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County must repay money from local culvert project

March 8, 2013

JOHN PEPIN - Journal Staff Writer , The Mining Journal

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MARQUETTE - Marquette County officials are determining how much money they will have to pay the Federal Emergency Management Agency for a local culvert replacement project that ran over budget.

Marquette County Administrator Scott Erbsich gave the county board an update on the situation this week, which involved a grant-funded project to curtail flooding over a section of Marquette County Road 510.

In 2009, through a request made via the Superior Watershed Partnership, the county was awarded a FEMA Pre-Disaster Mitigation grant to replace an undersized culvert.

County officials said an unnamed tributary flowed through the culvert and regularly flooded over the road to a depth of nearly a foot, especially in the springtime.

"The project came forward through the Superior Watershed Partnership taking the grant initiative with it, it came to the (county) board," Erbsich said. "There was a need for improvements out on 510 because of some serious flooding issues which were hazards for driving."

Erbsich said the road commission decided to take on the project. The SWP and the road commission committed to in-kind services of \$40,000 for the road commission and \$11,000 for the partnership.

Erbsich said the project was approved and completed. In late November, county officials were notified by FEMA the county would be required to reimburse \$35,370 of the money received, Erbsich said.

"The reason cited was that the completed pre-disaster mitigation project exceeded the amount originally approved," Erbsich said. "Additional culvert work was performed."

The county appealed that decision to FEMA. Final cost of the project, including in-kind services matches and the extra work completed, was \$96,665. On Feb. 26, FEMA officials responded to the county's appeal.

"Marquette County was notified that expenses for the original project scope remain eligible. However, expenses for the expanded project area are ineligible," Erbsich said. "At this time, I am unable to detail just what the total reimbursement amount will be at. The road commission, with assistance from the Superior Watershed (Partnership), is currently separating project expenses."

Erbsich said once those expenses have been determined, they will be forwarded and reviewed by the state Hazard Mitigation Office for final approval.

"FEMA wants close out in 30 days. It's a tight schedule, but we're moving forward with that," Erbsich said.

Marquette County Board Chairman Gerald Corkin voiced support for the road work Tuesday.

"It was a much needed project regardless of who has to pay for it in the end," Corkin said. "It was something that needed to be done."

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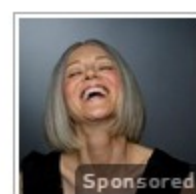
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