



Iowa Flood Center: Keeping Iowans safe from flooding

By Witold Krajewski, Director, Iowa Flood Center at the University of Iowa

We are reminded of the absolute power of Mother Nature every time we witness the devastation that comes with massive flooding. In 2017, Hurricane Harvey dumped 50 inches of rain on Texas and Louisiana, releasing a torrent of flood waters. Less than a month later, hurricanes struck Southwest Florida and Puerto Rico, resulting in more flooding. Though it's too soon to know the full cost of these disasters, experts say U.S. economic growth most likely suffered. Even more tragic, many lives were lost.

Iowans also know how much flooding has affected our state. Data from the Federal Emergency Management Agency shows that flooding happens somewhere in Iowa almost every year—and in the last 30 years, each of Iowa's 99 counties has reported a minimum of four flood-related presidential disasters, with many counties reporting more. A database that takes a county-level look at the impact of natural disasters estimates that Iowa suffered \$13.5 billion in flood losses from 1988 to 2015. During that same period, crops worth \$4.1 billion were ruined due to floods.

Now for some good news. Iowa is getting better at flood control and mitigation, and the Iowa Flood Center at the University of Iowa (IFC), the nation's only academic research center devoted solely to flooding, is leading the way. Created in 2009 by the Iowa State Legislature in the aftermath of the devastating flood of 2008, the IFC is Iowa's go-to source for a variety of information and tools that help Iowans prepare for and avoid flood damage. With the 2018 flood season approaching, I'd like to encourage Iowans to use IFC resources to know their flood risk, prepare for potential flooding, and stay informed about current conditions. Good information is the first step to protecting property and saving lives.

The IFC's Iowa Flood Information System (IFIS) (<http://ifis.iowafloodcenter.org/ifis/en>) is a free online suite of tools that offers access to the latest local flood information. The user-friendly system displays up-to-the-minute, community-specific information on rainfall, stream levels, and much more. IFIS now also includes data that gives businesses and homeowners a dollar estimate of property damage depending on the flood scenario.

One of Iowa's most wide-reaching efforts to reduce the impact of floods is the statewide Iowa Watershed Approach, or IWA. Funded through a \$96.9 million HUD grant, the IWA works with volunteer landowners in nine watersheds across the state to strategically build conservation practices such as ponds and wetlands to slow the movement of water from a field or yard to a stream or river. The IWA builds on the accomplishments of the the Iowa Watershed Project—a five-year effort that created more than 150 ponds, terraces, wetlands, water and sediment control basins and on-road structures. These conservation efforts are led by a partnership that includes the IFC and many state, city, and county agencies, as well as watershed management authorities, farmers and homeowners.

Together, we are taking important steps to making Iowa a safer and more resilient state in the face of flooding. My hope is that more Iowans will join the IFC and its many partners in our efforts to preserve Iowa's economic vitality and protect more homes and families.