



# FLOOD HAZARDS IN LANE COUNTY

**Important Safety information, please read!**

Lane County Public Works  
Land Management Division, Planning  
3050 North Delta Highway  
Eugene, OR 97408-1636

**Planner On Duty:** (541) 682-3577  
**Web:** [www.LaneCountyOR.gov/Floodplaininformation](http://www.LaneCountyOR.gov/Floodplaininformation)

## Dear Resident:

You are receiving this letter because our records show that you own property in Lane County that is likely located in the floodplain. In an effort to raise awareness and educate citizens about living safely in the floodplain, Lane County is working to improve accessibility to flood hazard-related information. Should you have questions or want additional information, a variety of contact information has been provided within this document.

**NOTICE:** Floodplain freeboard elevation requirements adopted by Ordinance 20-07 on October 12, 2021, took effect on September 7, 2023 pursuant to Lane Code Chapter 16.244(5)(xii). Applications for development received after that date for all new construction, substantial improvements to existing structures, and certain utilities are now required to have the lowest floor elevated two (2) feet above the Base Flood Elevation Level, or three (3) feet above highest adjacent grade where Base Flood Elevation data is not available.

## Overview

Several of Lane County's water bodies are susceptible to annual flooding, which poses a threat to both life and personal property. Our flood prone rivers include the Willamette (Main Stem, Middle and Coast Forks), McKenzie (including the South Fork), Siuslaw (including the North Fork), Row River and Lake Creek. Smaller flood prone tributaries include the Mohawk, Long Tom, Fall Creek, Little Fall Creek, Camp Creek, Horse Creek, Coyote Creek, Mosby Creek,

Poodle Creek, Siltcoos River and Tenmile River.

Lane County has nearly 140,000 acres of land in the floodplain. This is equivalent to well over 200 square miles! Over 11,000 individual parcels are partially or entirely located within the floodplain. Statewide, Lane County has more river miles of floodplain than any other county. Ongoing development along these rivers displaces natural areas that have historically functioned to store excess water during flood events.

## Recent & Historic Flooding Events

While some seasonal flood-related damage occurs nearly every year, the flooding events of April 2019, January 2012, and in February of 1996 represent more recent significant flooding. During these storm events, flooding was particularly severe along the Siuslaw and Mohawk Rivers and many road closures were in effect throughout Lane County. In April 2019 and January 2012, prolonged precipitation in a short amount of time caused many local rivers and creeks to rise to "100 year flood" levels, also termed the 1% chance flood. During floods in 1996, prolonged precipitation accompanied by an early snowmelt, caused flooding throughout Lane County. Damages during the 2012 and 1996 storm events were severe enough for Lane County to be included in Presidential Disaster Declarations for the State of Oregon.

Early records indicate that the Southern Willamette Valley experienced major flooding in 1850-51, 1861, 1881 and 1890.

These floods are estimated to have all exceeded the so-called “100-year flood” Base Flood level, or 1% chance flood level.

## Causes of Flooding in Lane County

Flooding occurs when climate, geology, and hydrology interact to create conditions where water bodies flow outside of their usual course and spill beyond their banks. These factors are augmented by ongoing development to create the potential for chronic seasonal flooding. Lane County spans a wide range of climatic and geologic regions from the Pacific coast to the high Cascades. Snowmelt from the central Cascades can provide a year-round water source, and can contribute significantly to flooding. Flooding is most common from October to April, when storms bring intense rainfall.

The Army Corps of Engineers operates 13 multi-purpose dams in the Willamette Valley, nine of which are situated in Lane County. The primary purpose of these dams is flood control. Reservoirs behind the dams are drained every fall to prepare for winter and spring rains. Therefore, most flooding in Lane County occurs on tributaries that do not feed these reservoirs or along rivers with no flood control devices, such as the Siuslaw and Mohawk. It is important to recognize that even if you live downstream of a dam, flooding is possible. During prolonged and intense flood events, reservoirs do fill up. In these situations, the Army Corps must release flood waters from the reservoirs.

## Lane County’s Flood Program

Lane County is a participating member of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). To participate in the NFIP, Lane County is required to adopt and enforce floodplain management ordinances aimed at reducing future flood damage to new construction within the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA). The rural Lane County Floodplain code provisions can be reviewed at: [www.LaneCountyOR.gov/LaneCodeCh16Floodplain](http://www.LaneCountyOR.gov/LaneCodeCh16Floodplain).

