

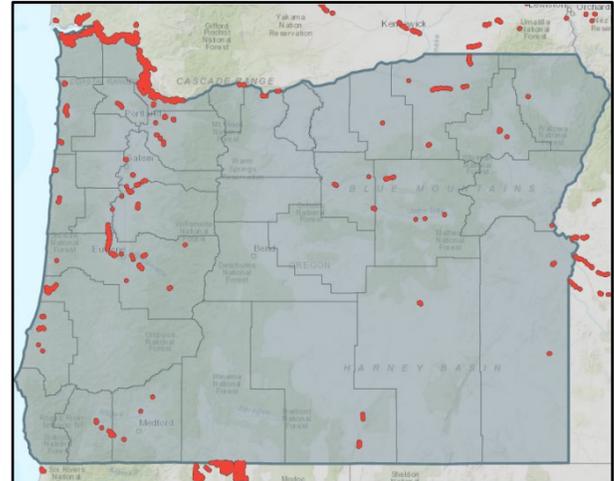
Statewide Need: Oregon's Levees



In recent years, there has been a lot of discussion surrounding the state of our public infrastructure in Oregon. Unfortunately, these conversations often overlook a critical form of infrastructure in our state: levees.

Oregon has over a thousand miles of levees, critical infrastructure that reduces the risks of flooding and protects people, property, jobs, and important community resources. Many of these levees were built 50-100 years ago, and in urban and rural areas alike, communities are struggling to maintain these aging systems, which need to be improved and modernized to continue to function to their full ability and provide the necessary levels of protection for Oregonians.

Tightening federal regulations further complicates this issue in communities with federally accredited levees, putting their access to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) at risk. Although the federal government helped construct and maintain many of our nation's levee systems, the responsibility and the cost of maintaining the infrastructure falls to local governments.



Levees in Oregon according to the USACE National Levee Database, which catalogs levees that: 1) USACE had a role in constructing, 2) USACE is involved in maintenance, or 3) levees that are enrolled in the USACE Rehabilitation & Inspection Program. (Unfortunately, central Oregon has not yet been catalogued in the National Levee Database)

At the federal level, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) coordinate closely on levee related regulations. FEMA is responsible for mapping flood risk and administering the NFIP, which provides property owners within a managed floodplain with access to affordable flood insurance. USACE inspects levees through their Rehabilitation & Inspection Program (RIP) and partners with local agencies to flood fight and make repairs in the event of a flood. Levees that meet specific safety criteria may be certified and accredited by FEMA. As long as the levee system is accredited, FEMA does not classify the historic floodplain behind the levee as a Special Flood Hazard Area, which means existing and new development is not required to build to floodplain standards.

Following the levee failures in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, FEMA and USACE overhauled the safety standards for the nation's levee systems. These new requirements hold local communities to a much higher standard, which must be met to maintain or secure certification and accreditation through FEMA.

Levee projects are underway across the state. In coastal communities like Warrenton, Tillamook, and Reedsport, in more rural areas like Pendleton, Burns, and Klamath County, and in urban communities like Portland, Springfield, and Turner. As investments in Oregon's infrastructure are considered and prioritized, the state of Oregon's levees can't be overlooked. Our public safety, economy, community assets, and quality of life depend on it.