigation strategy aimed at making a home, neighborhood, school, business, or city safer from the potential effects of hazards. The LMS Working Group sought public input using methods discussed below.

Community Events and Meetings

The purpose of attendance at community events is to present the findings of the risk and capability assessments, and to garner input regarding unique hazard concerns and possible mitigation actions for potential inclusion in the LMS, including ideas for policies and projects. This public outreach

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effort is also an opportunity for neighboring municipalities, agencies, businesses, academia, nonprofit organizations, and other interested parties to be involved in the planning process. Appendix E includes information from each event, including sign-in sheets, presentation materials, and photos.

November 14, 2024 – Hardee County Community Workshop

The LMS Working Group participated in a community workshop at the Hardee County Agri-Civic Center. Information about the LMS, the update process, maps and data specific to hazards from the 2025 LMS were displayed. Participants were able to participate in a survey regarding hazards.

November 26, 2024 – Healthy Hardee Meeting

The LMS Working Group presented an overview of the LMS to attendees at a Healthy Hardee meeting. Information about the LMS, the update process, maps and data specific to hazards from the 2025 LMS were displayed. Participants were able to participate in a survey regarding hazards.

December 4, 2024 – Hardee County Rotary Meeting

The LMS Working Group presented an overview of the LMS to attendees at the Hardee County Rotary meeting. Information about the LMS, the update process, maps and data specific to hazards from the 2025 LMS were displayed. Participants were able to participate in a survey regarding hazards.

Facebook and Social Media

The LMS Working Group will utilize social media to increase exposure of the LMS update to as many people as possible. Information will be posted on websites and Facebook pages for the County, local jurisdictions, and other LMS Working Group agencies.

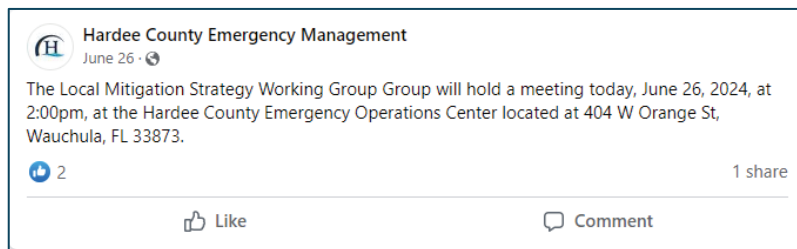


Figure II.1: Hardee County Emergency Management Facebook Post

Partnership with Other Events

Hardee County has several initiatives running concurrently with the LMS update. These include the Hardee County Vulnerability Assessment and the Hardee County Comprehensive Plan Update. When meetings were scheduled for these projects, information relating to the 2025 Hardee County LMS Update was provided.

Incorporation of Public Comments and Feedback

Throughout the drafting and review process, the LMS Working Group sought input from the public through a variety of mediums. Comments received were reviewed and incorporated into the document as necessary.

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Adoption of LMS

Section VII outlines the requirements for the Adoption of the LMS.