



FLOODING IN IOWA: A Responsible Response

Second in a series

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Under Water — Not Under the Radar

Census Data Offer Perspective on Cedar Rapids Flooding: Poor Hit Hardest

The profound effects of the summer floods on many households, businesses, towns and farmlands have rippled across Iowa's overall economy, placing new responsibilities on state government for both immediate relief and long-term rebuilding.

Two months later, the full impact of the flood is only beginning to emerge. Clearly, the largest impact, geographically and in terms of population, has been in Cedar Rapids, affecting most residents of Iowa's second-largest city and surrounding Linn County.

The impact extends well beyond owners of flooded homes or businesses, to other area residents and employees of those businesses. Many residents experienced temporary evacuations and disruptions, including water damage in basements, even if their homes were not within flooded areas. Other residents have pitched in by aiding and even temporarily housing direct victims of flooding; most residents have friends or relatives who have been affected.

Census data offer a statistical picture of those whose residences were flooded. Drawing upon census block group data and maps of the flooded area of Cedar Rapids, it is possible to provide broad estimates of the numbers of residents affected and basic background information about them (see appendix for methodology). This exercise presents a critical observation: Those directly affected by flooding in Cedar Rapids live and work in areas that are substantially poorer than most of their community and the state.

Early reports indicated as many as 25,000 Cedar Rapids residents were evacuated and 7,000 residents had their homes flooded. As Table 1 shows, however, it is likely that at least 1 in 10 Cedar Rapids residents, over 12,000 in all – as well as most downtown businesses and commercial areas – were actual flood victims. This includes over 3,000 children, two-thirds of whom are school-aged, many needing to adjust to new schools, classrooms and classmates when school commences this fall. For comparison purposes, Table 1 shows select demographic characteristics of the flood-victim population and of Cedar Rapids, Linn County and the state as a whole.

While Cedar Rapids and Linn County are more prosperous than the state as a whole – as measured by median family income, housing value and proportion of both residents and children in poverty – the same cannot be said of the flooded areas.

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Table 1. Cedar Rapids Resident and Household Flood Estimates

	Cedar Rapids Flood Area (e)	Cedar Rapids	Linn County	Iowa
Individuals	12,180	120,758	191,701	2,926,324
Families	2,774	30,874	50,335	769,684
Children	3,020	29,553	48,822	738,638
Median Family Income	\$41,870	\$54,286	\$56,494	\$48,004
Median Housing Value	\$67,364	\$92,900	\$97,200	\$82,100
Median Rent	\$ 402	\$ 447	\$ 435	\$ 383
% Owner-Occupied Housing	56.2%	69.0%	72.7%	72.3%
Poverty Rate	12.9%	7.3%	6.3%	8.8%
Child Poverty Rate	15.4%	9.1%	8.0%	10.7%

Source: Census block group data, 2000 U.S. Census

The median family income in the flooded neighborhoods was only three-quarters (74 percent) of Linn County's median income and 87 percent of the state median. For housing, median values were even less representative at 69 percent of the county and 82 percent of the state. Perhaps most pronounced, poverty rates in the flooded areas were more than double that of the county as a whole (104 percent higher), and substantially higher than that for the state (47 percent higher). Consistent with county and state data, child poverty rates were significantly above poverty rates for the population as a whole, with over 1 in 7 children affected by the flood living under the poverty level (about \$16,700 for a family of four, 1999).

Finally, flood victims were more likely to be renters than in Linn County or the state, but with median rental costs in the remaining parts of Linn County significantly higher than in the flooded area. Addressing housing needs is a first priority in responding to the flood, and affordable housing options, both for rent and purchase, is likely to be limited for many by both cost and availability.

The flooded area also had a much higher relative share of Cedar Rapids' and Linn County's African-American, Hispanic and other minority populations. Overall, 12.4 percent of the residents in the flooded areas were minorities (not white, non-Hispanic), compared with 6.9 percent of Linn County residents and 7.4 percent of the Iowa population.

The implications of this data are that particular efforts are likely to be needed in meeting basic needs and offering emergency relief to the affected population, as well as recognizing that existing housing alternatives in the rest of Cedar Rapids may currently be beyond these families' means, even without further financial damage resulting from the flooding. Similarly, rebuilding strategies must recognize the starting point for these residents, and go extra steps to ensure that they are represented in the rebuilding process.

