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Gov. Beshear Provides Update on Eastern Kentucky High-Ground Communities

Governor also awarded over \$8.6 million to increase access to clean water, improve Jenkins City Hall and more

EOLIA / WHITESBURG / LEBURN / HAZARD, Ky. (Feb. 27, 2024) – As part of ongoing efforts to help Eastern Kentucky rebuild after devastating floods in 2022, Gov. Andy Beshear traveled to Letcher, Knott and Perry counties today to provide an update on high-ground communities for flood-impacted Kentuckians.

The Governor also joined local officials to present over \$8.6 million in funding to benefit Letcher and Knott counties, which will go toward improving water and sewer infrastructure, modifying Jenkins City Hall, developing a recreational trail system, supporting flood recovery efforts and patching roadways.

“Right after the floods, we promised to stand with Eastern Kentucky until every home, structure and life was rebuilt,” said **Gov. Beshear**. “Through the awards we announced today and the progress being made on these high-ground communities, we are showing our Eastern Kentucky families that we are here for the long haul.”

The Cottages at Thompson Branch

Gov. Beshear visited Letcher County to provide an update on the high-ground community The Cottages at Thompson Branch. The 4-acre site has infrastructure in place, including high-speed internet, and is Build-Ready. In the coming weeks, through an innovative partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the first two homes will be delivered to the site and prepared for families to move in.

“Letcher County was hit hard by the historic flooding, and safe, affordable homes remain a critical need,” said Gov. Beshear. “Partnerships between federal, state and local officials as well as corporate and nonprofit partners are key to addressing the housing needs, putting resources to work quickly and building a strong community.”

Alternative Manufactured Housing Units (AMHUs) are ready to be delivered to the site once the concrete foundations are poured and cured, as weather permits. Next, with donations to the Team Eastern Kentucky Flood Relief Fund, exterior amenities like porches, shutters and landscaping will be added, making the homes more beautiful and resilient.

“Through FEMA’s Direct Housing Program, FEMA and the commonwealth have created an innovative approach to provide post-disaster housing, allowing flood survivors to live outside of the flood zone. This high-ground community is built with resiliency in mind, allowing survivors to begin rebuilding their lives in an area that’s safe and secure from future flooding disasters,” said **FEMA Field Coordinating Officer Craig Levy**.

“It will be a nice addition to our county when it’s finished,” said **Letcher County Judge/Executive Terry Adams**. “I hope this is the first of many high-ground housing projects of this caliber, and I look for it to be a model project for future endeavors of this kind.”

The Governor said nonprofit housing partner Homes Inc. will build eight more homes for flood survivors at The Cottages at Thompson Branch.

“This is an exciting day for us. Finding land suitable for building has been our biggest challenge, and this site will allow us to help more flood survivors looking for a place to call home,” said **Homes Inc. Executive Director Seth Long**.

The Cottages at Thompson Branch has funding from multiple sources. A grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission and Eastern Kentucky SAFE funds paid for making the clean water infrastructure permanent. The community's wastewater project has been let for bid. The Letcher County Fiscal Court donated land for the project.

For program details and information on how to become a homeowner, contact Homes Inc. at HomesIncorporated.org.

Letcher County Awards

Gov. Beshear presented over \$6 million in awards for Letcher County, including:

- A recommendation of \$1,332,703 to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) that will go toward improving sewer infrastructure in the city of Fleming-Neon;
- \$1,219,000 to the Letcher County Water & Sewer District to help bring water to approximately 221 new customers;
- A recommendation of \$1,900,000 to ARC to rehabilitate the waterline serving downtown Whitesburg;
- \$750,000 to make modifications to Jenkins City Hall that will improve accessibility for citizens and employees; and
- \$1 million to construct a 1 million gallon-per-day water treatment plant at the Letcher and Perry county line.

