



Common Myth:

Flooding is Bad

Actually, flooding is a natural process which helps to maintain the health of a stream or river. Just as fire is essential in a forest or prairie, flooding is essential to the river ecosystem. Areas adjacent to the stream that are occasionally inundated by floodwaters are called *floodplains*. These areas serve a variety of functions including: temporarily storing water, helping to dissipate energy, filtering nutrients, allowing for infiltration and providing important habitat for wildlife.

Runoff from rain water or snow melt makes its way to streams via storm sewers, ditches, and overland flow. As more and more water is added to this system, the stream eventually spills over and floods its banks. These floodplains absorb and store flood waters, reducing velocity and allowing for the slow release of water to the stream. They also improve water quality as vegetation within the floodplain filters sediments and other pollutants. Vegetation also helps to anchor the river banks, minimizing erosion and providing shade to reduce water temperatures. These areas also provide fish and wildlife the places they need to feed and reproduce.

Human activity often leads to flood damage. When people use the flood-prone areas along rivers and streams, problems can occur. Homes, businesses and other activities get in the way of the natural overflow of the watercourse. Sooner or later they will be damaged or destroyed. In addition, their buildings, pavement, landscaping, roads, etc. take up space in the normal floodplain that is needed to carry extra water during a flood. This displaces or forces the floodwater to move farther away from the natural waterway, flooding more land. It also can increase the velocity and depth of the water, resulting in stronger forces and causing extensive damage.

As land is developed, floodplain encroachment occurs more and more frequently, resulting in cumulative impacts to downstream areas. Often we hear of the destruction and loss of life due to flood waters – these losses are tragic but can be avoided if we setback from the stream and let it naturally “balance” all that we give it!

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