

Climate Change and Flood Insurance in Georgia



Georgia Climate Brief

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Climate Change and Flooding

Floods are the most common type of natural hazard in the United States, with 99% of U.S. counties experiencing a flood event from 1996-2019^{1,2}. Climate change is increasing the frequency and magnitude of flooding across Georgia³. In coastal communities, sea level rise is elevating storm surge and high tide flooding to new heights. Throughout the state, severe rain events are overwhelming local infrastructure, flooding streets and properties. As higher temperatures lead to prolonged droughts, even natural surfaces will struggle to absorb heavy downpours, intensifying erosion and runoff.

Flooding and Flood Insurance Basics

Many Georgia property owners need to consider an increasing risk of flood damage due to climate change. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), just one inch of water can result in \$25,000 in damage to a home. These repairs are typically not covered by standard homeowners or renters insurance policies. Instead, households must purchase



Flooding on Tybee Island after Hurricane Irma.

- Climate change will intensify the effects of flooding across Georgia.
- Even if you do not currently live in an area that FEMA identifies as high flood risk, you should consider purchasing flood insurance.
- The Community Rating System offers communities the opportunity to improve their resilience to flooding and lower rates for flood insurance holders.

separate flood insurance to protect their property. Most Americans get their flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program, or NFIP, which is managed by FEMA.

FEMA develops Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) to delineate areas at high risk of flooding, known as the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA). These maps are based on studies that use highly accurate elevation data and account for watershed characteristics, history of past storms, and dynamics of the water bodies in the area⁴.

Flood insurance is legally required for insurable structures that 1) are located within a mapped SFHA and 2) have a federally backed mortgage. However, property owners are only eligible for flood insurance through the NFIP if their community meets minimum floodplain management criteria. Starting in late 2021, FEMA launched Risk Rating 2.0, restructuring NFIP rates to better reflect an individual property's flood risk. In Georgia, this will translate into 23% of property owners



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is a consortium of 9 colleges and universities addressing what a changing climate means for Georgia and what we can do about it.

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owners receiving a decrease in their monthly premiums, while 66% will see slight increases of less than \$10 per month⁵.

It is important to note that FEMA's Flood Insurance Rate Maps do not assess future risks, including impacts from climate change. In deciding whether to obtain flood insurance, property owners should consider this additional exposure over the lifetime of your mortgage or lease.

Even if you live outside of a high-risk FEMA flood zone, you should still strongly consider flood insurance. FEMA estimates that about 25% of flood claims come from properties outside of a SFHA⁶. Being located outside of the SFHA and away from potential flooding sources often means lower flood insurance rates, making it an affordable way to protect what may be your largest single investment. The current and predicted effects of climate change, along with the frequent flooding of structures outside of SFHAs, emphasizes why property owners should consider the long-term benefits of getting flood insurance before a flood occurs. To learn more, speak with a qualified insurance agent about your specific property.

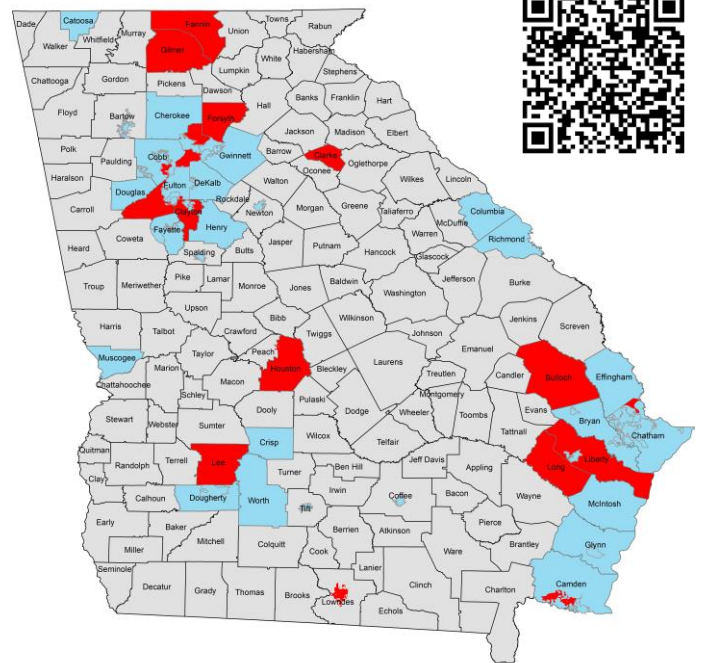
Many people believe that disaster relief is a substitute for flood insurance, but disaster relief assistance is not nearly as effective or beneficial. For an area to receive disaster relief, the President must formally declare a disaster. Many floods are not formally declared a disaster, and so disaster assistance funds cannot be provided to help people recover. Even if a disaster is formally declared, disaster assistance is not guaranteed, will likely pay less than flood insurance would, and is often in the form of a loan that must be repaid with interest. Flood insurance is the best way to ensure you are financially protected in the case of a flood!

The Community Rating System

As climate change alters flooding patterns in Georgia, there are proactive things communities can do to reduce flood risks and flood insurance costs. The

Community Rating System (CRS) is a voluntary incentive program of the NFIP that discounts homeowners' insurance premiums if their local city or county government takes additional steps to manage flooding⁶. Check out if your community participates in CRS on the map.

Community Rating System in Georgia



Is your community part of the CRS?

- Yes
- No (top 50 community in GA for most NFIP policies)
- No (not a top 50 community in GA for most NFIP policies)

Georgia communities participating in CRS⁸ and the non-participating communities who may benefit the most from joining. Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to see a larger map and references for this brief.

Learn More

Look up your property on the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Flood Map Viewer:

<https://map.georgiadfirm.com/>

Get help buying flood insurance:

<https://www.floodsmart.gov/>



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