

# What does future flood resiliency look like in Park County?

The historic June 13th flood on the Yellowstone has a lot of us thinking about what will happen when the next major flood hits Park County. I imagine the next time the Yellowstone lets loose, recovery will look a lot like it has in the past, with the community pulling together to help those who are impacted. Generous donations will be made and hard-earned tax dollars will go toward the cleanup and recovery effort.



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Guest  
columnist

**JEANNETTE BLANK**

What if, instead of scrambling to respond after the fact, our community decided

through the property sometime in the future.

To see what I'm talking about, take a look at the Upper Yellowstone Channel Migration Zone map that shows where high-risk areas labeled as the "erosion buffer," the "historic migration zone" and the "avulsion hazard zone" are located between Gardiner and the U.S. 89 bridge ([https://msl.mt.gov/geoinfo/data/montana\\_channel\\_migration\\_zones/projects/yellowstone\\_river](https://msl.mt.gov/geoinfo/data/montana_channel_migration_zones/projects/yellowstone_river)).

It's hard to resist building in these high-risk zones. After all, we love being close to rivers. Private property rights and the right for the individual to assume their own risk when building too close to the river has been our standard approach towards new development on the Yellowstone.

For those of you who believe private property rights should never be limited, consider this: When someone builds in a high-risk area along the river, they aren't



to proactively increase our resilience to future flood events to reduce damage to life, property, infrastructure, and the river? Flood resilience is the idea of minimizing future risk and cost by ensuring the river has enough room to move and adjust without damaging homes and critical infrastructure. Actions that improve flood resilience include avoiding development along the river's banks and floodplain; avoiding the use of rock riprap to armor and lock the river's banks into place; and maintaining and restoring the river's access to its floodplain where floodwater can spread out and dissipate energy.

The opposite of resilience is vulnerability. In Park County, our vulnerability to future Yellowstone floods will increase if we continue to develop along the river and constrain the river to its main channel with buildings, roads, and hardened bank treatments like rock riprap.

In an ideal world, we'd keep the river's floodplain open and relatively free of development, but that probably isn't a realistic goal for Park County. At the very least, we should prevent the construc-

tion just exposing themselves to higher risk of future damage, they are often increasing flood risk to their neighbor's property and downstream communities. By building in a high-risk area, this person is infringing on the rights of other property owners who could now be placed at a greater risk of flood damage from impacts like accelerated streamflow and erosion, debris piles, and higher costs of flood recovery.

More development in high-risk zones results in more damage during flood events, period. It also increases the tax burden for all of us to cover the cost of federal and state disaster emergency services, repairs to damaged roads and infrastructure, and investments into more expensive flood protection measures. Making common sense changes to local policies to prevent construction from happening in high-risk zones is the right thing to do.

Change must come from the community, so please contact the City Commissioners and Park County Commissioners to let them know that we want to make changes to prevent new building from occurring in the highest risk zones along the Upper Yel-

tion of new buildings and structures within the areas along the river that have the highest risk of damage in a future flood event. This would include areas that have been identified as being in the historic path of the river's channel movement, banks that are especially vulnerable to erosion, and locations that are considered high-risk avulsion zones, where the river will likely cut a new channel

lowstone River. We will thank ourselves for doing this the next time the mighty Yellowstone shows us how powerful she can be.

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