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National Drought Mitigation Center Involved in Development of Natural Hazards Map

The National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) is involved in a project with several other agencies and organizations in Canada, Mexico, and the United States to develop a map of the major natural hazards that threaten North America. Work on the project began in February 1995. Since then, there have been three working group meetings, with the most recent meeting taking place in Guadalajara, Mexico, in February 1997. Project leaders include Dr. Chris Tucker (Emergency Preparedness Canada), Dr. Joe Golden (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA]), Dr. Rosalind Helz (U.S. Geological Society [USGS]), and Dr. Mario Ordaz-Schroeder (Centro Nacional de Prevención de Desastres [CENAPRED]—National Center for Disaster Prevention).

Motivation for the project began when interest was expressed in constructing a map that would show both the disaster and vulnerability aspects of natural hazards. For example, the map would highlight the location of past earthquake disasters, yet also identify the potential risk-prone regions on the continent vulnerable to a major earthquake in the near future. Sixteen natural hazards affecting parts of North America are included in this project. These hazards include those with the highest economic impacts (floods and droughts), specific regional economic impacts (sea fog along the Canadian coasts), geological hazards (earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanos, and landslides), dramatic storms (hurricanes, tornadoes, and blizzards), and more general hazards (wildfires, lightning, cold, and heat). Besides specific elements that will be represented on the map, each hazard will have a brief description along with a discussion of past significant disasters.

The NDMC became a recent contributor to the project and is the working group leader in the project for drought. The Mexican representatives for the drought group are Fermin Garcia and Maria Teresa Vázquez Conde (CENAPRED), and Dr. David Phillips (Canadian Climate Centre) is the representative for Canada.

Most data for the project were submitted to the USGS lab in Golden, Colorado, by the end of April 1997. These will be compiled, and then a prototype map will be shown to interested sponsors to begin final production on the North American Natural Hazards Map. We will continue to provide updates on the progress of this project.

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