

Weekly Legislative Update for State Historic Preservation Officers

June 27, 2008

Responding to the Midwest Floods

Throughout the past week, preservation advocates and Midwestern Congressional leadership have explored how best to support recovery in flood-damaged regions around the swollen Mississippi River. Additional funding and temporary increases to the federal rehabilitation tax credit (FRTC) similar to measures aiding the Gulf Coast's recovery are in play.

Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) are, as of now, the primary advocates for preservation-related supplemental funding. According to Harkin's office, this funding would likely be included in a second supplemental appropriation imagined to move in late July.

Harkin's office is pushing Senate offices to get loss and repair cost estimates from their states by July 9. State Historic Preservation Offices, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Action, the Iowa Historic Preservation Alliance, and other groups have been soliciting these reports and working with Congressional offices.

Harkin's office is also looking for examples of how federal assistance has supported historic preservation in other parts of the country affected by natural disasters over the years.

The disastrous floods have spotlighted the value of comprehensive historic resource inventories as invaluable preparedness tools. The importance of survey came into sharp focus immediately after the 2005 hurricanes. Florida's SHPO was able to send FEMA information about affected areas immediately. Surveyors slogged through acres of historic places in unsurveyed areas in other states, which cost significant recovery time.

Sam Erickson, a National Trust Advisor and Vice President of Community Housing Initiatives based in Spencer, Iowa met with legislators last week to lobby for additional SHPO funding to support recovery efforts. She also discussed increasing the current 20% federal rehabilitation tax credit to 40% for projects under \$2 million. This concept is one of a number of provisions included within the Community Restoration and Revitalization Act (H.R.1043/S.584).

The FRTC received a similar temporary bump up in the Gulf Opportunity Zone. For affected Gulf Coast communities, the 20% federal credit was increased to 26% and the 10% credit was increased to 13%. That increase sunsets this year.