

ACTION PLAN NEEDED TO UPDATE FLOODPLAIN MAPPING (2014)

Floodplain maps around the province are outdated, which means communities are unable to make reliable decisions about flood management, community growth and development.

Background

Flooding poses catastrophic risks to BC's economic vitality, infrastructure, environment, safety, property owners and communities. While this is a complex issue, many stakeholders are concerned that, due to changes in flood risk over time, existing floodplain maps are outdated and provide an unreliable basis for decisions regarding flood management. There are also changes to flood vulnerability over time through development and growth in floodplains, leading to more extensive and severe consequences when a flood occurs.

A provincial mapping program began in 1974, and was accelerated by the 1987 Canada-BC Floodplain Mapping Agreement. This program ended when Provincial legislative changes in 2003-2004 shifted more responsibilities for flood hazard management to local governments (e.g., Ministry of Environment used to approve subdivisions or floodplain bylaws; now rests with local government approving officers, or with the Ministry of Transportation in the case of regional district electoral areas). Unfortunately, many local governments lack the resources and expertise required for effective flood management.

Several floodplain maps have been created since 2003 at the initiative of local governments, but many more communities lack current maps. The BC Ministry of Environment website includes links to 87 existing floodplain maps in BC. Of those, 69% are 20-25 years old, and the remaining maps are 14-19 years old—despite the recommendation of experts that floodplain maps should be updated every ten years.

A March 2013 stakeholder workshop, convened by the British Columbia Real Estate Association, resulted in the Floodplain Maps Action Plan, which identifies three main obstacles local governments face when updating floodplain maps: financial, political and technical. The Action Plan also proposes 21 specific actions by the private sector and all levels of government to overcome these obstacles.

Planning ahead to mitigate flood damage is less expensive than responding to emergencies. The southern Alberta flood that occurred in June 2013 resulted in insured property damage estimated at \$1.7 billion—the most costly natural disaster in Canadian history. The Alberta government estimates recovery cost at \$6 billion, including business support programs and compensation for homeowners moved from floodways.

The Alberta disaster can serve as a wakeup call for British Columbia. A major flood in British Columbia has the potential to not only destroy private homes but provide economic hardship to British Columbian businesses through damage to buildings, loss of equipment, the cost of start up and loss of revenue due to down time. An investment in floodplain maps now, in a comprehensive and coordinated way, will help BC communities make rational and cost-effective decisions about flood management practices, infrastructure and development. Such an investment will also save British Columbians some of the significant losses and upheaval that result from flood events.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government along with Stakeholders:

1. create a province-wide plan to complete floodplain mapping in BC that includes updating the mapping every 10 years;
2. develop, and update every five years, guidelines and specifications to reflect current floodplain mapping technologies and realities, improve consistency, build technical capacity to support utilization of a broader suite of technical tools (e.g., floodplain mapping, scenario analysis, risk assessment, etc.) and stress the need to integrate climate change into planning;
3. clarify liability and access to emergency funds, with respect to local governments and residents, in designated floodplains; and
4. create a task force to determine if there is a need for a provincial policy around limiting building on designated floodplains.

Submitted by the British Columbia Real Estate Association