Chestnut Ridge and Olive Branch

The Governor provided an update on the Chestnut Ridge high-ground community in Knott County. The community will be built on more than 100 acres along Chestnut Ridge Drive and will include single-family residential lots, walking trails, outdoor recreation areas and more. Over 200 homes will be built in the area.

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) has completed plans for an access road that will extend Chestnut Ridge Road. KYTC and the Department for Local Government (DLG) will soon put out a bid for the access and neighborhood roads. This will pave the way for nonprofit home builders to have access to housing lots and start home construction for flood survivors. The project will also include water, sewer, underground power, high-speed internet and grading the neighborhood to prepare home lots. Knott County Water and Sewer will be servicing water and sewer utilities, Kentucky Power will be providing

underground electricity and the commonwealth will be putting out a contract to connect every home in the community to high-speed internet.

State officials expect to close on the housing parcel, as well as the road right-of-way, in the coming weeks. Gov. Beshear thanked Western Pocahontas for donating the right-of-way property.

Once the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development approves the application, contractors will start breaking ground to give flood survivors access to the neighborhood.

The state is also working on acquiring an access road and rights of way for the Olive Branch high ground community in Knott County that will provide 132 homes on 75 acres of land donated by Shawn and Tammy Adams. This will be a multi-generational and family-friendly development featuring senior apartments as well as a park and recreation space. Work to build roads and bring utilities to the site is expected to start this summer.

Knott County Awards

The Governor also presented nearly \$2.5 million in awards for Knott County, including:

- \$250,000 for First Frontier Appalachian Trails to help develop a recreational trail system throughout an 18-county region;
- \$138,492 to help repair the Artisan Center of Kentucky Inc. in Hindman, which was damaged by floods;
- A recommendation of \$2,008,450 to ARC for the Knott County Water and Sewer District to extend waterline services to Quicksand and Saltlick Creek; and
- \$50,000 to Knott County to help repair almost 3 miles along Wolfpen Creek Road.

Skyview

Gov. Beshear joined local officials in Hazard to celebrate the upcoming start of Phase 1 construction to widen and improve an existing portion of Skyview Lane. The road will give housing contractors better access to build the new Skyview high-ground community and will later be paved for future residents.

Earlier this month, Gov. Beshear announced the state had acquired 50 acres of donated land from the Ison family to build 100 new single-family homes for flood survivors. KeeTech Construction Horizontal will start construction in the coming days to reconstruct a little more

than a half mile of the existing gravel road, establish good drainage and build it up with new gravel. Work will be completed this spring. Significant water and sanitary sewer work will be completed as part of the high-ground project. State officials recently approved water plans, and approved sewer plans will soon follow.

“Team Kentucky is building pathways to a promising future for Eastern Kentuckians impacted by the floods,” said Gov. Beshear. “This road project will help contractors access the construction site and get residents one step closer to rebuilding their homes and lives.”

“This is an amazing day in Perry County,” said **Perry County Judge/Executive Scott Alexander**. “We want to give a big thank you to the Governor and our state partners. They told us from day one they would stay with us and see us through the recovery from the July 2022 flood disaster. This project will bring new opportunities for families that chose to move out of the floodplain.”

“This project will provide flood survivors with housing constructed to a better standard than prior to the flood,” said **Hazard Mayor Donald “Happy” Mobelini**. “I want to thank Gov. Beshear for his vision of building for the future. These homes will be built on higher ground, with better energy efficiency and in good communities with good facilities.”

Governor Visits Arlie Boggs Elementary School

Earlier in the day, the Governor visited Arlie Boggs Elementary School in Eolia to meet with students who were involved in a school bus crash in January and to recognize the health care heroes and first responders who cared for the students and bus driver following the crash.

“Today at Arlie Boggs we celebrated the strength and resilience of our students, educators, health care heroes and first responders,” said Gov. Beshear. “I am thankful to recognize these brave students and the heroes who were there when we needed them most. Team Kentucky is grateful for their work.”

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