



The Community Rating System works to Protect Natural Floodplains

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The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS) rewards a community-centered approach to reducing flood hazards that also protects the natural and beneficial functions of a community's floodprone lands. Under a system of credit points based on the effectiveness of flood loss reduction techniques and protection of natural floodplain functions, a CRS-participating community obtains a CRS Class "rating." This rating entitles residents to a reduction in their NFIP flood insurance policy premiums of up to 45%.

The CRS's system of credit points recognizes the tremendous value of the natural areas that border the nation's rivers, lakes, and oceans. This value encompasses not only flood loss reduction benefits but also improved resiliency and quality-of-life attributes that natural areas contribute to a community. Many floodprone areas, especially riverfronts and shorelines, provide valuable local open space and recreational opportunities. The flood insurance premium reductions awarded to policyholders in communities that qualify help engender local empowerment for managing floodplain areas in ways that are tailored to the local conditions and also protect the local environment.

The CRS credits over 90 elements of comprehensive floodplain and watershed management that may be implemented by communities. The 90 elements include significant credits for protecting the natural functions of riverine and coastal floodplains, especially for

- Preserving natural floodplain open space, and acquiring floodprone land and returning it to its natural state.
- Planning for comprehensive floodplain management, including plans to protect and restore natural functions and habitat.
- Watershed management programs, including those that identify wetlands and natural areas and help protect natural channels.

These CRS credit elements recognize and provide incentives for communities that exceed the minimum floodplain management requirements of the NFIP.



About the CRS

The Community Rating System of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) rewards communities that undertake floodplain and watershed management activities that exceed the minimum floodplain management requirements of the NFIP. The CRS emphasizes and encourages a community-centered approach that addresses the hazards of flooding and also puts the protection of the natural functions and resources of a community's floodprone lands on an equal footing.

The CRS uses a rating system that is similar to fire insurance rating to determine discounts on flood insurance premiums for residents. CRS communities are rated from 9 to 1, based on points that they earn for conducting their choice of a range of creditable activities. Most communities enter the program at a CRS Class 9 or Class 8 rating, which entitles residents in Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs) to a 5% discount on their flood insurance premiums for a Class 9 or a 10% discount for Class 8.

As a community engages in additional mitigation activities, its residents become eligible for increased discounts. Each CRS Class improvement yields an additional 5% discount on flood insurance premiums for properties in the SFHA.

Flood insurance premium reductions have proven to be powerful incentives for communities to join the CRS and, even better, to maintain and improve their floodplain management programs over time. The CRS began in 1990 and today there are over 1,300 CRS communities, representing over two-thirds of the NFIP policy base.

Protecting Open Space in Floodplains

Since the beginning of the program, the CRS has recognized the preservation of open space as the most effective practice for avoiding flood damage, with the added benefit of enhancing the natural functions of riverine and coastal areas. The CRS awards credit points for floodprone land that has been protected as open space by a public agency or a private organization, as long as its status as permanent open space is assured. Over the years, the CRS credit points available for the protection of open space have increased as experience and study has provided evidence of the flood damage reduction benefits of open space preservation.

The CRS also places a high value on floodplain lands that have been restored to their natural state. A large amount of CRS credit is provided for acquiring floodplain buildings, removing them from floodprone areas, and restoring the vacated floodplain to permanent open space.

Preserving & Restoring Natural Shorelines

Particular attention is paid under the CRS to the value of natural shorelines and natural channels. These areas are critical for perpetuating natural processes, for providing aquatic and riparian habitat and for mitigating the effects of erosion. Preserving and restoring natural shorelines can offer multiple unique benefits to communities.

Two categories of credit are offered: one for preserving shorelines and channels in their natural state and another for restoring degraded shorelines and channels to an approximate natural state or one that supports natural functions.

Development and construction regulations that protect natural shorelines can receive this credit, as can local policies that apply to public land, such as shorelines within city parks. Habitat restoration projects and planting to preserve sand dunes are examples of activities that can earn CRS credit for rejuvenating natural shorelines.

CRS communities earn flood insurance premium discounts for protecting the natural functions of floodplains by . . .

