



Public Witness Testimony from Tony Stamas, President and CEO, Midland Business Alliance (Midland, Michigan)

Thank you Chairwoman Kaptur, Ranking Member Simpson, and subcommittee members for the opportunity to present this public witness testimony on behalf of the Midland Business Alliance (MBA). Specifically, my testimony addresses the need for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to continue serving as a critical federal partner – following last year’s major disaster declaration (DR-4547-MI) – to help mitigate longstanding flooding issues within the Tittabawassee River Watershed located in the middle of Michigan’s “mitten.”

The MBA is a voice for more than 3,000 businesses, from start-ups to *Fortune* 500 companies, in the Great Lakes Bay Region. We are working in partnership with the City of Midland, Midland County, and other local community stakeholders to urge essential federal stakeholders to work with state, local, and tribal governments, and businesses and non-profit stakeholders, in developing and supporting environment-based flood mitigation measures to reduce the impact of floods on communities, lives, and livelihoods within the Tittabawassee River Watershed.

Almost one year ago, the Midland area was the dramatic “breaking news” featured on national broadcasts – displacing the COVID-19 pandemic as the leading story for the first time in weeks. Several days of rains and flooding turned even more dire when two hydroelectric dams were breached on May 19, 2020. The Edenville Dam failed and the waters of Wixom Lake were unleashed on the Edenville community and then downstream to Sanford Lake, which



subsequently caused the Sanford Dam below it to fail. The contents of these two upstream lakes added to existing flooding, in turn devastating the village of Sanford, the city of Midland, and properties up and down the river in Midland County and beyond. Flash flood emergencies were issued, and approximately 10,000 Midland residents were evacuated.

The national-newsworthy catastrophic dam failures have obscured the fact that a significant flood event was already in progress at that time. The National Weather Service said the rainfall alone would have resulted in a “200-year flood” event. The dam failures, as the saying goes, “added insult to injury.” The flood finally crested at 35.05 feet in Midland on May 20, 2020, at more than 11 feet above flood stage. Officials have described this as a 500-year flood event.

In addition to evacuations, more than 2,500 homes were damaged or destroyed, with losses estimated at more than \$200 million. Other damages included:

- Businesses and homes near the dams were ripped off of their foundations, with many structures floating downstream or smashing into other buildings and structures.
- Buildings that did survive commonly had their lower levels and first floors full of turbulent water, mud, dead fish, and debris.
- Bridges and federal, state, and county roads were undermined and washed away.
- Schools and government buildings saw approximately \$34 million of damage.
- MidMichigan Medical Center-Midland, the county’s only hospital and a Level II trauma center, experienced power outages in several care units and the cafeteria/kitchen; sewer backups in the lower level; and flooding of campus facilities, including the EMS/ambulance facility and the urgent care operations. The hospital moved all COVID-19 patients and maternity patients to



other regional hospitals, but the majority of patients remained. Even though many employees were dealing with flooding at home, they still showed up to care for patients.

- Downtown Midland was flooded, including the Midland County Courthouse and businesses spreading out from the downtown district.
- Near downtown, The Dow Chemical Company has manufacturing facilities on the banks of the Tittabawassee River. Dow shut down operations in anticipation of flooding, before the dams failed.
- The Grace A. Dow Memorial Library, the Midland County Historical Society museum and Heritage Park, and the Midland Center for the Arts (MCFTA) were all flooded, causing extensive damage. All are still working to repair and restore facilities, contents, and history. The MCFTA is celebrating its 50th year and has been a major COVID-19 vaccination center for the Health Department of Midland County. (People are getting their shots up on center stage, literally.)
- All types of homes were lost and damaged, including some of Midland's historic and prized mid-century modern homes designed by Alden B. Dow and other noted architects.
- Five of Midland's sanitary sewer pump stations were flooded, shutting them down and threatening sewer backups across the western half of the city.

With the violence of the floodwaters and the breaching of dams, the best news was that no lives were lost. We are strong enough to recover from the rest.

Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers from the region and all over the country came to Midland County's aid in those early days, helping to feed and shelter those without homes, to start the cleanup, and to offer endless hours of support. However, with the



one-year anniversary a few days away, our community is still not whole again.

The Midland Business Alliance has been honored to partner with Three Rivers Corporation and local businesses and foundations to help with some of the rebuilding of the village of Sanford, including the recent reopening of a popular hometown restaurant, a boat sales/service/accessories business, the hardware store, and several residences. The support of rebuilding goes far beyond the MBA's efforts. Local businesses and industry, local and state government, nonprofit organizations, Midland foundations, and federal programs have all converged to help those with losses. Citizens formed the Four Lakes Task Force and are planning to rebuild the dams and restore the lakes. But the list of repair and recovery needs across the area is long and overwhelming at times.

Unfortunately, the May 2020 flooding was not an isolated event. The city of Midland receives the waters from four river systems: the Tobacco River and Tittabawassee River to the north and the Pine River and Chippewa River to the west. The waters of these four rivers and their tributaries meet at the confluence of the Tittabawassee and Chippewa in downtown Midland.

This was not the first time Midland County businesses and residents have had to overcome the devastation and millions of dollars in losses. Unforgiving rains and floods have occurred in the Midland area in 1986, 1996, 2013, and 2017 as well as 2020. These flood events have negatively impacted jobs, economic growth, property values, and tax revenues in the Midland area.



Following the May 2020 flood event, and the subsequent major disaster declaration, we have benefited greatly from the continued support of the Corps of Engineers, FEMA, USDA, NOAA, and EPA. None of our recovery efforts to date would have been possible without our federal government partners, including the remarkable efforts of Representative John Moolenaar, Senator Debbie Stabenow, Senator Gary Peters, and members of the bipartisan Michigan congressional delegation.

We are committed to finding ways to make the 2020 flood the last “big one.” We want to make this our “high water mark” – one that is never reached again. The MBA is currently working with the City of Midland, Midland County, and other local stakeholders to develop innovative, long-term solutions to lessen the frequency and severity of river flooding in Midland. We are focused on environment-based flood mitigation measures, such as the creation of wetlands, natural flood plains, and conservation easements that could slow the flow rate of rivers, creeks, and streams.

We are asking the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies to support Representative Moolenaar’s report language request to urge the Corps of Engineers to participate and coordinate as an essential federal stakeholder, with other federal partners, on developing and supporting measures to mitigate the severity of future flood events to protect Midland and the Great Lakes Bay Region from future flood events.

Thank you, Chairwoman Kaptur and Ranking Member Simpson, for this opportunity to share our story. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.