

## County and city officials mull flood district funding for cities

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*Officials from the city and county discussed how funding should be distributed from the County Flood Control District at the Museum of Northern Arizona Tuesday.*

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After clashing over funding from the Coconino County Flood Control District earlier this year, officials with the county and its cities sat down Tuesday to discuss the district's funding priorities and how some of that money should be distributed to the cities.

The disagreement arose in 2018 when the county began taxing all residents of Coconino County, including those living in cities that have opted to manage their own flood plains.

The county has prioritized the flood district money going to what county supervisors see as the largest flood threat to the region: overgrown forests at risk of wildfires that lead to post-fire floods.

Most recently, the district is funding a project to do forest restoration work on steep slopes above Williams on Bill Williams Mountain.

But with citizens of Flagstaff now being taxed, Flagstaff officials have argued some of that money should be coming back to the city to address city-specific flood issues -- case in point, Flagstaff's Rio de Flag flood control project, and councilmembers have floated the possibility of funding that in part with county flood district money.

Flagstaff Mayor Coral Evans said she understands why the county has chosen to prioritize forest restoration projects, but she said cities have traditional flooding projects that need money as well.

“Without a doubt we see the devastating flooding that can happen because of forest fires. We also have traditional flooding issues in our cities and towns,” Evans said. “How do we fund these really big infrastructure problems as a county?”

Evans added she thinks it's a problem that the same pool of money used to fund forest restoration is funding flood control projects.

As the county was developing the district's budget for 2020 earlier this year, Evans and the mayors of four other cities from across the county sent the Board of Supervisors a letter saying they felt the county's method of choosing projects to fund was not transparent and that cities were not getting a share of the money.

County Supervisor Art Babbott sent a letter in response writing that the county legally has no responsibility to give cities a portion of the flood district's money, unless a city wants the county to manage their floodplain.

Nonetheless, the county is looking at distributing some amount of the funding back to cities. The question is how the money should be distributed, and how much.

During the flood district's most recent budget process, the amount floated for distribution between the cities was \$500,000. But the county decided against including that in the district's 2020 budget in part because there was disagreement in how to distribute it, said County Flood District Director Lucinda Andreani.

On Tuesday, county supervisors and city officials from Flagstaff, Sedona, Page, Williams and Fredonia discussed if money should be allocated at a set amount directly to cities or if the county should distribute funds in a competitive process.

Board of Supervisors chair Lena Fowler also wondered if the flood district's tax rate should be higher than it is, thus generating more money for projects.

The exact amount that should be cut out of the district's funds and sent to cities was not discussed Tuesday, but after the meeting, Evans said she thinks it should be more than the \$500,000 that the county had originally been considering.

Still, Andreani said she believes the conversation they are having might be different if the monsoon season had brought more rain and caused more flooding off of the Museum Fire burn scar, suggesting that if the area had seen more flooding, cities might be pushing for more forest restoration funding rather than trying to get more money for individual projects.

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