Floodplain managers, planners, environmentalists, and local officials share an awareness of the benefits of protecting the natural functions of floodplains as a means of both protecting property from flood losses and preserving natural ecosystems. This attitude is translated into action through various strategies for ensuring that human activity proceeds with minimal negative impacts across space or into the future. Some of these approaches are known as “low-impact development (LID),” “Smart Growth,” “sustainability,” and the use of “green infrastructure.” These approaches combine recognition of the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, and social actions; a balance of present needs with future needs; recognition of natural and geographic boundaries rather than artificial or political ones within which to make decisions; and a locally based, participatory planning and decisionmaking process.

The “no adverse impact” approach developed by the Association of State Floodplain Managers provides the philosophy and legal underpinnings for a holistic approach that puts floodplain management in the vanguard of this trend. The concept and its implementation are explained in No Adverse Impact: A Toolkit for Common Sense Floodplain Management (ASFPM, 2003) and in other publications of the ASFPM. No adverse impact floodplain management is essentially a “do no harm” policy, based on the concept that the actions of any community or property owner should not adversely affect others, now or in the future. It calls for the anticipation of the potential negative effects of any development action within the watershed on other people and property and on the environment itself—now and in the future. Those impacts can be one-time-only or cumulative and they encompass the combined effects on legal, social, ecological, and physical systems. Any potential negative impacts must be either avoided (by preventing the development from taking place) or mitigated, through measures specified by the community.

Not only does an no adverse impact approach foster long-term sustainability, but it also contributes to local and national disaster resilience—the ability to withstand natural extremes such as floods without experiencing them as catastrophic or disastrous events. A community that has followed the no adverse impact approach to managing its floodplains gains multiple benefits. Not only is the community safer and more resistant to disaster, it is also more economically and environmentally durable and more efficient. In addition, the residents of such a community enjoy a stronger economy and a better quality of life on a day-to-day basis because the disruption and costs of floods have been avoided.

The ASFPM encourages the adoption of no adverse impact floodplain management as a basis for fostering disaster resilience and sustainability at the local and state levels and over the long term. It is holistic, broad-based, sensitive to the natural functions of floodplains, and demands local control and responsibility. Although implementation of this approach takes place at the community level, as with other techniques federal leadership and incentives will be needed to make it more widespread and thus yield the greatest possible long-term benefits.

- No federal program should allow the transfer of flooding impacts from one entity to another or from present generations to those of the future.