

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy, Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner LaTourette Announce New Investments in Flood Protection

05/3/2022

\$50 Million Expansion of Blue Acres Buyout Program For Ida-Impacted Communities and \$10 Million in Community Stormwater Assistance

LAMBERTVILLE – On a residential block in Lambertville where Tropical Storm Ida's flood waters swept two houses into Swan Creek, Governor Phil Murphy today announced new investments in flood protection for New Jersey communities, including a \$50 million investment in the Blue Acres homeowner buyout program for Ida-impacted communities, and \$10 million in community stormwater assistance grants. These new investments build on Governor Murphy's commitment to building a stronger, fairer, and more affordable New Jersey that is resilient to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather, like the flooding caused by the remnants of Tropical Storm Ida.

On Wednesday, September 1, 2021, Tropical Storm Ida unleashed severe weather throughout the State, including strong winds, tornadoes, and heavy and sustained rainfall reaching up to 10 inches in some areas that resulted in extreme flooding, damage to homes, public facilities, and other structures, and, sadly, the loss of 29 lives. In response to Ida's massive impact, President Biden approved the Governor's major disaster declaration request, paving the way for residents, businesses, and local governments in the counties of Bergen, Cape May, Essex, Gloucester, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Passaic, Somerset, Union, and Warren to receive Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assistance for emergency response and initial disaster recovery activities. To date, FEMA has provided more than \$247 million in Individual Assistance to 44,866 New Jerseyans impacted by Ida.

While FEMA's initial assistance addressed the most immediate recovery needs of those impacted by Tropical Storm Ida, the Murphy Administration recognizes that there are still unmet, long-term rebuilding needs. The \$50 million investment in the Blue Acres Buyout Program is the first phase of Governor Murphy's Ida Recovery Strategy which looks to maximize all available federal Ida disaster recovery funds to launch several programs over the coming months. Developed collaboratively by the Governor's Office, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management (NJOEM), and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Ida Recovery Strategy will also include programs funded by the recently announced \$228 million in federal U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding that will be available to New Jersey following the release of CDBG-DR rules and after an exhaustive public outreach process led by DCA to assess need.

"No New Jerseyan should have to see their life's work washed away by devastating rain and floodwaters. As New Jersey continues to experience more extreme weather events, we must become proactive in our approach to protect the communities and businesses that continue to bear the brunt of flooding and damage from these storms," **said Governor Murphy**. "This \$50 million investment of federal Ida recovery funds in our nationally recognized Blue Acres program will allow homeowners in communities like Lambertville to facilitate market-rate purchases of properties which have experienced repetitive flood losses. Helping families relocate and turning these properties into open space will allow more flood waters to be absorbed or diverted so that we don't see the kinds of catastrophic losses we did during Tropical Storm Ida. Investing in our communities' resiliency today will protect our residents while strengthening New Jersey's economy and sustaining its growth long into the future."

"The Department of Community Affairs has been working hard to help victims of Ida in their recovery and we will continue to support communities in developing long-term solutions to manage both the climate crisis and the affordable housing crisis that New Jersey is experiencing," **said Lt. Governor Sheila Y. Oliver, who serves as Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs**. "Especially as we rebuild from Ida, we must ensure that our most vulnerable residents are not placed in harm's way and set to endure more flooding."

New Jersey's Blue Acres Program is a nationally recognized example of an established and forward-thinking buyout program. The Program allows homeowners to sell flood-damaged or flood-prone homes at a market rate to the State. In turn, the Program then demolishes the home, and the land is preserved for open space, recreational purposes, or for permanently preserved wetlands to avoid the cycle of flood-damage-rebuild-repair that has become all too routine in the State's worst flood zones.

For Ida, the Blue Acres program is prioritizing homes that are now uninhabitable because they were either destroyed or severely damaged by the storm. The Governor's Disaster Recovery Office, NJOEM, DEP, and DCA are working jointly to identify homes that fit this criteria and to work with local municipalities and homeowners to effectuate buyouts.

"One of DEP's most important jobs is protecting people and property from flood hazards, which have worsened significantly over the last 20 years, and we must help communities get ahead of the next storm," **said Commissioner of Environmental Protection Shawn M. LaTourette**. "Our communities are tired of *recovering* from storms; it is time we help each other become more resilient instead. By expanding Blue Acres, right sizing our water infrastructure, strengthening flood standards, and improving our stormwater management, the Murphy Administration will help our neighbors and businesses build stronger and more resilient."

"The New Jersey State Police and Office of Emergency Management are committed to protecting our citizens from flood hazards and supporting communities as they recover from disasters like Ida," **said Colonel Patrick J. Callahan, Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police**. "We are proud to partner with the DEP to continue Tropical Storm Ida recovery efforts by dedicating \$50 million in funding from two Federal Emergency Management Agency grant programs administered by OEM."

