Floodplain Management — Environment First Fund

Purpose and History

In 1949, the Iowa General Assembly created the Iowa Natural Resources Council as part of an effort to stem flood damages after a number of devastating flood events in the 1940s. The Council's power over floodplain activities, originally advisory, was expanded in 1957 and 1965 to establish regulatory authority. After a number of State reorganizations, floodplain regulatory authority now resides with the Floodplain Management Program of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The Program's goal is the protection of life and property from damage by flood. To ensure the continued success of the Program and address identified needs, in 2009 the General Assembly created a dedicated Program appropriation. The DNR found that many of the State's existing floodplain maps lacked sufficient accuracy, and that most provided information for only 100-year frequency (1.0% annual chance) flood events. Additionally, the unincorporated areas of nearly one-third of Iowa counties were unmapped.

Functions

The Floodplain Management Program addresses the following functions:

- Stream Gages: A portion of this appropriation supports a network of stream gages. The Floodplain Management Program has entered into an agreement with the U.S. Geological Survey for the continued support, operation, and maintenance of 16 stream gaging stations.
- Dam Safety Program: Appropriated funds support the staffing and administration of dam construction permitting and inspections. Permits may be required to draw down water levels or to construct, modify, or remove dams. The DNR maintains information on all of Iowa's approximately 3,800 dams. The Dam Safety Program assists in the creation of Emergency Action Plans for all dams where a failure could threaten human life. Dam safety inspectors are also funded through this appropriation.
- Floodplain Mapping: A portion of the appropriation funds the administration of the DNR's Floodplain Mapping project being conducted with the Iowa Flood Center. The project is developing new, comprehensive, accurate floodplain maps for all cities and counties. Initial maps will be available to individuals and local governments to determine flooding risk. Initial maps cannot be used as Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), but the DNR will work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to develop FIRMs from the Floodplain Mapping project.
- Flood Insurance Technical Assistance: This program encourages and facilitates community enrollment in flood insurance programs. Appropriated funds pay the administrative expenses related to this program. Technical assistance is provided to help communities comply with the National Flood Insurance Program.

More Information

Department of Natural Resources: iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection/Land-Quality/Flood-Plain-Management
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- Floodplain Project Review and Assistance: The DNR regulates construction on all floodplains and floodways. Prior to construction, the DNR determines if a floodplain development permit is required. Permits may be required by the DNR (for floodplain or sovereign lands) or by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This appropriation funds the administration of the floodplain permitting section that provides technical assistance to applicants and potential applicants.

Funding — Environment First Fund

Beginning in FY 2010, the Floodplain Management Program has received a total of $2.0 million from the Environment First Fund. Over the past 10 years, funding has come from various sources, including the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund, the General Fund, and the Environment First Fund. The average total appropriation over the past 10 years has been $1.9 million.

Related Statutes and Administrative Rules

Iowa Code chapter 455B

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