

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Statement of Procedures on Floodplain Management and Wetlands Protection

January 5, 1979

Section 1 - General

- a. Executive Order 11988 entitled "Floodplain Management" dated May 24, 1977, requires Federal agencies to evaluate the potential effects of actions it may take in a floodplain to avoid adversely impacting floodplains wherever possible, to ensure that its planning programs and budget requests reflect consideration of flood hazards and floodplain management, including the restoration and preservation of such land areas as natural undeveloped floodplains, and to prescribe procedures to implement the policies and procedures of this Executive Order. Guidance for implementation of the Executive Order has been provided by the U.S. Water Resources Council in its Floodplain Management Guidelines dated February 10, 1978 (see 40 FR 6030).
- b. Executive Order 11990 entitled "Protection of Wetlands", dated May 24, 1977, requires Federal agencies to take action to avoid adversely impacting wetlands wherever possible, to minimize wetlands destruction and to preserve the values of wetlands, and to prescribe procedures to implement the policies and procedures of this Executive Order.
- c. It is the intent of these Executive Orders that, wherever possible, Federal agencies implement the floodplains/wetlands requirements through existing procedures, such as those internal procedures established to implement the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and OMB A-95 review procedures. In those instances where the environmental impacts of a proposed action are not significant enough to require an environmental impact statement (EIS) pursuant to section 102(2)(C) of NEPA, or where programs are not subject to the requirements of NEPA, alternative but equivalent floodplain/wetlands evaluation and notice procedures must be established.

Section 2 - Purpose

- a. The purpose of this Statement of Procedures is to set forth Agency policy and guidance for carrying out the provisions of Executive Orders 11988 and 11990.
- b. EPA program offices shall amend existing regulations and procedures to incorporate the policies and procedures set forth in this Statement of Procedures.
- c. To the extent possible, EPA shall accommodate the requirements of Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 through the Agency NEPA procedures contained in 40 CFR part 6.

Section 3 - Policy

a. The Agency shall avoid wherever possible the long and short term impacts associated with the destruction of wetlands and the occupancy and modification of floodplains and wetlands, and avoid direct and indirect support of floodplain and wetlands development wherever there is a practicable alternative.

b. The Agency shall incorporate floodplain management goals and wetlands protection considerations into its planning, regulatory, and decisionmaking processes. It shall also promote the preservation and restoration of floodplains so that their natural and beneficial values can be realized. To the extent possible EPA shall:

(1) Reduce the hazard and risk of flood loss and wherever it is possible to avoid direct or indirect adverse impact on floodplains;

(2) Where there is no practical alternative to locating in a floodplain, minimize the impact of floods on human safety, health, and welfare, as well as the natural environment;

(3) Restore and preserve natural and beneficial values served by floodplains;

(4) Require the construction of EPA structures and facilities to be in accordance with the standards and criteria, of the regulations promulgated pursuant to the National Flood Insurance Program;

(5) Identify floodplains which require restoration and preservation and recommend management programs necessary to protect these floodplains and to include such considerations as part of on-going planning programs; and

(6) Provide the public with early and continuing information concerning floodplain management and with opportunities for participating in decision making including the (evaluation of) tradeoffs among competing alternatives.

c. The Agency shall incorporate wetlands protection considerations into its planning, regulatory, and decisionmaking processes. It shall minimize the destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands and preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands. Agency activities shall continue to be carried out consistent with the Administrator's Decision Statement No. 4 dated February 21, 1973 entitled "EPA Policy to Protect the Nation's Wetlands."

Section 4 - Definitions

a. *Base Flood* means that flood which has a one percent chance of occurrence in any given year (also known as a 100-year flood). This term is used in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to indicate the minimum level of flooding to be used by a community in its floodplain management regulations.

b. *Base Floodplain* means the land area covered by a 100-year flood (one percent chance floodplain). Also see definition of floodplain.

c. *Flood or Flooding* means a general and temporary condition of partial or complete inundation of normally dry land areas from the overflow of inland and/or tidal waters, and/or the unusual and rapid accumulation or runoff of surface waters from any source, or flooding from any other source.