"When we began the clean-up from the heavy rainfall we received from Hurricane Ida, Governor Murphy was there to offer crucial assistance from the State of New Jersey," **said Lambertville Mayor Andrew Nowick**. "Governor Murphy's expansion of the DEP Blue Acres program and his added investments in hazard mitigation and stormwater infrastructure will help us become more resilient against the challenges of climate change. We are very thankful to Governor Murphy and his team for their commitment to help municipalities like Lambertville plan effectively and come back stronger."

The \$50 million in new funding for the Blue Acres Buyout Program consists of \$40 million FEMA COVID-19 Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds and \$10 million in FEMA "Swift Current" funds. HMGP funds can be used for flood or other general hazard mitigation projects that align with the State's Hazard Mitigation Plan. FEMA Swift Current Program funds were dedicated specifically to New Jersey for home buyouts and elevations for structures with a National Flood Insurance Program policy that meet severe repetitive loss, repetitive loss, or substantially damaged requirements.

While the \$500 million investment in Blue Acres buyouts is a substantial step in Ida recovery, there is no one single measure that will protect a community from extreme weather and worsening flooding. In recognition of the need for a comprehensive approach, the Murphy Administration is investing in a network of solutions that, together, will ensure the resilience of our communities and economies in the face of a changing climate, including:

- 1. Flood Resilience Infrastructure.** Working with the Army Corps of Engineers, the Murphy Administration is helping to facilitate new federal investments of over \$1 billion in the study, design, and construction of hard infrastructure projects in some of New Jersey's most flood-prone watersheds. And, the Governor's proposed Fiscal Year 2023 budget includes over \$60 million for continued investments in shore protection and flood control projects. Additionally, the NJOEM facilitates federal FEMA investments annually to help reduce New Jersey's vulnerability to disasters. It is NJOEM's commitment to reduce risks from hazards and break the cycle of damage through projects that eliminate long term risk to people and property.
- 2. Resilience Planning & Buyouts.** The Blue Acres Buyout Program will get families out of harm's way while creating more storage for increasing flood waters that can have dual benefits for communities as new parklands or open space. Buyouts will also be offered on a continuous basis through coordinated efforts between State agencies, local municipalities, and homeowners.
- 3. Modernizing Flood Hazard Standards.** Under Governor Murphy's Executive Order 100, the Administration is working to ensure that new investments in buildings and infrastructure will stand the test of time and a changing climate by modernizing the state's flood hazard rules.
- 4. Improving Stormwater Management.** The Murphy Administration is investing in right-sizing the state's stormwater infrastructure to ensure it can handle bigger storms of today and tomorrow ([https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://t.e2ma.net/click/7y0j3g/nrddit/njv1iw__!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!hyaNjJp5ZzrmwHa_WKkJd0wX5msJV0u0lpAaVomY_hfL5xwE0-8JKScegk2VHhnq7UUrOPHlxvwEwYtMr5igt5aog0N\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://t.e2ma.net/click/7y0j3g/nrddit/njv1iw__!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!hyaNjJp5ZzrmwHa_WKkJd0wX5msJV0u0lpAaVomY_hfL5xwE0-8JKScegk2VHhnq7UUrOPHlxvwEwYtMr5igt5aog0N$)), including through the Water Infrastructure Investment Plan ([https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://t.e2ma.net/click/7y0j3g/nrddit/3bw1iw__!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!hyaNjJp5ZzrmwHa_WKkJd0wX5msJV0u0lpAaVomY_hfL5xwE0-8JKScegk2VHhnq7UUrOPHlxvwEwYtMr5igpdAs4PW\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://t.e2ma.net/click/7y0j3g/nrddit/3bw1iw__!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!hyaNjJp5ZzrmwHa_WKkJd0wX5msJV0u0lpAaVomY_hfL5xwE0-8JKScegk2VHhnq7UUrOPHlxvwEwYtMr5igpdAs4PW$)), and a new \$10 million grant that will encourage and assist communities interested in taking the first steps in forming a stormwater utility, building green infrastructure, enhancing existing infrastructure, and restoring riparian areas. More details about the stormwater grant funding will be announced later this month.

Those impacted by Ida and other storms last year are encouraged to visit this site ([https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://t.e2ma.net/click/7y0j3g/nrddit/j4w1iw__!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!hyaNjJp5ZzrmwHa_WKkJd0wX5msJV0u0lpAaVomY_hfL5xwE0-8JKScegk2VHhnq7UUrOPHlxvwEwYtMr5iginDZjnH\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://t.e2ma.net/click/7y0j3g/nrddit/j4w1iw__!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!hyaNjJp5ZzrmwHa_WKkJd0wX5msJV0u0lpAaVomY_hfL5xwE0-8JKScegk2VHhnq7UUrOPHlxvwEwYtMr5iginDZjnH$)) for information and discuss their interest with their local governments.

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