

## **Flood plain development**

<http://www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/stories.nsf/News/Editorial+%2F+Commentary/B96017AFDCD50BC886256DA900056A22?OpenDocument&Headline=Letters+to+the+editor&highlight=2%2Cnew%2Cmadrid>

The true question raised by building in vulnerable flood plains is not whether to have economic development, but where. Those who push federal subsidies want taxpayers to assume that if Wal-Mart does not build a store in the flood plain, it will not find a place anywhere else. Just driving around tells us otherwise.

True, builders often find flat flood plains a little easier to build in, but only if taxpayers pick up much of the costs of building levees and bailing out businesses after floods. As environmentalists, we support economic development but oppose docking taxpayers to subsidize building in risky and environmentally sensitive areas.

In his recent commentary, Sen. Jim Talent correctly points out that a few places already have so much infrastructure that bigger levees may be the only answer. But the *Post-Dispatch's* recent flood plain series shows that most taxpayer money is foolishly encouraging new building, not protecting the old.

The St. John's Bayou/New Madrid Floodway project in southeastern Missouri provides a perfect example of what not to do. Boosters sold this \$85 million project on the grounds that it would stop flooding in East Prairie, a poor town that badly needs flood control. But the project does almost nothing for East Prairie. It floods once every 10 years today and will still flood once every 10 years even after the project is built, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Corps agrees the project will generate no economic development in East Prairie, but instead boosts production of soybeans and corn that are already in surplus. That seems bizarre since the government is also spending billions of dollars to take millions of acres of cropland out of production to lower surpluses and boost prices.

According to the Corps, an alternative \$11 million project would largely eliminate flooding in East Prairie and boost economic development.

We strongly support it. Like an alternative East Prairie project, alternative flood plain policies would be better, cheaper, safer, good for the environment, and honest with taxpayers.

### **Tim Searchinger**

Senior Attorney,  
Environmental Defense