



AMERICAN CIVITAS

Board: Douglas County, Nevada County Planning Commission

Date: August 12, 2025

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Item	Description	Outcome	Vote Count
1	CALL TO ORDER	Called to Order	N/A
2	PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE	Stated	N/A
3	PUBLIC COMMENT (No Action)	N/A	N/A
4	APPROVAL OF AGENDA	Approved with Consent Item J Pulled	(7-0)
5	APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES	Approved	(7-0)
6	DISCUSSION TO RECOMMEND ADOPTION OF 2025 UPDATE TO THE CARSON RIVER FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT PLAN	Approved	(7-0)
7	CLOSING PUBLIC COMMENT (No Action)	N/A	N/A
8	ADJOURNMENT	Adjourned	N/A

Executive Summary

The Douglas County Planning Commission met at 1:00 PM on August 12, 2025, efficiently addressing key items. No public comments were received during opening or closing periods. The agenda and minutes were unanimously approved with minor corrections. The main focus was recommending the 2025 Carson River Floodplain Management Plan update, presented by the Carson Water Subconservancy District and supported by Courtney Walker, aiming to reduce flood risk across Alpine, Douglas, Carson City, Lyon, Churchill, and Storey Counties with FEMA funding and a 20% insurance discount. Commissioners McKalip, Walters, Hunt, and Collett questioned river dynamics, floodplain definitions, implementation, TDR programs, and irrigation ditch management, receiving detailed responses. John Colbert supported the plan.

Highlights

1. **Carson River Floodplain Management Plan:** The 2025 update, a collaborative effort by CWSD and Douglas County, was presented, emphasizing flood risk reduction across the watershed, supported by FEMA funding and a 20% flood insurance discount. The plan includes 49 suggested actions across eight mitigation categories, updated with low-impact development and barrier-overcoming strategies.

Public Comment (Non-Agenda Items)

Public Comments: None Received.

Approval of Agenda and Previous Minutes

The Douglas County Planning Commission considered the adoption of the agenda and previous meeting minutes, as corrected.

Commissioners' Comments: None received.

Public Comments: None received.

Vote: Vote unanimous to approval agenda and previous minutes.

2025 Update to the Carson River Floodplain Management Plan, presented by the Carson Water Subconservancy District

Debbie Nunn-Ripp from the Carson Water Subconservancy District (CWSD) and Courtney Walker, Douglas County's Stormwater Program Manager, presented the Regional Floodplain Management update. Courtney Walker began by offering a brief introduction, noting that Debbie Nunn-Ripp would deliver the majority of the presentation given that the plan is a regional initiative encompassing Douglas County. Walker provided context on the collaborative relationship between Douglas County and CWSD, describing the latter as a regional agency. She pointed out that two Douglas County commissioners serve on the CWSD board, alongside representatives from Alpine County, Douglas County, Carson City, and Lyon County. Walker shared a personal anecdote, revealing her previous employment with CWSD before joining Douglas County, which has given her a deep understanding and appreciation for their coordination efforts across counties to manage the Carson River watershed regionally. As an example of this collaboration, she cited a coordinated FEMA floodplain map update conducted throughout the watershed from Alpine County to Lyon County, near the Weeks Bridge, a process that spanned approximately 12 to 13 years and was finalized with adoption in June for Douglas County, providing an updated floodplain map currently in use. Walker further explained that CWSD's role as a FEMA Cooperating Technical Partner allows them to secure planning funds, which they allocate based on county requests for studies and planning efforts. This partnership has facilitated several area drainage master plans, including those for Johnson Lane, Ruhenstroth, Fish Springs, and Buckeye Creek, which are comprehensive drainage studies generating capital improvement projects incorporated into the county's stormwater master plan adopted the previous year. She expressed gratitude for CWSD's support in these planning endeavors. Additionally, Walker highlighted the plan's dual focus on river flooding and alluvial fan flooding, noting Douglas County's advantage in lacking heavy development along the river corridor, unlike Reno's Truckee River downtown area. She displayed a photo from the 1997 flood in Carson Valley, emphasizing that the region sustained considerably less damage—\$29 million across five counties—compared to Washoe County's \$500 million, reinforcing the goal to manage and limit development in floodplains thoughtfully.

