



**Federal Emergency  
Management Agency**



**Assistant Secretary of the Army  
(Civil Works)**

TO: Honorable Nancy Sutley  
Chair, Council on Environmental Quality

SUBJECT: Guidance on "Unwise Use of Floodplains"

Per the request of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and on behalf of the Federal Interagency Floodplain Management Task Force (FIFM-TF), we submit the attached document, *Guidance on "Unwise Use of Floodplains."* The document is intended to help Federal agencies avoid the unwise use of floodplains and reflects the perspectives of the various Federal agencies on the Task Force. It is not intended to supersede the missions, legislative requirements, or policies of any agency.

We believe that this guidance may be of use in several instances, including in the ongoing effort to revise the *Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies*, dated March 10, 1983, in the development of the corresponding individual agency guidance, and future activities where a consolidated Federal perspective may add value. We appreciate this opportunity to advance the objective of avoiding the unwise use of floodplains.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

U.S. Department of the Army

  
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David L. Miller  
Administrator, Federal Insurance and  
Mitigation Administration  
Co-Chair, FIFM-TF

  
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Jo-Ellen Darcy  
Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)  
Co-Chair, FIFM-TF

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Date: MAR 20 2012

# Federal Interagency Floodplain Management Task Force

## Guidance on “Unwise Use of Floodplains”

March 9, 2012

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“Unwise use” refers to actions that unnecessarily increase or transfer flood risks that can result in adverse impacts to human health, safety, welfare, property, natural resources, or functions of floodplains.<sup>1</sup>

Regulations, programs, policies, or practices that could be considered unwise use of the floodplain include, but are not limited to, actions that:

- are inconsistent with the provisions of the Floodplain Management Executive Order (E.O. 11988) and associated federal guidance;
- unnecessarily increase or transfer flood risk geographically, governmentally, socioeconomically, or generationally;
- fail to consider a systems approach (e.g., integrated water resource management, ecosystem-based management, or context-sensitive solutions);
- disproportionately affect minority, low-income, or vulnerable populations; or
- fail to consider relevant current, future, and potential economic, environmental, and social risks, costs, impacts, and benefits.

The Task Force recommends this guidance for use when evaluating potential activities impacting a floodplain. This guidance does not override or supersede the missions, legislative requirements, or policies of any of the Task Force member agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Floodplains include low-lying areas adjacent to and the water bodies of streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries, and coastal zones that are inundated or may become inundated as a result of changing conditions.