- Preserving open space in floodplains;
- Protecting natural shorelines;
- Prohibiting fill in the floodplain;
- Mapping natural floodplain functions;
- Providing for low impact development, low density zoning, and land development criteria that encourage open space and floodplain protection;
- Creating and implementing a watershed management plan, a habitat conservation plan, a natural functions plan, or a comprehensive floodplain management plan;
- Prohibiting buildings in floodplains;
- Regulations to protect natural and beneficial functions and water quality;
- Management of stormwater;
- Controlling erosion and sediment throughout the watershed;
- Planning for the protection and restoration of habitat and the natural functions of floodplains;
- Public outreach and education projects about the natural functions of floodprone areas;
- Library collections about the local natural functions and resources, endangered, species, habitat, and other features;
- Acquisition of floodprone properties and relocating them out of the floodplain;
- Stream dumping regulations;
- Erosion protection maintenance;
- . . . and others.



Watershed Management

Managing development and land use within watersheds is important for the protection of the floodplain and the coastal area. Managing stormwater runoff is credited under the CRS. Watershed and stormwater management help to keep pollutants out of waterways, maintain optimum flow volume and velocity in the channels, keep sediment loads to natural levels, and promote gradual infiltration. Erosion and sedimentation control regulations, low-impact development standards, using stormwater storage basins, and having riparian buffers all are creditable under the CRS.

Planning for Floodplain Management, Protecting Natural Functions & Preserving Habitat

The CRS promotes comprehensive floodplain management planning, analysis and evaluation related to the protection of the natural functions of floodplains, and habitat protection. Credit is available for community-adopted management plans that protect and enhance one or more of the natural functions and native species of the local floodplain.

The CRS encourages analysis of the potential impacts of growth and development on the local environment, followed by implementation of specific projects for protecting and restoring habitat and other natural functions. Habitat conservation plans, especially those accepted by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service, qualify for this credit.

Other Ways the CRS Fosters Natural Floodplains

A deeper understanding of and appreciation for the natural resources and functions of floodplains, wetlands, coastlines, and lakeshores leads to long-term public support for the preservation of these areas. The CRS therefore gives credit to communities that conduct public information and education projects about these attributes. Credit is also provided for collections of information in local libraries or on community websites about natural functions, habitat, endangered species, water quality, and similar concerns.

Communities that produce maps of the natural functions and resources of their floodprone areas—

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whether as printed material or a layer of a geographic information system—can receive CRS credit for taking that step toward broader management of their local floodplains.

To further encourage natural floodplains, the CRS does not allow credit for certain activities, including the construction of major levee systems or coastal structural projects such as sea walls or groins. Those measures can result in unintended consequences and the degradation of natural functions.

CRS Communities meet Provisions for Environmental Protection

The CRS encourages, recognizes, and rewards local stewardship of natural floodplain functions and resources, in conjunction with flood loss reduction. The CRS reinforces the importance of community adherence to federal environmental protection requirements.

Because the CRS is a federal program, its participants must comply with applicable federal environmental preservation laws, implementing regulations, and executive orders. Certain building or land-altering activities must meet these requirements if they are to be considered for CRS credit. These include acquisition and relocation projects, some flood protection initiatives, and drainage and levee maintenance operations.

The means for compliance with environmental protection requirements and the documentation required for each project are based on the type of project and its funding source. Guidance to help CRS communities understand which provisions apply to which types of efforts, and what they can do to certify that they have complied with them so that they may receive CRS credit, is available in the *Coordinator's Manual* and at www.CRSresources.org.



Constant Improvement for the CRS

A thorough evaluation of the CRS, credit criteria, credit points, and other features was carried out pursuant to the *CRS Strategic Plan for 2008–2013*. The CRS took this opportunity to re-evaluate the importance of natural functions both to community resilience and to flood loss reduction. With the release of the 2013 *CRS Coordinator's Manual*, therefore, the CRS credit point structure was realigned to increase the credit provided for local activities that protect open space, watershed habitat, water quality, and other attributes. It emphasizes the importance of the community's giving full consideration to the range of natural resources and functions present in its floodprone areas.

The communities that participate in the CRS are also improving, and many have realized CRS Class improvements since joining the program. Certain prerequisites must be met to reach the more advanced CRS Class ratings. A new prerequisite to achieving a Class 4 requires a community's floodplain and watershed management program to have earned a minimum of 100 credit points for protecting the natural functions of floodplains.

To Find Out More

Learn how to apply to the CRS and get more information, guidance, and publications, at www.CRSresources.org.