The County must manage land within the SFHA in accordance with standards set by

the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This is handled by the Land Management Division. Lane County is a participating member of the FEMA Community Rating System (CRS). The CRS program rewards communities for taking proactive steps to reduce the potential impacts of flooding. This mailing is one example of a flood reduction activity which Lane County undertakes. These types of actions help qualify flood insurance policy holders to receive discounted flood insurance rates. Lane County currently has a CRS rating of 6, giving residents a 20% discount on flood insurance.

## Flood Insurance

Due to the fact that Lane County participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), property owners within our community are able to purchase flood insurance at reasonably discounted rates. Within the NFIP, flood insurance coverage up to \$250,000 is available for single family residences, with an additional \$100,000 to help cover contents and belongings. It is important to note that standard homeowner’s insurance does not cover flood damages, and that Federal financial assistance requires the purchase of flood insurance for buildings within the floodplain. Also, after the initial purchase of an NFIP flood policy there is a mandatory 30-day waiting period before the policy becomes effective. Therefore, it is vital to purchase insurance before the onset of the rainy season to ensure coverage. Research shows that over 25% of all NFIP claims are filed for properties outside the mapped floodplain. For additional information on flood insurance visit: [www.floodsmart.gov](http://www.floodsmart.gov).

## Floodplain Guidelines & Regulations

The following section includes suggestions and information to aid in understanding how floodplains function, and how the County regulates the floodplain in order to protect lives and property.

***Do not dump or throw anything into ditches or streams:*** Trash and vegetation dumped into a stream degrades water quality

and reduces the capacity of the stream to carry flood waters. A plugged channel cannot carry water, and when it rains, the excess water must go somewhere. Every piece of trash placed in a stream contributes to flooding. Lane County and the State of Oregon both enforce regulations that prohibit the illegal dumping of materials into ditches, streams or other drainage ways. Please report any observed dumping into road drainage ways, ditches or culverts to the Lane County Nuisance Abatement Program at (541) 682-4533. The Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL) has jurisdiction over the "waters of the State." Contact DSL to report observed dumping in wetlands at (503) 986-5200. To report all other illegal dumping, contact the Lane County Land Management Division - Code Compliance Program at (541) 682-3724.

***Leave natural debris, such as stumps fallen trees and boulders in the stream.***

DO NOT remove vegetation that is actively growing and near the banks of a water body. Streamside vegetation is tightly controlled by local, state, and federal regulations. Before undertaking any removal of streamside vegetation, contact the Lane County Planning Department at (541) 682-3577 and the Department of State Lands at (503) 986-5200. Please report any clearing of trees/vegetation near water bodies to the Lane County Land Management Division - Code Compliance Program at (541) 682-3724.

***Obtain floodplain development permits and/or building permits, if required:***

To minimize damage to structures during flood events, the County regulates all development within the mapped floodplain. These standards apply to new construction and to substantial improvements of existing structures. The County defines a "substantial improvement" as any improvement to a structure, permitted within the last 5 years, the cost of which equals or exceeds 50% of the market value of the structure. New construction must be anchored, built with flood-resistant materials, elevated above the elevation of the 100-year (1% chance) flood, with proper flood openings. Additionally, most other types of projects within the

floodplain also require a permit, such as grading, cut and fill, and installation of riprap and other bank stabilization techniques. Contact the Lane County Planning Department at (541) 682-3577 prior to undertaking any activity within the floodplain.

***Recognize the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains to help reduce flooding:***

Floodplains are a natural component of the environment. Floodplain areas are scenic, highly valued as wildlife habitat, and often very suitable for farming. Poorly planned development in floodplains can lead to streambank erosion, loss of valuable property, the degradation of habitat, increased risk of flooding to downstream properties, and decreased water quality. Whenever possible, residents are strongly encouraged to build outside of the floodplain.

***Reduce risk of damage to homes:*** Some methods for reducing or eliminating the risk of flooding include elevation of the home, relocating the home to higher ground, constructing floodwalls or berms, flood-proofing, and protecting/elevating utilities. For further information, contact the Planning Department at (541) 682-3577 and FEMA, Region X at (425) 487-4600.

