

What Levees Do and Do Not Do

Levees can reduce some flooding, but they do not eliminate flood risk.

WHAT LEVEES DO



HOLDS BACK SOME FLOODWATER

Levees are built to keep river water in the channel during many flood events.



DIRECTS WATER WITHIN A CONSTRAINED CORRIDOR

Levees confine high flows to the river channel, which can reduce erosion and protect adjacent areas.



REDUCES FREQUENT OVERBANK FLOODING

Protected areas behind levees experience less frequent overbank flooding compared to unprotected floodplains.

WHAT LEVEES DO NOT DO



DO NOT ELIMINATE RISK ENTIRELY

Levees lower the likelihood of some flooding, but risk always remains.



DO NOT PREVENT OVERTOPPING

In extreme floods, water can flow over the top of levees and into protected areas.



DO NOT PREVENT FAILURE OR BREACH

Levees can fail or breach due to erosion, instability, seepage, or other causes.



DO NOT ELIMINATE FLOODING FROM OTHER SOURCES

Rainfall in the protected area, drainage backup, and groundwater can still cause flooding.

WHEN LEVEES ARE OVERTOPPED OR BREACHED



During extreme events, water can go over or through a levee, leading to flooding in areas that are usually protected.

RESIDUAL RISK REMAINS



Areas behind levees can still flood, especially during extreme events or from other water pathways. The depth, timing, and duration of flooding can vary, and impacts can still be severe.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR POLICY



• protected does not mean risk-free



• land use behind levees should still account for flood risk



• emergency planning is still necessary in levee-protected areas



KEY TAKEAWAY

Levees reduce some flood risk, but they do not remove it.