

HARRIS COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

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The Harris County Flood Control District (District) is a special purpose district created by the Texas Legislature in 1937 in response to devastating floods that struck the region in 1929 and 1935. Harris County's Commissioners Court is the governing body of the District. The District's boundaries are coincident with Harris County, a community of more than 4.1 million that includes the City of Houston. The District's mission, in simple terms, is to: (1) Devise flood damage reduction plans; (2) Implement the plans; and (3) Maintain the infrastructure.

Nature gave us 22 primary watersheds within the county's 1,756 square miles, each with its own independent flooding problems. The District's drainage and flood control infrastructure is extensive, including more than 1,500 channels totaling about 2,500 miles in length (about the distance from Los Angeles to New York). Nature also challenges us with flat terrain, clay soils that do not absorb water well, and annual rainfall of 48 inches. The flooding problems in the community are severe, with several hundred thousand homes and businesses in the identified flood plain (not all flooding areas are mapped yet), and projects to reduce the risk are estimated to cost several billion dollars.

The District's income is derived primarily from a dedicated ad valorem property tax. The rate is variable depending on operation and maintenance needs, and in 2011 was set at 2.872 cents per \$100 valuation (the statutory limit for the District's tax rate is 30 cents). Capital projects are funded with District short-term borrowing and long-term bonds, Harris County long-term bonds, impact fees, and cash. By using the combined resources of Harris County and the District, many more projects can be implemented across Harris County. The District's Capital Improvement Program currently has about \$400 million in available funds, and spending for 2012 is estimated at \$180 million for projects (out of a recommended \$200 million).

Through aggressive privatization and managed competition, the District has reduced its full time staff to 398, down from nearly 1,000 in 1989. The District obtains virtually all engineering design work for capital projects and maintenance repairs through consulting contracts, and obtains all construction work through the competitive bidding process. All of the District's routine maintenance (primarily mowing) is performed through contracts with private companies.

The District's Mission Statement is: "Provide flood damage reduction projects that work, with appropriate regard for community and natural values." This balancing act is a continual challenge in the third most populous county in the United States, and achieving needed flood risk reduction within financial limitations is the major component of the District's commitment to make every taxpayer dollar count.