Debbie Nunn-Ripp stated the plan's main purpose: to reduce flood risk throughout the watershed as a regional entity. She mentioned that the initial version of the plan was created in 2008, with all watershed counties having adopted the 2025 update, and this presentation marked the final request for Douglas County's adoption. Debbie noted that the plan was updated by the Carson River Coalition (CRC), which CWSD facilitates as a stakeholder group rather than a regulatory body, comprising participants such as private individuals, staff from local, state, and federal governments, tribal governments, and citizen-driven groups. The CRC formed in 1998 following the 1997 floods, conducting a 2003 survey and establishing the River Corridor and Floodplain Management Working Group. This group initiated an integrated watershed planning process focusing on long-term resource management and addressing diverse stakeholder needs through regular CRC meetings. She detailed the funding history, noting that the 2008 and 2013 iterations were supported by NDEP through a 319 Clean Water Act grant, while the 2018 and 2025 updates were funded by FEMA. The plans contain suggested actions for counties to reduce risk, document progress, outline future FEMA-funded projects, and serve as a floodplain management guideline, referencing county hazard mitigation plans and master plans in which CWSD participates. She cited a 2015 CRC education group survey, led by Brenda, revealing that most watershed residents had lived there less than five years and were often unaware of flood risks, a key educational focus. She emphasized that flooding, exacerbated by development pressures, becomes costlier post-disaster, advocating for preemptive water management. She noted that elevated roadways and housing paths can alter natural flood routes, using a beautiful Alpine County photo to demonstrate how rivers meander, referring to floodplains and floodways as the meander belt. The plan's regional approach aims to protect floodplains from development and reduce watershed-scale damage, as water disregards county boundaries, making it ecologically and economically sensible. She quoted the National Institute of Building Sciences, stating that every dollar spent on flood mitigation saves seven, with the best mitigation preserving open spaces to avoid sevenfold repair costs. She cited Johnson Lane's flash floods from 14- and 15-minute storms over Hot Springs Mountain, causing \$1 million in county damage plus private sediment issues, underscoring the choice between paying \$1 upfront or \$7 after, excluding human life costs. The plan, initially river-focused, now includes alluvial fans and dry lake beds, where water's unpredictable paths require pre-construction understanding to benefit residents and minimize costs. She stressed a balanced approach, not opposing building but encouraging construction around floodplains, supporting agricultural uses, and balancing property rights with natural resources without conflict. The CRC's main message, reaffirmed post-1997, is to protect floodplains from development, as impacted meander belts lose natural functions, with agricultural fields, golf courses, and open spaces in Carson Valley critical for floodwater attenuation, groundwater recharge, non-point source pollution buffering, and wildlife habitat. Debbie compared 1997 damages (\$29 million watershed-wide vs. \$500 million in Washoe County), noting Washoe's 25-year investments like Wingfield Park to slow water. She outlined eight mitigation strategies and 49 suggested actions, implemented at the county level since CWSD lacks regulatory authority, leveraging federal, state, and local funds. She cited the Stormwater Master Plan as an example, listing actions under the stormwater impact category. Significant 2025 updates include stormwater and Low-Impact Development (LID) solutions, a new section with emergency managers' insights on eliminating internal and external silos for collaborative risk reduction, and a cleaned-up action to buffer natural drainage ways.

Flood Hazard Mitigation Strategies:

1. Protect Natural Floodplain Functions and Values
2. Set Higher Regulatory Standards
3. Collect Flood Data and Maintenance Information
4. Balance Channel Migration and Bank Erosion Monitoring
5. Increase Floodplain and Flood Hazard Outreach & Education
6. Reduce Infrastructure Impact
7. Map and Study Alluvial Fans
8. Minimize stormwater impacts

Commissioner Comments:

Commissioner McKalip inquired about the impact of the river's natural course changes on planning, specifically how a significant storm could alter its path, expressing support for proactive measures and seeking clarification on challenges posed by such shifts. Brenda Hunt responded that the Living River Approach considers the meander belt where the river naturally changes, recommending a buffer zone of at least 50 feet from the river's edge to avoid building in high-risk areas, and suggested a two-pronged strategy: protecting certain lands from development where flood or river movement cannot be controlled, and constructing detention basins in other areas to contain water, noting collaboration with the Carson Valley Conservation District for strategic bank stabilization to protect infrastructure like houses, bridges, and roads, though acknowledging the river's movement cannot be fully prevented in some locations. Commissioner Walters requested information on Appendix E regarding county progress reports, seeking updates on Douglas County's implementation and compliance with the plan, and questioned the absence of this appendix in the provided materials.

