



WATER LEADERS WORKSHOP HANDOUT

Funding for Reclamation & Rebuilding

NRCS Buyout Program (EWP-FPE) Overview

Presenter: Jason Burns

Title: County Manager, Lincoln County

Program Focus: Post-disaster recovery, floodplain risk reduction, and long-term watershed resilience

1. What We're Solving

- Repetitive flood loss in high-risk areas (river corridors, burn scars, floodplains)
- Rising costs of disaster response vs. proactive mitigation
- Public safety concerns for residents remaining in hazardous zones
- Strain on infrastructure and emergency services

Key Message:

👉 *We cannot rebuild the same risk and expect a different outcome.*

2. What is the NRCS Buyout Program?

The Natural Resources Conservation Service Emergency Watershed Protection – Floodplain Easement (EWP-FPE) program:

- Voluntary property acquisition (buyout)
- Targets **flood-damaged or high-risk properties**
- Converts land into **permanent open space / natural floodplain**
- Removes future development rights
- Reduces long-term federal, state, and local disaster costs

3. How the Program Works (Simplified)

Step 1 – Application & Interest

- Property owners opt in voluntarily
- Local government (sponsor) coordinates intake

Step 2 – Eligibility Review

- NRCS + local sponsor verify flood risk, damages, and program fit

Step 3 – Appraisal & Due Diligence

- Fair market value appraisal
- Title review, environmental checks

Step 4 – Offer & Acquisition

- Offer made to property owner
- If accepted → closing

Step 5 – Restoration

- Structures removed
- Land restored to natural floodplain function

4. Funding Structure

- **NRCS (Federal):** Majority funding (often up to 100% depending on disaster authorization)
- **Local Sponsor (County):** Project coordination, contracting, administration
- **Property Owner:**
 - No out-of-pocket cost for participation
 - Receives fair market value (pre-disaster or adjusted per program rules)

Key Advantage:

👉 *This is one of the few programs that fully removes risk—not just reduces it.*

5. Why Buyouts Matter (Big Picture)

- Eliminates **repetitive loss cycle**
- Reduces burden on:
 - FEMA disaster assistance
 - Insurance systems
 - Local emergency response
- Restores:
 - Natural floodplain storage
 - Watershed function
 - Environmental health

Return on Investment:

- Buyouts often save **multiple dollars for every \$1 spent** in avoided future damages

6. Lincoln County Case Study

- ~250 property owners expressed interest
- Initial rollout focused on **residential properties at highest risk**
- ~100 preliminary eligibility letters going out
- Active:
 - Site assessments
 - Eligibility determinations
- Upcoming:
 - Appraisals
 - Title work
 - First acquisitions

Program Approach:

- Fully voluntary
- County-managed process
- Zero-cost to participants
- Focused on long-term resiliency, not short-term fixes

7. Key Challenges

- Property owner expectations vs. program requirements
- Timing (federal processes can be slow)
- Emotional attachment to property
- Title complications / ownership issues
- Coordination between agencies

8. Keys to Success

- Strong local sponsor (local leadership matters)
- Clear communication with property owners
- Centralized management of all services
- Early coordination with NRCS
- Transparency and consistency

Critical Principle:

👉 *Trust drives participation.*

9. Rebuilding vs. Relocating

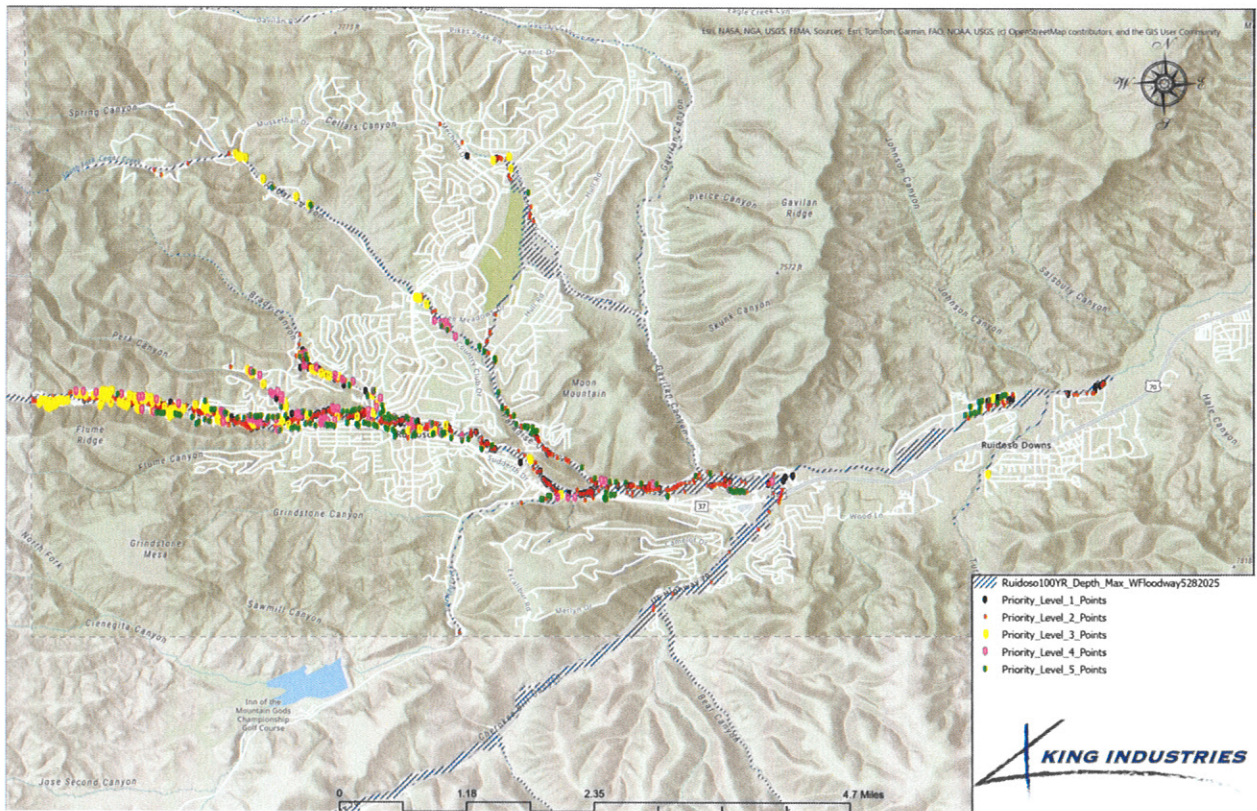
Rebuild in Place	Buyout & Relocate
Repeated risk	Risk eliminated
Ongoing costs	One-time investment
Emergency response burden	Long-term resilience
Infrastructure strain	Natural system restoration

