

FLOODING AND YOUR COMMUNITY

VERMONT IS DEFINED by its natural landscape – the Green Mountains, the Connecticut River, Lake Champlain. These natural features are critical to both our identity and our economy. 7,100 miles of rivers and streams are found within the state, watercourses that were critical for travel and commerce when the region was settled by English and French colonists in the 18th century, as well as for the Abenaki communities that pre-date colonization. Our settlement patterns along rivers grew out of this history, and today many homes, businesses, and roads are at risk of flood damage, as Tropical Storm Irene made devastatingly clear.

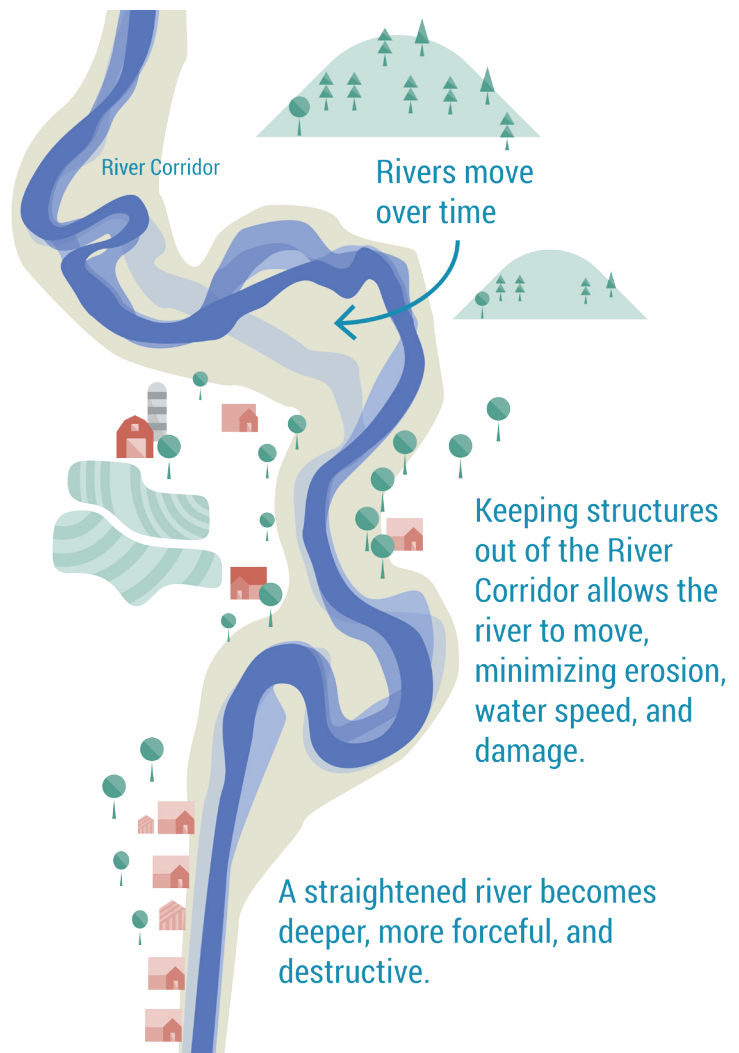
No town is immune. Between 1999 and 2013, 96% of Vermont towns requested assistance 531 times to repair roads, bridges, and buildings that floodwaters damaged. That added up to over \$260 million or \$19 million each year. And that doesn't include private property damage. As our climate changes, these numbers will likely get worse, unless we build a better relationship with our rivers and streams.

We need to make room for rivers, allowing them to overflow their banks when full and move within their River Corridor, finding the slowest way down the valley on a natural meander path. Controlling their path and reinforcing banks often leads to more powerful water and serious problems downstream. The *Making Room for Rivers* training toolkit (floodtraining.vermont.gov) includes tangible steps your community can take to improve river management and flood resilience. As town officials, it is your responsibility to make sure your community is safe and your assets are protected in a way that doesn't put others at risk. To do so, you'll need to go beyond the minimum regulatory standards. The future of your community, as well as communities upstream and downstream, depends on local planning to have "no adverse impact."

River Corridors



Rivers move over time. They erode soil from a bank here and deposit it there. The River Corridor is the land area adjacent to a river or stream in which the water may eventually move. This area is determined using river science and mapping. It also includes room for a buffer of vegetation to keep banks strong and a margin of safety for nearby structures. See all river corridors on the atlas (bit.ly/floodatlas).



No Adverse Impact



This is the most important floodplain management principle. The actions of one property owner should not adversely impact the rights of other property owners. Examples of adverse impacts include increased flooding, erosion, sedimentation, and cost of public services as well as degradation of water quality. No adverse impact is not anti-development, but rather a community-based process to determine appropriate development and mitigation strategies.

Communities across the state are updating their plans and bylaws to proactively protect and restore River Corridors and floodplains, sometimes called the Special Flood Hazard Area. They're committed to not making the problem worse. Some towns are even taking steps to remove risks. We know that this work isn't easy. Town officials often face competing demands:

- Protecting what has already been built near a river while also ensuring that efforts does not make roads, bridges, businesses, and families downstream at greater risk.
- Following smart growth goals for compact development while also directing such development outside of a River Corridor or floodplain.
- Weighing the right of someone to develop their land if that development could increase risk for others.

The Rivers Program of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation is here to help you navigate these challenges. You can visit the Flood Ready Atlas (bit.ly/floodatlas) to learn more about flood risks and River Corridors in your community and the Flood Ready site (bit.ly/floodreadyvt) for extensive information about these topics. You can also contact your Regional Floodplain Manager (bit.ly/flood-manager) to answer questions and talk about opportunities for your community.

While this work can be daunting, we encourage you to boldly envision a future in which rivers have room to move and your community is safe and resilient. As Vermonters prepare for more frequent and intense storms as a result of climate change, simply meeting the minimum regulatory standards of floodplain management is not good enough anymore. It's time to help your community safely weather the next storm.

Special Flood Hazard Area



Also referred to as floodplains, these areas are at high risk of flooding. There is at least a 1 in 4 chance of flooding during a 30-year mortgage. Over 12,000 Vermont structures are located in the SFHA.



Get Help

Your Regional Floodplain Manager is here for you. We want to help you ensure that all development in or near River Corridors and floodplains has **no adverse impact** on the rest of your community. If you have any questions about how to evaluate something, [contact us](#).

