

Flood Terminology

Floodplain: A floodplain is a land area adjacent to a river, stream, lake, estuary, or other water body that is subject to flooding. This area, if left undisturbed, acts to store excess floodwater. The floodplain is made up of two sections: the floodway and the flood fringe.

100-Year Flood: The 100-year flooding event is the flood having a 1 percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in magnitude in any given year. Contrary to popular belief, it is not a flood occurring once every 100 years. The 100-year floodplain is the area adjoining a river, stream, or watercourse covered by water in the event of a 100-year flood.

Floodway: The floodway is one of two main sections that make up the floodplain. Floodways are defined for regulatory purposes. Unlike floodplains, floodways do not reflect a recognizable geologic feature. For floodplain management purposes, floodways are defined as the channel of a river or stream, and the overbank areas adjacent to the channel. The floodway carries the bulk of the floodwater downstream and is usually the area where water velocities and forces are the greatest. The floodway must be kept open and free from development or other structures that would obstruct or divert flood flows onto other properties. Municipal regulations prohibit any development the floodway without an engineer's certification that no rise in the Base Flood Elevation will occur.

Flood Fringe: The flood fringe refers to the outer portions of the floodplain, beginning at the edge of the floodway and continuing outward. This is the area where development is most likely to occur, and where precautions to protect life and property need to be taken.

Development: For floodplain ordinance purposes, development is broadly defined by AMC 21.60 "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." The definition of development for floodplain purposes is generally broader and includes more activities than the definition of development used in other sections of local land use ordinances.

Base Flood Elevation (BFE): The term "Base Flood Elevation" refers to the elevation (measured in feet above sea level) that the 1% annual flood (100-year flood) is expected to reach. Within the Municipality of Anchorage, the vertical datum used to measure flood elevations is based on the NGS1972 vertical adjustment.