



FEMA

Fact Sheet

TRAVIS COUNTY FLOOD MAP PROJECT

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is remapping the floodplains of Travis County to identify the risks associated with heavy rains in the Austin-Hill Country region. The Travis County project is part of the agency's nationwide effort to revise the maps that predict where floods are likely to occur. Local governments rely on the maps to manage development that may affect – and be affected by – flooding. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) uses the maps for flood insurance purposes.

Q: Why is FEMA remapping floodplains in Travis County?

A: FEMA ranks Travis County among the fastest growing areas in the nation and in the top 10 percent of counties in the nation at risk of flood damages. The ranking is based on the number of people at risk of flooding, the current population and rate of population growth, the number of homes repeatedly damaged by floods, and the number of homes with flood-insurance policies. As population grows along the Colorado River, its tributaries and the Highland Lakes, more people are exposed to the risks of flooding. In addition, new information shows that the risk of flooding has changed since the most recent floodplain maps were drawn.

Q: How long will the remapping project take?

A: FEMA expects to have preliminary Travis County flood insurance maps in late 2005.

Q: Is there local support for the remapping project?

A: There is strong local commitment of technical and financial resources for the project. The City of Austin is a technical partner on the project. In addition, Travis County and 12 communities have agreed to cooperate with FEMA on the remapping project.

Q: Why is there local support for the remapping project?

A: Local officials need more accurate maps to manage floodplains effectively and to help protect lives and property. Most of the current FEMA maps are based on out-of-date technical data prepared up to 25 years ago. FEMA will use dozens of flood studies conducted in Travis County over recent years. One of the largest, issued last year by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is the first re-examination of flood flows along the Colorado River since the late 1970s.

Q: What does the Corps of Engineers study show about flood levels for Lake Travis?

A: The report indicates that a 100-year flood on Lake Travis would reach a level six feet higher than previously thought — 722 feet above mean sea level — instead of the current 716 feet.

Q: Weren't the Highland Lakes and dams built to control floods?

A: Only Mansfield Dam, which forms Lake Travis, is designed for flood control. It was built to reduce the force of floods downstream and to store water. Lake Travis can store as much as 260 billion gallons of floodwaters. Through floodgate operations, the floodwaters are released in a controlled manner to help prevent inundation of downstream regions. The other five dams of the Highland Lakes were built primarily for hydroelectricity and water supply. They reduce, but do not eliminate the threat of heavy flooding.

Q: How will the new maps affect property owners?

A: The effect on property owners will depend on the location of the property. FEMA floodplain maps are used to determine flood risk, insurance needs, and local floodplain construction requirements. For example, local floodplain ordinances require homes and businesses in the 100-year floodplain to be built at or above the 100-year flood elevation. This is necessary for citizens in the community to be eligible to purchase more affordable federal flood insurance, as well as to prevent future rises in the floodplain. In addition, most homes and businesses located in the 100-year floodplain are required to have flood insurance as a condition of the mortgage or home loan. Some residents must also maintain flood coverage to be eligible for certain federal disaster relief. The FEMA study likely will result in new base flood elevations and 100-year floodplain boundaries that include some properties currently outside of the floodplain, and vice versa. If the updated FEMA maps raise the 100-year flood* elevations and increase the mapped floodplains, there may be flood insurance rate benefits to owners of property in the newly designated floodplain if they obtain flood insurance prior to the change. Contact your local floodplain administrator or visit the FEMA Web site for more information: www.fema.gov/nfip/avgcost.shtm.

Q: Where can I find out whether my property is in the 100-year floodplain and what building requirements may apply?

A: The floodplain administrator for your community can help you determine if your property is in the floodplain and how to safely develop your property. Local floodplain administrator contact information can be found on the Texas Colorado River Floodplain Coalition's website at <http://www.TCRFC.org>.

Q: What opportunities are there for public involvement in the remapping project?

A: FEMA is developing a public outreach and information program that will include periodic informational meetings, newsletters, web pages and public meetings. Residents will be able to comment and respond to proposed new flood-hazard boundaries. After the study, FEMA will issue preliminary maps for a 90-day public review and comment period. A property owner can contest any changes during the 90-day review period by providing technical backup or studies. After FEMA addresses any comments received, and prints final maps, Travis County and incorporated communities will have six months to pass ordinances adopting them. Communities must adopt the new maps by ordinance to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program.

Questions? Call the project hotline toll-free, 1-877-425-3389. You may also contact project consultants Mike Moya or Lynn Lovell at Halff Associates, Inc., (817) 847-1422, or by e-mail at mmoya@halff.com or llovell@halff.com. Another source of information is the project Web site www.halff-femastudy.com. Contact the FEMA Region VI office at (940) 898-5127 or the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) at (281) 829-6880. Information about the NFIP also is available at www.fema.gov.

* The term 100-year flood can be misleading. It is not a flood that occurs once every 100 years. Rather, it is the flood that has a 1-percent chance of being equaled or exceeded each year. Thus, the 100-year flood could occur more than once in a relatively short period.