The Rio de Flag is Flagstaff’s river. The Rio flows through the Southside Neighborhood, a historic area home to many underprivileged minority peoples, many of which came to Flagstaff to be apart of the booming lumber industry. The Southside has faced the dangers of flooding since the late 1800s and remains in a floodplain today.

**Why is this Important?**

1. The community is at risk of catastrophic flood, which is a threat to life, health, and safety.
2. Estimated $916M in flood damage and over 1,500 structures impacted.
3. The floodplain regulations and mandatory flood insurance make the area expensive to renovate and to own a home.

**Key Terms**

**Rio de Flag** - Flagstaff’s river that flows from the San Francisco Peaks south through Flagstaff, leaving town east via Doney Park.

**Southside Neighborhood** - Located south of downtown and north of NAU. Historically, a segregated neighborhood that was home to many Black, Latinx, Basque, Asian, and Native Peoples who worked at the lumber yards, railroads, and owned businesses.

**Floodplain** - An area prone to flooding that is low-lying and adjacent to a river. Structures in the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) federally-designated floodplain require flood insurance.

**100 Year Flood** - A flood that has a 1% chance of occurring in any given year.

**Children in the 1960’s play next to the Rio de Flag in the Southside.**

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**Key Terms**

- **Gentrification** - The rapid change of low income neighborhood and working-class areas of the central city into affluent middle-class residential use.
- **Environmental Justice** - The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.
- **Watershed** - A watershed is the area of land where all of the water that falls in it and drains off of it goes to a common outlet (or river); the Rio de Flag watershed is 200-square miles in size.

**Residential flooding in the Southside, Flagstaff, 1993.**

“The flood zone makes it more expensive to purchase home insurance, to make repairs, and to build affordable housing—but once the river is re-channeled to protect against floods, the land and housing in Southside will increase in value, and possibly lead to gentrification and removal of longtime residents who have doggedly held onto homes built by their parents and grandparents, but which are now in need of repair and renovation.”

- Dr. Ricardo Guthrie

**Citations**

8. Map on reverse created and designed by Chelsea Silva, 2018.
1888-1993 - The Rio de Flag floods every 1-15 years

1890s - the Rio de Flag was rerouted to prevent flooding north of the railroad tracks

1903 - A major flood inundated downtown Flagstaff and the Southside with 3-5 feet of water

1927 - The South Dunbar School opens as a segregated school for African Americans

1983 - FEMA declares that the Southside lies in a federal floodplain

1952 - Flagstaff schools desegregated 2 years before the landmark case Brown vs. the Board of Education

2000 - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) feasibility report for the Rio de Flag is completed; Rio de Flag Flood Control Project authorized

2007 - Home to the Dunbar School until it closed in 1952, the Murdoch “School” reopens as a community center

2010 - South Beaver Elementary closes. It was historically segregated for Hispanic students and later African American students after the Dunbar School closed.

2014 - The Basque Tourist Home reopens and the Handball court is partially restored

2017 - City of Flag received $1 million to complete Flood Control Project design

Additional maps and resources at friendsoftheriodeflag.org