

VI. The Issues

In the previous chapter, trends as a means of understanding and presaging issues and determining policy decisions were discussed. This chapter examines and reviews issues in flood hazards management. (These issues will then be dealt with more specifically in chapter VIII, which deals with the issues of the National Flood Insurance Program.)

PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES

A public policy issue is a fundamental conflict among objectives, goals, customs, plans, activities, or interested parties. Such an issue is not likely to be resolved completely in favor of any extreme position in that conflict. Over the long run, the necessarily temporary resolution of issues by a public policy is likely to move toward favoring one interest over another. Thus, at any given time public policy must strike a fresh workable balance between conflicting forces.

THE ISSUES IN FLOOD HAZARDS MANAGEMENT

The conflicts in flood hazards management fall into seven areas (see table 14).

Equity

1. **Right of private** owners to unrestricted use of their property conflicts with Government's responsibilities.
2. Distribution pattern of costs and benefits from flood hazards mitigation and disaster relief.

There are two key equity issues. The first finds the right of property owners to the unrestricted use of their property in conflict with governmental responsibility to safeguard health, safety, and the welfare of citizens.

The second involves the distribution pattern of costs and benefits from the mitigation of flood hazards and from disaster relief. The central question is whether the distribution should principally

involve all local payers and beneficiaries or should -- cover a broader national base.

State and Local Governments v. the Federal Government

1. Conflict between Federal Government as provider of disaster assistance and insurer against loss and jurisdictional powers of States and local governments.
2. Conflict between decentralization of Federal programs and integrated nature of local programs.
3. Conflict between mandatory elements of Federal nonstructural flood management practices and greater awareness of local needs by States and local governments.
4. Local governments confused by wide variety of Federal statutes related to flood control that have conflicting compliance incentives and objectives.

The conflict between State and local governments and the Federal Government arises from two considerations. The first reflects the constitutional limitation on federalism and the distribution of sovereign power among Federal, State, and local governments. The second reflects the piecemeal, contradictory, and poorly integrated plans and programs of the Federal Government in its dealings with State and local governments.

Lack of Integration Among Federal Programs

1. Different agencies with different functions associated with each aspect of lifecycle of a flood hazard.
2. Competing usage of floodplains; physical development; open space; improve water quality; and wetlands, wildlife, and historical preservation.
3. Conflicting Federal land use programs as reflected in development activities of the Corps of Engineers and the Federal Insurance Administration.
4. Federal programs with flood management responsibilities often contrary to historical prodevelopment policies.

There is little integration within the Federal system in terms of agency plans and programs con-

Table 14.—Seven Issues in Flood Hazards Management Summarized

Equity	State and local v. Federal Government	Lack of integration among Federal programs	Goals conflicts	Means conflicts	Short-term v. long-term interests	Information
1. Right of private owners to unrestricted use of their property conflicts with Government's responsibilities.	1. Conflict between Federal Government as provider of disaster assistance and insurer against loss and jurisdictional powers of States and local governments.	1. Different agencies with different functions associated with each aspect of lifecycle of a flood hazard.	1. There are no specific national objectives for floodplain management against which to measure progress.	1. The traditional ways to control floods are being seen not only as inadequate but also as causing the situation to worsen.	1. Short-term benefits of developing a flood hazard area conflict with longer term risks.	1. Present information about flood hazards is inadequate. New information needed to coordinate research and to develop, sustain, and evaluate programs to mitigate flood hazards. Reluctance to allocate funds for information gathering purposes.
2. Distribution pattern of costs and benefits from flood hazards mitigation and disaster relief.	2. Conflict between decentralization of Federal programs and integrated nature of local programs.	2. Competing usage of flood plains; physical development; open space; improve water quality; wetlands, wildlife historical preservation.	2. Single purpose floodplain management conflicts with multipurpose community developmental, environmental, and social objectives.	2. Conflict between relying on single means, e.g., protecting structures or elevating buildings, rather than integrated multiple means, e.g., regulation, acquisition, and relocation, design and location of utilities, redevelopment, and renewal.	2. Present procedure of Federal planning based on flood that has one chance in a hundred of occurring conflicts with need to determine more suitable standards for long-term planning.	2. Different perceptions of magnitude and immediacy of flood hazards, e.g., Federal v. State and local levels; hydrologist and Federal land manager v. private property owner.
	3. Conflict between mandatory elements of Federal nonstructural flood management practices and greater awareness of local needs by State and local governments.	3. Conflicting Federal land use programs as reflected in development activities of the Corps of Engineers and the Federal Insurance Administration.		3. Inherent political, social, and societal conflicts in transition to approach integrating socioeconomic flood hazards control strategies with engineering strategies.	3. Timelag for new measures to take effect conflicts with urgent need to achieve significant improvements in floodplain management.	
	4. Local governments confused by wide variety of Federal statutes related to flood control, that have conflicting compliance incentives and objectives.	4. Federal programs with flood management responsibilities often contrary to historical prodevelopment policies.				

SOURCE: Office of Technology Assessment.

cerned with flood hazards management. This may be improved by the President's reorganization of Federal agencies responsible for hazards and emergency preparedness.

Goals Conflicts

1. There are no specific national objectives for floodplain management against which to measure progress.
2. Single purpose floodplain management conflicts with multipurpose community developmental, environmental, and social objectives.

There are no clear, action-oriented national goals with regard to flood hazards management. Existing programs that are directed at dealing with flood hazards areas are disorganized and at cross-purposes.

Means Conflicts

1. The traditional ways to control floods are being seen not only as inadequate but also as causing the situation to worsen.
2. Conflict between relying on single means, e.g., protecting structures or elevating buildings, rather than integrated multiple means, e.g., regulation, design and location of utilities, redevelopment, and renewal.
3. Inherent political, social, and societal conflicts in transition to approach integrating socioeconomic flood hazard control strategies with engineering strategies.

The traditional means of flood control are increasingly seen not only as inadequate but also as methods that cause the situation to worsen. Yet, political, social, and institutional conflicts are inherent in any transition to an integrated approach using nonphysical or socioeconomic strategies along with physical or engineering design strategies. Mechanical devices and engineered structures tend to appeal to public officials and others with the responsibility for making decisions because

their behavior is logical, consistent, and predictable; they yield easily quantifiable data; they perform their tasks objectively; and they can be put into effect on order.

Short-Term v. Long-Term Interests

1. Short-term benefits of developing a flood-hazard area conflict with longer term risks.
2. Present procedure of Federal planning based on flood that has one chance in a hundred of occurring conflicts with need to determine more suitable standards for long-term planning.
3. Timelag for new measures to take effect conflicts with urgent need to achieve significant improvements in floodplain management.

The short-term benefits of developing a flood hazard area conflict with the longer term risks. In addition, conflicts arise over the calculations of short- versus long-term costs and benefits.

Information

1. Present information about flood hazards inadequate. New information needed to coordinate research and to develop, sustain, and evaluate programs to mitigate flood hazards. Reluctance to allocate funds for information-gathering purposes.
2. Different perceptions of magnitude and immediacy of flood hazards, e.g., Federal v. State and local levels; hydrologist and Federal land manager v. private property owners.

Information about all aspects of flood hazards is inadequate. A policy information base is not available and there is a reluctance to generate it. Research programs are uncoordinated and information is not disseminated in a useful and timely form to all concerned. (Information needs particularly relevant to research and development are discussed further in chapter XI.)