



P.O. Box 27766  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27611  
919.782.1705

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**PLANNING UPSTREAM  
TO BUILD RESILIENCY  
DOWNSTREAM**

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# PLANNING UPSTREAM TO BUILD RESILIENCY DOWNSTREAM

The unrelenting power and devastation of flood waters leave an indelible mark on the land, communities, and people who are unlucky enough to experience them. From hurricanes and tropical storms to powerful thunderstorms and persistent rain, extreme weather is becoming more prevalent in North Carolina and subsequently, so are the occurrences of flooding.

Increasingly, rural communities are bearing the brunt of severe flooding events yet lack the resources, funding, or capacity to recover from past floods or plan for future ones. Farmers and rural residents in North Carolina are well aware of the risks and impacts of flooding, having experienced several major hurricanes over the past 25 years, as well as recurring flooding related to smaller rainfall events. This flooding results in considerable and long-lasting economic damage to homes, businesses, farms, and public infrastructure. With a small tax base and government assistance focused more on recovery, rural North Carolina lacks the funds to invest in flood mitigation, making it difficult for these communities to thrive and leads to a repeated underinvestment in flood protections and mitigation at a time when the problem is growing and investment is most needed.

A few things are clear. First, North Carolina needs a Flood Resilience Blueprint that details a proactive approach to flood mitigation. Flooding is a watershed-scale problem that demands state investment in holistic, effective solutions that leverage federal resilience dollars and support local implementation. Thankfully, North Carolina can build on best practices from other states, namely Louisiana and Iowa, that have demonstrated the many benefits and increased funding that flows from planning, engaging and coordinating across all levels of government. Various stakeholders from North Carolina have traveled to and engaged with the Iowa team, learning about their priorities and programmatic design. Their holistic, watershed-scale program is focused on solutions that protect the state's agriculture industry and the residents of vulnerable, flood-risk communities — focus areas that align with North Carolina's needs.

Second, we need to empower communities to identify and design local solutions to local problems. Residents, businesses, farmers and other landowners have intimate, first-hand knowledge of local flooding issues and insights into viable solutions. Engaging and equipping these stakeholders is essential to the success of any program or project, yet too often these communities don't have access to the capacity, funding



or technical expertise needed to develop resilience projects. A robust NC Resilient Communities Program will provide technical assistance and support for local communities to develop shovel-ready projects and allow the state to compete more effectively for federal resilience dollars.

Third, we should reinvigorate state-level programs and resources designed to fund competitive, private sector mitigation and restoration projects. The new Natural Infrastructure Flood Mitigation program within Division of Mitigation Services will use watershed studies to identify local flooding threats and then contract with private restoration companies to more quickly and effectively construct flood reduction projects. It's a program that can, if funded, put boots on the ground in short order and creates much needed jobs.

Finally, we need an entity to coordinate and manage the projects, funding, and planning. North Carolina has a strong foundation with its Resilience Office within the NC Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR), while Louisiana runs their program through a public-private partnership and the Iowa Flood Center has been successfully managed by the University of Iowa. Successful implementation will require one agency with oversight responsibility that works through local communities to maintain grassroots support and input.

One-off projects undertaken by individual communities or stakeholders will not fully address the problem. Floodwaters do not confine themselves to city or county boundaries. Actions taken by upstream communities can positively or negatively impact those downstream. By combining science, modeling, and planning North Carolina can identify and justify increased investment in flood mitigation measures that protect agriculture and rural communities. As local needs are determined, science, modeling, and planning can be used to place the best mitigation practices in the appropriate locations, which will maximize benefits for all North Carolinians.

Given the broad and far-reaching impacts of flooding on the people and economy of North Carolina, we hope state legislators will take action on this issue and give legislative solutions, such as the Disaster Mitigation and Relief Act of 2021 and the Flood Resiliency and Prevention Act, a robust and thorough discussion. These bills would implement many of the policy solutions mentioned above, and critically, would provide funding to put flood mitigation practices in communities where they are needed most.

With planning and funding upstream, North Carolina can build resiliency downstream in our most vulnerable communities.