Homes that are not constructed to flood standards can be protected during emergencies by the installation of sandbags. However, it is more difficult to start emergency work after the storm has arrived. It is recommended that you begin preparations ahead of time. Water and debris control aids (such as sandbags, sand, lumber, plastic tarps and plywood) are inexpensive when compared to the protection received, and can be installed with household tools. For more detailed information, visit the Lane County Emergency Management website at: [www.LaneCountyOR.gov/Prepare](http://www.LaneCountyOR.gov/Prepare). In case of an emergency, call 911.

***County Floodplain Services:*** The County can provide information on: (1) if a property is located within the SFHA as shown on the current Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM); (2) additional flood insurance data for a site, such as the FIRM zone and base flood elevation (BFE) or flood depth data where

available; (3) flood insurance purchase requirements; and (4) additional flood information, such as problems not shown on the FIRM, special flood related hazards, historical flood information, and natural floodplain functions. Floodplain permit records on file at the County are available via the online property records website at: <http://apps.lanecounty.org/LMDPro/>.

Contact the Lane County Planning Department at (541) 682-3577 to learn more about these services.

### **County Stormwater Management:**

Stormwater is the runoff from rainfall and snowmelt. In undeveloped areas like forests and meadows, much of it soaks into the ground. When the soil is holding as much moisture as it can possibly absorb, surface runoff occurs. Vegetation helps to slow surface runoff. However, in urban areas, buildings and other impervious surfaces such as parking lots or sidewalks do not allow water to soak into the ground, which results in increased amounts of runoff, faster flow, even flooding. Along the way, runoff can pick up pollutants such as fertilizers and pesticides from yards, motor oil from leaking cars, pet waste, and dirt from construction sites. This can pollute waterways, which harms aquatic life and threatens downstream drinking water intakes. As required by DEQ and EPA, Lane County is working to improve water quality and minimize flooding. To learn more, visit: [www.LaneCountyOR.gov/stormwater](http://www.LaneCountyOR.gov/stormwater).

### **Flood Safety Information and Tips**

Lane County residents can sign up to receive text message alerts about floods and other hazards at: [www.LaneCountyOR.gov/EmergencyAlerts](http://www.LaneCountyOR.gov/EmergencyAlerts). The County's Flood Information website also has links to river level data and to the National Weather Service at: [www.LaneCountyOR.gov/Floodplaininformation](http://www.LaneCountyOR.gov/Floodplaininformation). Lane County has a Storm Road Tracker listing road closures at:

<http://lcmaps.lanecounty.org/stormroadtracker/index.html>.

### **Additional Safety Information:**

- 1. Prepare an evacuation plan:** Before the floodwaters hit, develop an evacuation plan among all members of a household that includes a meeting place outside of the house, as well as an escape route out of the floodplain. For more info, visit [www.LaneCountyOR.gov/Evacuation](http://www.LaneCountyOR.gov/Evacuation).
- 2. Do not walk or drive through flowing water: TURN AROUND, DON'T DROWN:** Drowning is the number one cause of flood deaths, with the many drownings occurring in cars. Water currents can be deceptive; six inches of moving water can knock you off your feet. If you walk in standing water, use a pole or stick to ensure that the ground is still there. Do not drive around road barriers; the road or bridge may be washed out.
- 3. Stay away from power lines and electrical wires:** The number two flood killer after drowning is electrocution. Report downed power lines to your local utility company or to the County Emergency Management Office.
- 4. Shut off gas and electricity and move valuable contents upstairs:** Be prepared in advance with a detailed checklist, because notifications of an approaching flood may provide little time for preparation prior to evacuation.
- 5. Look before you step:** After a flood, the ground both inside and outside of structures can be covered with hazardous and dangerous debris.
- 6. Be alert for gas leaks:** Use a flashlight to inspect for damage and ensure gas has been turned off and the area has been ventilated.
- 7. Post-fire flood risks:** Increased risks of flood hazards and mud flows may exist within a fire perimeter and downstream of burned areas years after a fire. Residents in these areas may want to consider purchasing flood insurance.

*Thank you for taking the time to read this important information.*

#### **Additional Agency Contacts**

**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**  
Phone: (425) 487-4600  
Web: <https://www.fema.gov>

**Lane County Emergency Management**  
Phone: (541) 682-6744    Emergency: 911  
Web: [www.LaneCountyOR.gov/Prepare](http://www.LaneCountyOR.gov/Prepare)