Background Information

Since it was established in 1968, the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) has forged an effective mitigation partnership to reduce losses from flooding through a combination of insurance protection for existing structures and prudent floodplain management criteria to reduce future flood losses for new construction. FEMA's flood hazard maps, which are produced to support the NFIP, form the foundation upon which the insurance rates and the floodplain management requirements are based. The flood hazard data presented graphically on the flood hazard maps are supported by Flood Insurance Studies (FISs), which are detailed hydrologic and hydraulic engineering studies. The information resulting from these studies is presented in FIS reports and on flood hazard maps, published by FEMA.

Most of the existing inventory of flood hazard maps has been produced using manual cartographic methods. However, given the advantages and utility of having flood hazard data and supporting information available in digital formats, FEMA is committed to eliminating the manual process and converting the existing flood hazard map inventory to digital format. To stay abreast of changing flooding conditions in communities throughout the United States, FEMA must periodically update the flood hazard maps and the collateral FIS reports. As these revisions occur, FEMA has been generating digital products, albeit at a slow pace due to funding constraints. To date, approximately 3 percent of the flood hazard mapping inventory is in digital format, with another 5 percent in the process of conversion.

In 1997, FEMA developed a plan to modernize the flood hazard mapping effort. Although the FEMA Map Modernization Plan continues to evolve, the basic components remain the same--to improve map accuracy and completeness; map utility; map production; and public awareness and customer service. Among many other program improvements, FEMA is improving the flood hazard maps by shifting its map production from a manual, cartographic process, to a digital process using Geographic Information Systems and georeferenced spatial data. This improvement will create more useful flood hazard data for our customers. Over the next few years, FEMA hopes to accelerate the transition from the cartographic mapping process to the digital mapping process and continue implementation of Map Modernization initiatives.

FEMA has used contractors to provide services for the mapping activities since the NFIP began. As we move into the 21st Century, FEMA will continue to use contractors' services to make the transition from cartographic to digital map production. As with any transition, there will still be many responsibilities associated with the current manually produced inventory of flood hazard maps, including updates and revisions, as well as the development of specific databases, methodologies, and production standards for the next generation of flood hazard maps.

The engineering requirements and other services FEMA is requesting cover a wide geographic area and affect many State and local governments, their citizenry, as well as private business and investment concerns. FEMA's Cooperative Technical Communities initiative is expected to expand significantly during the course of this contract. The Flood Map Production Coordination Contractor (formerly known as the Technical Evaluation Contractor (TEC)) is expected to provide leadership and innovative business guidance, with FEMA's goals of reducing disaster losses, increasing customer services, and increasing customer demand for flood insurance as part of the provisions of these technical services.

Many opportunities for improving the NFIP as well as its map products and services will be identified during the course of the next few years. The Flood Map Production Coordination Contractor will be actively encouraged to be on the leading edge of developing these proposals for consideration by FEMA and other organizations. Some previous customer-oriented innovations created during the last contract were developing a toll-free Map Assistance Center (1-877-FEMAMAP) for questions concerning floodplain mapping, and developing an Internet web site about the floodplain mapping process.