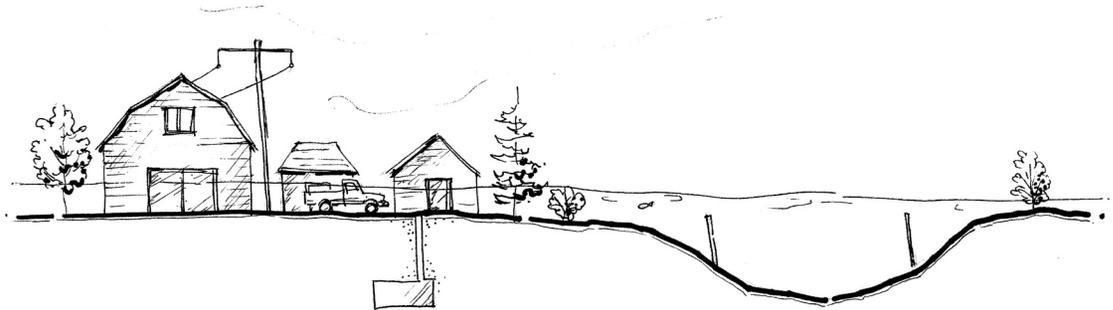


floodplains

A floodplain is a low-lying area adjacent to a river that is made-up primarily of river sediment and is subject to flooding. Flooding can be fast or slow, but usually develops over a period of days. Development often occurs in the floodplain because of the rich, fertile soils that occur there. Some of the most desirable agricultural lands in the United States are in floodplains. In the past, flooding was not as catastrophic as it is today because there was a smaller population living in the floodplain and runoff was kept in check by vegetation. As the population in floodplains has increased, so has the damage caused by flooding (Glimer 1995).

Every year, billions of dollars are spent across the United States to clean up damage caused by flooding. Much of this damage occurs in floodplains. Damage can range from water inundating a basement, to the complete loss of a structure. Ecological problems are also associated with flooding. Sewers and septic systems can rupture or overflow during a flood event, causing contamination of lakes, streams and groundwater. Soil erosion is also prevalent as the flood waters recede because of the lack of vegetation in the developed floodplain.

Proper planning can help communities avoid the damage, devastation and costs associated with flooding. A comprehensive plan that relates that use of the land to the land's hazards is important. Hazardous areas such as floodplains may be reserved as parks, greenways, or other open spaces. Zoning ordinances give teeth to a land use plan and can be used to restrict development in floodplains.



Ecological and structural damage is possible when development occurs in the floodplain. Loss of property and life are probable as well when a flood event occurs.

references and further reading:

The Association of State Floodplain Managers. Floodplain Information. 3 Dec. 2004. <<http://www.floods.org>>.

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