Flood History and Hazards

(Continued from Page 2)

Repairs are still underway for the damage from the May 15, 2011 flood. Temporary repairs have been made to Manastash Road while the County awaits federal funding for permanent repairs. Hanson Road remains closed also awaiting federal funds. Cooke Canyon Road has been repaired and is open to the public.

In 1981 Kittitas County began regulating the floodplains as part of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). With the County’s participation in the NFIP, landowners are able to purchase flood insurance. Without flood insurance, it is almost impossible to get a mortgage for property within the floodplain.

Floodplain boundaries are illustrated on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM). The FIRMs in Kittitas County were drawn by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and adopted by Kittitas County in 1981. Even though the landscape has dramatically changed since 1981, if you own property within the floodplain there are requirements that must be followed. The NFIP regulates all development within the regulatory floodplain and the County enforces these regulations through KCC 14.08. FEMA is currently in the process of re-drawing the county’s FIRMs.

Flood Protection & Prevention

(Continued from Page 3)

Floodplains are vital to the health of our rivers and streams. When floodplains are preserved in their natural state they provide benefits to our river and stream systems, provide natural flood control by providing storage areas for floodwaters, filter nutrients and impurities from roof and re-channel aquifers by promoting infiltration. The sediments deposited within them create a rich agricultural environment. Floodplains also provide habitat for waterfowl, fish and wildlife and also provide scenic and recreational opportunities.

During winter in Kittitas County, the combination of excessive precipitation and higher than normal temperatures can cause rapid snowmelt. This causes tributaries of the Yakima River to rise, producing damage as water flows downstream, flooding structures and agricultural land in lower elevations. Floods in tributaries and in the Yakima River can cause the flooding to be even more severe.

In 2011, Kittitas County experienced two major flood events, with one declared a presidential disaster. Since 1975, floods have caused over $10 million in damage within the County.

By state law, residences are not allowed within the floodway. Residences that are pre-FIRM and located within the floodway are not allowed to increase their building footprint, perform substantial improvements, and if they sustain damage that is more than 50% of the market value of the residence, they are not allowed to repair or rebuild.

Floodplain Development Regulations & Permitting

(Continued from page 3)

of construction. For example, if you own a pre-FIRM home with a market value of $100,000 and you plan to remodel with a total cost of $75,000, your remodel qualifies as a substantial improvement. You will be required to bring your home up to current NFIP standards, which will include elevating your home above the BFE. Substantial improvement also includes repairs from floods, fire, earthquakes or any other disaster.

FLOODWAY: The floodway is also a part of the floodplain and is illustrated on the FIRMs. The floodway is the channel of a river or stream that must remain open and unobstructed to allow floodwaters to pass without increasing the BFE. The floodway is the portion of a river or stream with the greatest danger during a flood because of the high velocity of water that flows through. All development, including any manmade change to improved or unimproved real estate, such as buildings or other structures, mining, dredging, filling, grading, paving, excavation or drilling operations or storage of equipment or materials is prohibited within the floodway unless a no-rise certification is provided. A no-rise certification is a hydrological analysis performed by a licensed engineer that proves that the project within the floodway will not cause any rise in flood levels.

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Flood Protection & Preparation

Buying flood insurance is the most important step to take in protecting your home from flood-related losses.

Floods occur frequently in Kittitas County. In 2011, two major floods occurred with one qualifying as a presidential disaster. Flooding typically occurs during the winter and spring months in Kittitas County when excessive precipitation results in rapid snow melt. Ice jams in creeks and irrigation ditches can exacerbate the problem. Flooding is a threat to all people and properties in Kittitas County, and property owners need to take steps to protect themselves and their property before a flood occurs.

