

**Muckleston, Keith. *Floodplain Regulations and Residential Land Values in Oregon*. Oregon State University, 1981.** (Reviewed by Susan Mershon)

This is a research project done by members of the OSU Department of Geography, and sponsored by the Water Resources Research Institute and the Office of Water Research and Technology, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The researchers consider it obvious that the reservoir dam system isn't effective in controlling floods in the Willamette (witness the large 1964 flood). Flood losses are ever-increasing over the years, they said, despite the reservoirs, because floodplain land is being used more. The researchers advocate a non-structural approach, based on keeping the people away from the floodwaters. A key part of this approach was the 1968 National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

The researchers were concerned that the non-structural approach was being implemented too slowly. The report describes a vague fear of regulated land appreciating at a lower rate than their unregulated neighbors. (This is nation-wide, not only in the Willamette Valley.)

The study hypothesized that "the mean rates of appreciation for regulated lands would be significantly less than those for similar, proximate, unregulated lots." The study concluded that this was not the case. The hypothesis was rejected, and the researchers tentatively concluded that floodplain regulations did not dampen land values. In some sites, the regulated land's value actually rose more than unregulated land. They said, "This probably reflects the amenity values of waterfront properties and also the markedly improved state of the Willamette River over recent years."

The study picked six "study parcels," all in the Willamette Valley. Three parcels are on the main stem. Most of the reliable data (by their own admission) came from North Albany and from Oak Grove (north of Oregon City). Each parcel was carefully chosen; ideally the only difference between the lots therein was their regulatory status.

The study was organized in a scientific manner. However, it was not a "real-time" study; the work involved looking through land assessors' records for a period of years. The longest period was 23 years, at Oak Grove.

## **Analysis**

I was surprised by the study's findings. I would have thought the hypothesis was true. The researchers recognized a need for real information on the interaction between land use regulations and property values.

The study is concisely written and contains some succinct conceptual diagrams. It admits incomplete data and less-than-ideal circumstances in many study parcels. Because of these admissions I trust the

report. The published report doesn't contain the data itself, only the analysis thereof.

The report was well organized but didn't give me a full understanding of the floodplain regulations. If I were to pursue this further, I would find out more about precisely what regulations were in effect during the study period, and what current regulations are. Has there been a later study on this topic?

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