Methodological Appendix

The Iowa Fiscal Partnership made use of available maps of the flooded Cedar Rapids and juxtaposed the census block groups onto that flood area in order to get an approximate fit that could relate back to census data. IFP then estimated the percentage of block tracks and block groups that were part of the flooded area, as follows:

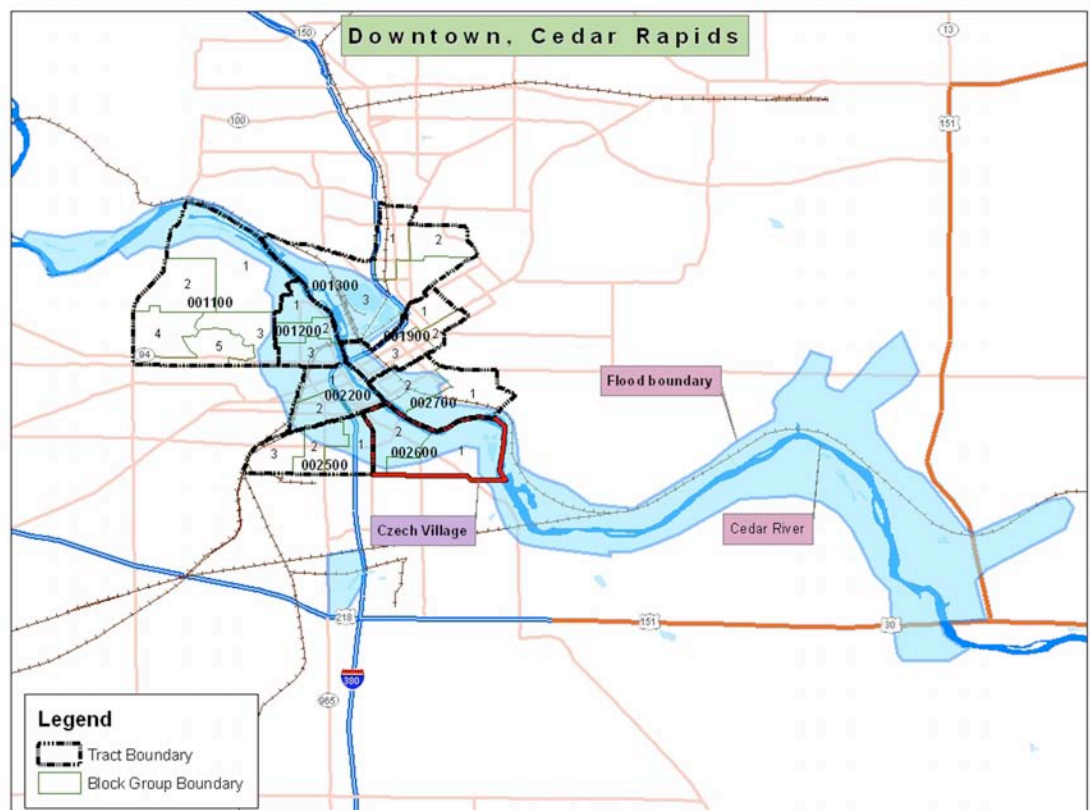
- Census tract 11 (1/2 of block group 1)
- Census tract 12 (all)
- Census tract 13 (1/2 of block group 3)
- Census tract 19 (1/4 of block group 3)
- Census tract 22 (all)
- Census tract 25 (1/2 of block groups 1 and 2)
- Census tract 26 (all of block group 2 and _ of block group 1)
- Census tract 27 (all of block group 2 and _ of block group 1)

IFP then drew from the 1999 census available demographic data at the block-group level to complete the report, comparing the estimated affected flood area data with Cedar Rapids, Linn County and state data. In making estimates, the median figures are really means of the medians for the individual block groups.

While this estimation is subject to numerous limitations (using rough calculations for the percentage of the block group affected and assuming different parts of the block group had similar demographic characteristics, using census data from the 2000 census, which does not reflect growth or change), it provides a ballpark estimate of those affected and the data comparing them with the city, county and state are drawn from the same source. In the long term, it should be possible to get more detailed and accurate

information from assessor data regarding housing stock, but the census still represents the best available data source for the other information contained in this report.

The map of the flooded areas with the census block groups juxtaposed is shown at right.



***GUIDING PRINCIPLES
RESPONSES TO DISASTERS NEED TO BE:***

TIMELY

- Focused relief efforts need to occur when people are experiencing the disruptions and have immediate need for relief (recognizing the phases that families are likely to experience in dealing with loss)
- Rebuilding opportunities need to be presented when there is a readiness and capacity to take advantage of the opportunity to rebuild

TARGETED

- Rebuilding efforts need to be focused upon those impacted by the disaster, with a particular emphasis upon those for whom rebuilding will be most problematic (low-income and limited resource families)
- Rebuilding efforts need to involve those impacted in the planning and, to the extent possible, make use of their own skills and talents in rebuilding
- Rebuilding efforts need to pay attention to 21st century demands and pay particular attention to “green” strategies and to inclusion in responding to an increasingly diverse Iowa population

TRANSITIONAL

- Although rebuilding efforts will take years, most policies should be designed as temporary and not permanent ones
- Accountability for results requires that clear, time-specific goals and objectives be established for investments

Iowa Fiscal Partnership

The Iowa Fiscal Partnership is a joint initiative of the Iowa Policy Project and the Child & Family Policy Center, two nonprofit, nonpartisan Iowa-based organizations that cooperate in analysis of tax policy and budget issues facing Iowans. IFP reports are available on the web at <http://www.iowafiscal.org>.

The Iowa Fiscal Partnership is part of the State Fiscal Analysis Initiative, a network of state-level organizations and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities to promote sound fiscal policy analysis. IFP work is supported by the Stoneman Family Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.