

BUSINESS

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Firms unite against Findlay flooding

FINDLAY — A coalition of large employers from several counties in the Blanchard River watershed have banded together to try to hold back the frequently flooding river.

Eight firms have pledged a total of more than \$1 million and have received a \$300,000 grant to form the **Northwest Ohio Flood Mitigation Partnership LLC**, a nonprofit to be headed by former Findlay Mayor Tony Iriti.

The partnership's goal is to speed the federal process for alleviating potential flooding hazards along waterways like the Blanchard. That process is administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and can often take a decade to complete.

In the partnership are **Cooper Tire & Rubber Co., Marathon Oil Corp., Blanchard Valley Health System, Fifth Third Bancorp, National Lime & Stone Co., Pro-Tec Coating Co., W.C. Wood Corp. Inc., and Whirlpool Corp.**

The Corps of Engineers is to begin a two-year feasibility study of the entire Blanchard River watershed later this year at a cost of \$600,000.

Last week, the Findlay-Hancock County Community Foundation awarded the partnership a three-year grant totaling \$300,000. The money will be used to pay the salaries of Mr. Iriti and an administrative assistant, a spokesman for the foundation said. Mr. Iriti could not be reached for comment.



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The Blanchard's overflow in August wreaked havoc in downtown Findlay.

Marathon Oil was particularly hard hit by the flooding in August, which left eight feet of water in the basement of its operations center in downtown Findlay, company spokesman Linda Casey said. Last fall, Marathon spokesman Angela Graves told The Blade that continued flooding in Findlay would make it difficult for its most notable local company to stay.

The nearly weeklong flooding in downtown Findlay last August cost Marathon millions of dollars in reconstruction and damage costs in addition

to lost productivity. Repairs to Marathon's Main Street headquarters lasted well into the fall, Ms. Graves said.

The river flooded again this month, although the levels were below those seen last summer. Still, downtown Findlay, Ottawa, and several other communities were affected.

Ms. Casey said that although local residents may be encouraged that large businesses in the area have stepped into the flooding fray, it would be wrong to expect a resolution quickly.

— Larry P. Vellequette