



Governor signs law defining flood plain

By [STEVE WHITWORTH](#)

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Gov. Pat Quinn has signed into law a bill that supporters say protects the interests of people and businesses in the American Bottom by defining what constitutes a 100-year flood plain.

On Thursday, Quinn signed Senate Bill 2556, which defines the term "100-year flood plain" in several state statutes and adds certain safeguards against flooding for critical facilities. The bill became law with the governor's signature.

State Sen. William Haine, D-Alton, one of the sponsors of SB 2556, said the measure is "a big bill for us.

"It defines a flood plain," he said. "It says if we have federal levees, which we have, and we have a flood protection district, which we have because of a previous bill two years ago, and are engaged in the process of reconstruction of our levees to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers standards, and we have Federal Emergency Management Agency maps saying we are meeting those guidelines - if all those conditions are met - then we are not in a 100-year flood plain in the bottomland."

Supporters said the bill, which passed unanimously in the Illinois Senate earlier this year, was designed to fix what was a practical problem with an executive order issued by then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich in 2006, which decreed that "critical facilities" could not be built in a 100-year flood plain. Haine said such facilities could include roads, bridges, police stations and a wide range of other public and private facilities and programs.

Haine said he sponsored the measure after being approached by members of the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois who were concerned about how possible changes in local flood protection maps might inhibit the ability of businesses to repair or expand facilities. The federal government is considering changes that could decertify the levee system, which some fear could have a negative impact on flood insurance rates and the ability to get building permits.

The Alton Democrat said the impetus for the bill came when an assisted care center in Caseyville was denied permit by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources because it was considered to be in the American Bottom's 100-year flood plain.

Haine noted that SB 2556 is the fourth bill having to do with the Metro East's levees and their reconstruction that he has gotten passed in the last couple of years. The bill applies only to Madison, St. Clair and Monroe counties.

"It completes the matrix that the Legislature has established for the Metro East," he said. "It assures the levee will be repaired and brought up to current design standards. It assures future economic development, ranging from the Granite City Steel mill all the way down to St. Clair County. If any conditions change, we could be in a flood plain, but if we proceed, then our economic development will be assured."

Haine said the new law will ensure that such development projects as ConocoPhillips' expansion of its Wood River Refinery in Roxana will continue, as well as the expansion of other businesses and industries, while ensuring that job opportunities are not lost because of a "bureaucratic mistake," as happened in the case of the assisted care center in Caseyville.

"It's an important bill that just assures the definitions are clear, so there is not a bureaucratic mistake that could prevent a business from expanding or could cause a resident to pay exorbitant sums in flood insurance," Hain said.

Telegraph City Editor Dennis Grubaugh contributed some information for this article.

swhitworth@thetelegraph.com

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