

Reinvesting in America's Watersheds: A Special Report

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DAMS IN DANGER PEOPLE AT RISK?

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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 dams, including those in Wisconsin, are in desperate need of repair. If problems are not corrected, the consequences are grave—to both humans 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 Wisconsin...

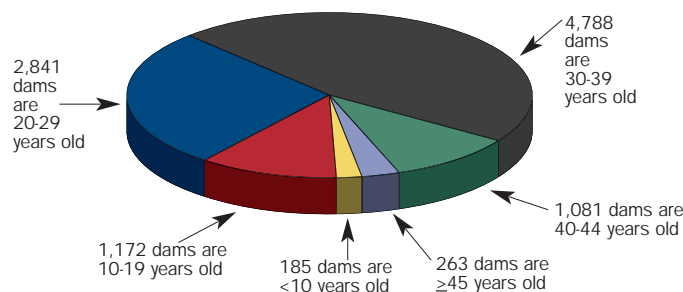
Eighty-three dams have become part of Wisconsin's landscape through the PL-566 Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention program. More than half of these dams need repairs that, if not corrected, will result in significant adverse environmental, economic, and social impacts. Consider that:



Wisconsin's small watershed projects with dams

- At least \$2 million is needed to rehabilitate the dams.
- The dams were built to protect agricultural lands. Human health and safety concerns now exist downstream of 12 dams as a result of residential and commercial development.
- Studies are needed on an additional 41 dams to determine the extent to which other homes and businesses could be in harm's way.
- Eighty-two of the dams are between 20 and 39 years old. Many of these dams will reach the end of their useful life within 15 years.

Our Nation's Aging Dams



Wisconsin's Unique Problems

Wisconsin's severe winters and temperature fluctuations have taken their toll on 15 dams in the state. The situation is as follows:

- The freezing and thawing of water in the soil have caused sections of the spillway outlet pipes to pull apart. The opening allows sediment to enter the pipe.
- Left unrepaired, the downstream embankment will erode and the dam could fail.
- Flood control and recreational benefits now taken for granted would be lost. Small communities, roads, and bridges in the downstream path of the unleashed water could sustain severe flood damages.

The local government sponsors of these dams have been diligent in their responsibilities to inspect and maintain them. Unfortunately, the high cost of repairing the dams can overwhelm county budgets. The county sponsors are limited in the amount they can levy in taxes, which in turn limits their ability to address the problem.

If the situation is ignored, there will be a greater cost to human life and property. Recreational activities and wildlife will also suffer.

The cost to repair a dam after it fails could be up to 100 times the cost to make preventative repairs now. For this reason, action must be taken now to protect and extend this investment in Wisconsin's small watershed projects.



THE PROBLEMS. Top: Dam blowout of Coon Creek #41. Bottom left: Freeze-thaw damage to the concrete cradle which supports the pipe. Joint separation can be seen at the top of the photo. This is at Plum Creek #19 in Pierce County. Bottom right: At Alma Mill Creek Structure #2 in Buffalo County, soil from the dam has collapsed through the gap in the pipe. The weakened dam is more vulnerable to failure in heavy rains.

An Action Alert in Wisconsin

12

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

30

dams need repairs to provide flood control and protect natural resources

\$2 million

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