d. *Floodplain* means the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters and other floodprone areas such as offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any given year. The base floodplain shall be used to designate the 100-year floodplain (one percent chance floodplain). The critical action floodplain is defined as the 500-year floodplain (0.2 percent chance floodplain).

e. *Floodproofing* means modification of individual structures and facilities, their sites, and their contents to protect against structural failure, to keep water out or to reduce effects of water entry.

f. *Minimize* means to reduce to the smallest possible amount or degree.

g. *Practicable* means capable of being done within existing constraints. The test of what is practicable depends upon the situation and includes consideration of the pertinent factors such as environment, community welfare, cost, or technology.

h. *Preserve* means to prevent modification to the natural floodplain environment or to maintain it as closely as possible to its natural state.

i. *Restore* means to re-establish a setting or environment in which the natural functions of the floodplain can again operate.

j. *Wetlands* means those areas that are inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas such as sloughs, potholes, wet meadows, river overflows, mud flats, and natural ponds.

Section 5 - Applicability

a. The Executive Orders apply to activities of Federal agencies pertaining to (1) acquiring, managing, and disposing of Federal lands and facilities, (2) providing Federally undertaken, financed, or assisted construction and improvements, and (3) conducting Federal activities and programs affecting land use, including but not limited to water and related land resources planning, regulating, and licensing activities.

b. These procedures shall apply to EPA's programs as follows: (1) All Agency actions involving construction of facilities or management of lands or property. This will require amendment of the EPA Facilities Management Manual (October 1973 and revisions thereafter).

(2) All Agency actions where the NEPA process applies. This would include the programs under sections 306/402 of the Clean Water Act pertaining to new source permitting and section 201 of the Clean Water Act pertaining to wastewater treatment construction grants.

(3) All agency actions where there is sufficient independent statutory authority to carry out the floodplain/wetlands procedures.

(4) In program areas where there is no EIS requirement nor clear statutory authority for EPA to require procedural implementation, EPA shall continue to provide leadership and offer guidance so that the value of floodplain management and wetlands protection can be understood and carried out to the maximum extent practicable in these programs.

c. These procedures shall not apply to any permitting or source review programs of EPA once such authority has been transferred or delegated to a State. However, EPA shall, to the extent possible, require States to provide equivalent effort to assure support for the objectives of these procedures as part of the State assumption process.

Section 6 - Requirements

a. Floodplain/Wetlands review of proposed Agency actions.

(1) *Floodplain/Wetlands Determination*— Before undertaking an Agency action, each program office must determine whether or not the action will be located in or affect a floodplain or wetlands. The Agency shall utilize maps prepared by the Federal Insurance Administration of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Flood Insurance Rate Maps or Flood Hazard Boundary Maps), Fish and Wildlife Service (National Wetlands Inventory Maps), and other appropriate agencies to determine whether a proposed action is located in or will likely affect a floodplain or wetlands. If there is no floodplain/wetlands impact identified, the action may proceed without further consideration of the remaining procedures set forth below.

(2) *Early Public Notice* —When it is apparent that a proposed or potential agency action is likely to impact a floodplain or wetlands, the public should be informed through appropriate public notice procedures.

(3) *Floodplain/Wetlands Assessment* —If the Agency determines a proposed action is located in or affects a floodplain or wetlands, a floodplain/wetlands assessment shall be undertaken. For those actions where an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) is prepared pursuant to 40 CFR part 6, the floodplain/wetlands assessment shall be prepared concurrently with these analyses and shall be included in

the EA or EIS. In all other cases, a *floodplain/wetlands assessment* shall be prepared. Assessments shall consist of a description of the proposed action, a discussion of its effect on the floodplain/wetlands, and shall also describe the alternatives considered.

(4) *Public Review of Assessments* —For proposed actions impacting floodplain/wetlands where an EA or EIS is prepared, the opportunity for public review will be provided through the EIS provisions contained in 40 CFR parts 6, 25, or 35, where appropriate. In other cases, an equivalent public notice of the floodplain/wetlands assessment shall be made consistent with the public involvement requirements of the applicable program.