Commissioner McKalip inquired about the impact of the river's natural course changes on planning, specifically questioning how a significant storm could alter its path and whether this poses a challenge, while expressing support for proactive measures. Brenda Hunt responded that the Living River Approach considers the meander belt where the river naturally changes, recommending a buffer zone of at least 50 feet from the river's edge to avoid building in high-risk areas, and proposed a two-pronged strategy: protecting certain lands from development where flood or river movement cannot be controlled, and constructing detention basins in other areas to contain water, noting collaboration with the Carson Valley Conservation District for strategic bank stabilization to protect infrastructure like houses, bridges, and roads, though acknowledging the river's movement cannot be fully prevented in some locations.

Commissioner Lile posed questions about floodplains, asking how they are established—whether by FEMA maps, historical water flow patterns, or other methods—and sought clarification from Courtney Walker on Douglas County's approach to delineating areas subject to the plan's recommendations. Debbie Neddenriep explained that floodplains are primarily defined by FEMA as the area inundated by a 1% annual chance storm, known as the regulatory floodplain for rivers like the Carson River, while area drainage master plans also consider 25- and 100-year storms, noting that sediment-filled flash flood channels can turn even a 25-year storm into a disaster; Courtney Walker added that floodplains serve as an insurance tool for FEMA's 100-year storm extent, but

Douglas County also assesses smaller events like six inches of water for mitigation projects, allowing community-defined floodplains based on local issues.

Commissioner St. John further requested information on Appendix E regarding county progress reports, seeking updates on Douglas County's implementation and compliance with the plan, and expressed confusion over its absence from the agenda materials. Courtney Walker clarified that the attachment included the plan but omitted the five or six appendices, including Appendix E, which contains county staff progress reports from 2023 and 2024, accessible via a link on cwsd.org under floodplain management and hazard plans, offering to email the link, though the Chair deferred further discussion to a future meeting as it was not part of the current agenda item.

Commissioner Walder praised the plan as amazing with no criticism, highlighted the value of the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program in aligning with floodplain conservation by redirecting development to suitable areas, and cited Carson City's effective use of golf courses and open spaces that close during floods as a community draw, responding to a suggestion that Carson City is not superior.

Commissioner Clutts raised concerns about irrigation ditch management, questioning the absence of recommendations for its impact on water diversion, particularly in the western valley where development on ditches without water rights leads to unmaintained ditches diverting water from agricultural lands during runoff or flash floods. Courtney Walker noted this issue is addressed in the separate Stormwater Master Plan, involving coordination with the agricultural community for ditch maintenance across roads and allowing land entry if needed, but Collett emphasized the problem lies with non-rancher property owners, proposing enforcement or monitoring. Brenda Hunt suggested a solution similar to weed management, where the state issues warnings and the county removes weeds with billing, recommending collaboration with the federal watermaster and conservation districts to educate non-rancher property owners who may not understand their role in the system.

Commissioner Casey asked an additional question about the hierarchy, confirming that the Carson River Floodplain Management Plan informs the Douglas County Stormwater Master Plan, where Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs) are detailed, and sought Courtney Walker's opinion on whether these CIPs address the master plan's goals, receiving an affirmative response.

Public Comment: John Colbert supported the plan, noting his involvement with the Carson River Coalition since 1998, highlighting floodplain management as the main message from stakeholder processes, and praising Douglas County for pursuing floodplain management goals, including a master plan element for flooding and consistent adoption since 2008.

Vote: Unanimous (7-0) approval.

Closing Public Comments (Non-Agenda Items)

Public Comments: None received.

Meeting Adjourned.