

Reinvesting in America's Watersheds: A Special Report

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For 50 years, America's small upstream dams have provided for flood protection, municipal water supplies, wildlife habitat, water for livestock, and recreational opportunities. But time has taken its toll. Many of the nation's dams, including those in Alabama, are in desperate need of repair. If problems are not corrected, the consequences are grave—to both people and the environment. Funding is needed, and now is the time to act.



Across the Nation...

More than 600 dams need to be rebuilt and upgraded to ensure the safety and health of those downstream. In addition, another 1,500 dams need repairs so they can continue to provide flood control, municipal water supplies, recreational activities, water for livestock, and wildlife habitat. An estimated \$540 million is needed to rehabilitate these dams.



Small watershed projects

Ten thousand dams built under Small Watershed Programs make up a \$9 billion infrastructure. These dams provide more than \$800 million in benefits annually. The majority of these dams were built for a 50-year lifespan and some have already or soon will reach that mark. Funds for building these dams have come from four programs: Flood Control Act of 1944 (PL-78-534); Pilot Watershed Program; Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1953 (PL 83-566); and Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D).

In Alabama...

Alabama has 108 small upstream dams constructed in the last 39 years. These structures are extremely important to Alabama's rural economy and also provide many benefits to the majority of Alabama residents.



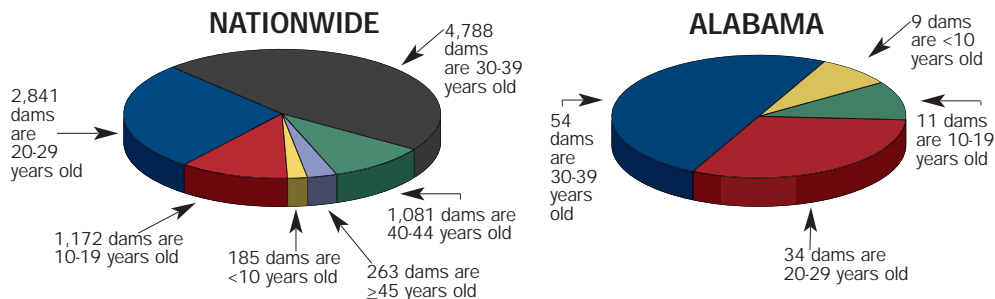
Alabama has 27 watershed projects with 108 dams constructed

These dams protect many communities and 500,000 acres of farmland. They also reduce damages to 375 bridges and 600 miles of roads with benefits exceeding \$9 million annually. In addition to flood protection, these dams provide numerous other benefits such as improved water quality, water supply, recreation, wildlife enhancement, and improved quality of life for residents.

Many of the 108 dams are reaching the end of their 50-year design life. Seventy-one dams are in need of restoration to maintain safe structures and extend their useful life. Twenty of these structures built to protect agricultural lands now have homes or other structures built downstream. Failure of these dams would result in

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Our Aging Dams



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flash flooding, loss of life, and millions of dollars in property damage. Rehabilitation of these 71 dams is estimated to cost \$24 million. Local conservation districts have maintained the dams, but do not have the funds for major repairs.

Many of the older dams have structural components which have significant deterioration. This includes deteriorating concrete and steel components. Twenty-one sites have antiquated gates which are severely rusted. Most are inoperable, which would make draining the impoundment impossible in case of an emergency.

A Case Study...

Little New River Watershed is typical of the older watersheds in Alabama. The local sponsors, assisted by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, built three dams for flood control and sediment reduction in 1960. These were built under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL-566) and provide flood and sediment reduction benefits to 1,127 acres plus several roads and bridges.

The dams are approaching the end of their 50-year economic life. The dams are in need of repair and restoration of pipe spillway structures to maintain their integrity and function. They also need upgrading due to downstream improvements built since the dams were constructed. Two sites have gates that are inoperable. This increases the concern over safety of these dams since they could not be drained in the event of an emergency.

Little New River Watershed is located in rural Marion County, Alabama. The county has limited financial resources and does not have the funds to make repairs and upgrades to the watershed dams.



THE PROBLEMS. Top: A deteriorating gate will not enable the dam to be drained in an emergency.

WHY REPAIR THE DAMS? Left: Children and adults depend on clean drinking water. The dams also provide recreational activities and flood protection.

A Call to Action in Alabama**20**

dams need to be rebuilt and upgraded to protect life and property in downstream areas

51

dams need repairs to safeguard municipal water supplies, provide flood control, and protect natural resources

\$24 million

is needed to rehabilitate those dams to protect people and natural resources