(5) *Minimize, Restore or Preserve* —If there is no practicable alternative to locating in or affecting the floodplain or wetlands, the Agency shall act to minimize potential harm to the floodplain or wetlands. The Agency shall also act to restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values of floodplains and wetlands as part of the analysis of all alternatives under consideration.

(6) *Agency Decision* —After consideration of alternative actions, as they have been modified in the preceding analysis, the Agency shall select the desired alternative. For all Agency actions proposed to be in or affecting a floodplain/wetlands, the Agency shall provide further public notice announcing this decision. This decision shall be accompanied by a Statement of Findings, not to exceed three pages. This Statement shall include: (i) The reasons why the proposed action must be located in or affect the floodplain or wetlands; (ii) a description of significant facts considered in making the decision to locate in or affect the floodplain or wetlands including alternative sites and actions; (iii) a statement indicating whether the proposed action conforms to applicable State or local floodplain protection standards; (iv) a description of the steps taken to design or modify the proposed action to minimize potential harm to or within the floodplain or wetlands; and (v) a statement indicating how the proposed action affects the natural or beneficial values of the floodplain or wetlands. If the provisions of 40 CFR part 6 apply, the Statement of Findings may be incorporated in the final EIS or in the environmental assessment. In other cases, notice should be placed in the Federal Register or other local medium and copies sent to Federal, State, and local agencies and other entities which submitted comments or are otherwise concerned with the floodplain/wetlands assessment. For floodplain actions subject to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-95, the Agency shall send the Statement of Findings to State and areawide A-95 clearinghouse in the geographic area affected. At least 15 working days shall be allowed for public and interagency review of the Statement of Findings.

(7) *Authorizations/Appropriations* —Any requests for new authorizations or appropriations transmitted to OMB shall include, a floodplain/wetlands assessment and, for floodplain impacting actions, a Statement of Findings, if a proposed action will be located in a floodplain or wetlands.

b. *Lead agency concept.* To the maximum extent possible, the Agency shall rely on the lead agency concept to carry out the provisions set forth in section 6.a of this appendix.

Therefore, when EPA and another Federal agency have related actions, EPA shall work with the other agency to identify which agency shall take the lead in satisfying these procedural requirements and thereby avoid duplication of efforts.

c. Additional floodplain management provisions relating to Federal property and facilities.

(1) *Construction Activities* —EPA controlled structures and facilities must be constructed in accordance with existing criteria and standards set forth under the NFIP and must include mitigation of adverse impacts wherever feasible. Deviation from these requirements may occur only to the extent NFIP standards are demonstrated as inappropriate for a given structure or facility.

(2) *Flood Protection Measures* —If newly constructed structures or facilities are to be located in a floodplain, accepted floodproofing and other flood protection measures shall be undertaken. To achieve flood protection, EPA shall, wherever practicable, elevate structures above the base flood level rather than filling land.

(3) *Restoration and Preservation* —As part of any EPA plan or action, the potential for restoring and preserving floodplains and wetlands so that their natural and beneficial values can be realized must be considered and incorporated into the plan or action wherever feasible.

(4) *Property Used by Public* —If property used by the public has suffered damage or is located in an identified flood hazard area, EPA shall provide on structures, and other places where appropriate, conspicuous indicators of past and probable flood height to enhance public knowledge of flood hazards.

(5) *Transfer of EPA Property* —When property in flood plains is proposed for lease, easement, right-of-way, or disposal to non-Federal public or private parties, EPA shall reference in the conveyance those uses that are restricted under Federal, State and local floodplain regulations and attach other restrictions to uses of the property as may be deemed appropriate. Notwithstanding, EPA shall consider withholding such properties from conveyance.

Section 7 - Implementation

a. Pursuant to section 2, the EPA program offices shall amend existing regulations, procedures, and guidance, as appropriate, to incorporate the policies and procedures set forth in this Statement of Procedures. Such amendments shall be made within six months of the date of these Procedures.

b. The Office of External Affairs (OEA) is responsible for the oversight of the implementation of this Statement of Procedures and shall be given advanced opportunity to review amendments to regulations, procedures, and guidance. OEA shall coordinate

efforts with the program offices to develop necessary manuals and more specialized supplementary guidance to carry out this Statement of Procedures.