

# THE NEED FOR FLOODPLAIN PROTECTION



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## WHAT ARE FLOODPLAINS

Floodplains are low-lying areas adjacent to rivers and water bodies. These are areas that are rich in biodiversity, provide increased flood storage capacity and serve as riparian buffers that trap sediments and other pollutants before they reach water bodies, enhancing water quality. Floodplains serve as critical habitat for many of Oregon's endangered anadromous fish species.

## FLOODPLAIN ENCROACHMENT

Floodplain encroachment describes the process by which natural floodplains are replaced by man-made material and structures. In 2016, NOAA estimated that 85% of the Willamette River's historic floodplain had been eliminated. Similarly, at least 50% of the Columbia River floodplain has been developed, and Tillamook Bay has lost 90%. (NOAA, Oregon Floodplains: Working to Conserve Pacific Salmon & Local Communities, 2016). When floodplains are developed, communities permanently lose the ecosystem services of floodplains, including flood storage capacity.

## COST OF FLOODING

Flooding continues to be one of the most ecologically, economically, and socially costly disasters. Flooding causes more damage than any other severe weather event, resulting in an average of \$8.2 billion in losses each year. (FEMA, *Flood Impacts*, available at <https://community.fema.gov/ProtectiveActions/s/article/Flood-Impact>). Flooding damages critical infrastructure, personal property, and threatens human life.

## REFORMS TO THE NFIP

### NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE'S OPINION:

To come into compliance with the Endangered Species Act, FEMA must:

- Update mapping protocols to more accurately identify special flood hazard areas
- Revise management criteria to ensure development is either avoided or mitigated in floodplains
- Implement interim measures, including mitigation and offset requirements, to support floodplain function while other reforms go into effect

## SOME BENEFITS OF FLOODPLAIN PROTECTION

### PROTECTION OF ICONIC SPECIES

Enacting NMFS's Recommendations is necessary to ensure that the NFIP does not continue to jeopardize the continued existence of 17 listed species, including Oregon's iconic salmon and steelhead species, as well as the Southern Resident orca.

### DECREASED EXPOSURE TO FLOODING EVENTS

Floodplain protection reduces the exposure of human life and property to the hazards of flooding, saving lives, property, and money.

### INCREASED COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Intact floodplains bolster a community's ability to withstand the impacts of flooding events, as waterways are better suited to endure rapid influxes of water.