Some steps property owners and renters can take to prepare for flooding include:
- Check your insurance coverage. Standard homeowners and renters insurance does not cover flooding. Consider purchasing a flood insurance policy. It is available for all properties, not just those within a defined risk area. If your property is located outside of the defined risk area, you may qualify for a reduced rate Preferred Risk Policy. Contact your homeowners’ insurance agent for more information, but remember that flood insurance has a 30-day waiting period so you should purchase it sooner rather than later.
- Know your risk. To determine if your property is in a known risk area, visit www.floodsmart.gov, call your local jurisdiction or the County’s Floodplain Manager at 509-962-7523, or view the County’s online mapping service at gis.co.kittitas.wa.us. Floodwater doesn’t stay within defined risk areas, so be aware of streams and ditches that could potentially flood your property.
- Homeowner’s Insurance does not cover flood-related losses.
- Prepare your property. Do not build or store items within the floodplain unless they are properly elevated and anchored. Some items around your house, such as fuel tanks, are very buoyant and must be anchored using an approved method. HVAC systems, hot water heaters and electrical panels should be elevated above flood levels. Install a backflow valve in your septic system to prevent sewage backing up into your home.
- Minimize flood damage. Store valuables and electronics higher. Keep an inventory of household belongings.
- Sign up for a monthly e-newsletter with flood information and updates on activities and the flood control zone district by visiting the flood information website at: http://www.co.kittitas.wa.us/publicworks/flood

Floodplain Development Regulations & Permits

PERMITS REQUIRED. All landowners are required to apply for a Floodplain Development Permit prior to performing any development within the 100-year floodplain. Development includes any manmade change to improved or unimproved real estate, including but not limited to buildings or other structures, mining, dredging, filling, grading, paving, excavation or drilling operations or storage of equipment or materials. This permit can be applied for from the Kittitas County Public Works Department.

BUILDING REGULATIONS. To prevent damage to new buildings, the National Flood Insurance Program and KCC 14.08 have construction guidelines. In Kittitas County, structures within the 100-year floodplain must be elevated 1-foot above the base flood elevation (BFE). The BFE is identified on the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) and is the level of the water during a 100-year flood. For example, if the elevation of your land is 1500 feet, and the BFE is 1502 feet, there will be two feet of water on the ground during the 100-year flood. Because structures must be constructed 1-foot above BFE, your structure’s lowest floor will need to be constructed 3-feet above the ground.

Basements are not allowed within the 100-year floodplain and crawl space depth is limited. Because solid walls can collapse from the pressure of rising flood waters, openings that allow the flood waters to flow through are required if the crawl space is enclosed. Utilities, such as HVAC systems, electric systems and hot water heaters must be installed above the BFE regardless of whether they are inside or outside of your home. Propane and other fuel tanks must be elevated above the BFE and/or anchored to prevent them from floating away. Structures must be properly anchored to their foundation to prevent shifting during a flood.

A Floodplain Development Permit is required before beginning any development within the 100-year floodplain.

SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENTS. Many structures within the floodplain were constructed prior to 1971 and are not properly elevated. These structures are known as pre-FIRM. To prevent these structures from continued damage the National Flood Insurance Program has a substantial improvement rule. Substantial improvement is any reconstruction, rehabilitation, addition, remodeling or other improvement to a structure that has a total cost which equals or exceeds 50% of the market value of the structure before the start of construction.

RESOURCES
Kittitas County Public Works
publicworks@co.kittitas.wa.us
509-962-7523
Office: 411 N. Ruby St, Ste. 1
Ellensburg, WA 98926

Kittitas County Community Development Services
509-962-7505
Office: 411 N. Ruby St, Ste. 2
Ellensburg, WA 98926

Kittitas County Emergency Management Office
509-925-9525
National Flood Insurance Program
Floodsmart.gov
1-888-379-9531

Disaster & Readiness Information
Ready.gov
3days3ways.org

City of Ellensburg Public Works
509-962-7230
City of Ellensburg
509-968-0220
City of Cle Elum
509-674-2282
City of Roslyn
509-649-3105
Town of South Cle Elum
509-674-4392

To find out if property you own or plan to purchase is located in a mapped floodplain or floodway, contact the Kittitas County Public Works Department.