



A vision for smart floodplain management

With funding from an NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant, Willamette Partnership is helping communities build an integrated approach to floodplain management in Oregon.

Floodplains are the nexus between water and land. That point of interaction gives them a unique and vital economic and ecological role. Healthy, resilient communities require functioning floodplains to reduce property damage from floods, recharge groundwater, support fish and wildlife habitat, clean water, and provide open spaces to play.

But we have known since the 1940s that the way we manage floodplains is often inconsistent with providing these functions. Communities and their leaders and planners want to get floodplain management right, but it's not easy. We need a new vision for smart floodplain management, built on strategies and tools that have been shown to reduce risk to communities and support natural systems.

Smart floodplain management is based on the following strategies (adapted from White, 1942 and ASFP Foundation, 2007):

- Land use: Use comprehensive planning to limit new development in very high-risk areas and voluntary buy-outs to allow people to frequently flooded areas when they are ready. Allow no net unmitigated adverse impact to flood capacity, other properties, and natural floodplain functions.
- Watershed restoration: Restore the natural functions of floodplains as possible, from green infrastructure in urban areas to larger-scale restoration efforts in appropriate areas.

- Building: Use Low Impact Development standards for development in and around floodplains, and remove policy and insurance incentives for land elevation.
- Disaster relief: Develop holistic community preparedness and post-disaster plans.
- Structural solutions: Use levee setbacks and renewals to help increase community resilience to floods. Allow new protection structures only as a last resort and only for defense of existing development.
- Engagement: Build community awareness of the importance of floodplains and a realistic understanding of the risks associated with building and living in floodplains.

Smart floodplain management will require improved tools for:

- Mapping flood hazard areas and areas of future risk;
- Planning, including decision support tools that quantify natural functions in a way that can be used in benefit cost analysis, prioritization decisions, and comprehensive planning; and
- Policies and programs that limit new development in high risk areas, incentivize buyouts and restoration, and provide an integrated path for communities to meet their regulatory requirements.

For more information about this project, contact:

Nicole Maness
Willamette Partnership
E: maness@willamettepartnership.org
T: 503.946.8350