10. Strategic Takeaways for Water Leaders

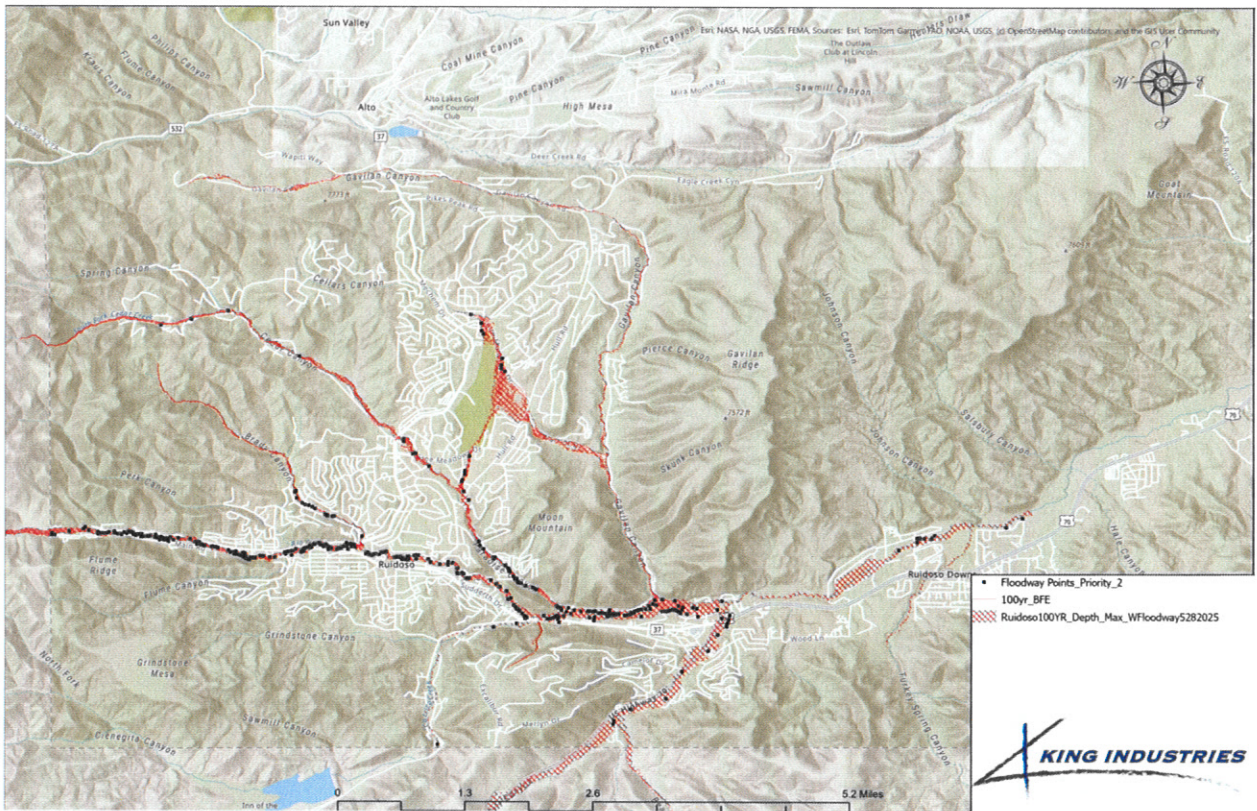
- Buyouts are **not just housing policy—they are water management policy**
- Floodplain restoration is **infrastructure**
- Proactive mitigation must be prioritized over reactive spending
- Partnerships (local + federal) are essential
- Programs like NRCS EWP-FPE are **underutilized tools with high impact**

CLOSING MESSAGE

👉 *If we are serious about watershed resilience, we must be willing to remove development from where water naturally needs to go.*



All potential identified properties, priority 1-5



All properties identified to be in floodway.