

# THE CASE FOR REINVESTING IN BROOME COUNTY'S WATERSHEDS

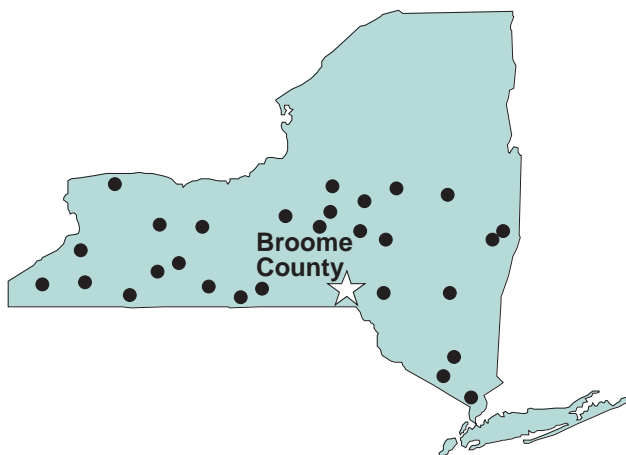


**THE SITUATION: DAMS THAT HAVE PROTECTED BROOME COUNTY'S TOWNS FROM THREE MAJOR**

**FLOODS DURING THE PAST 25 YEARS ARE SLOWLY DETERIORATING.**

Over the past 35 years in Broome County the Natural Resources Conservation Service, with the assistance of county, state and local government has spent nearly \$25 million dollars to implement flood control projects above the cities of Binghamton, Johnson City, and the Villages of Maine, Deposit and the Town of Union. Since 1972, three major flood events have been experienced by these communities with the result that little measurable damage occurred.

The oldest of these dams is now over 30 years old. Sedimentation is significantly affecting the ability of some of these dams to perform the basic function for which they were designed: to impound floodwater. The city of Binghamton spent nearly \$35,000 to excavate sediment from behind two of their sites within the past 5 years. Lack of funding allowed them to remove only half of the material at the most affected site. Also, components that were installed 35 years ago are now deteriorating. Something must be done now.



*Broome County is home to the state's fifth largest metropolitan area, the city of Binghamton. It also is home to five planned and constructed PL- 566 Projects - Little Choconut-Finch-Hollow, Patterson-Brixius, Nanticoke, Brandywine, and Deposit Watersheds.*



## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

- Size: 143,000 acres
- Number of dams: 21
- Project start: 1964
- Project end: 1995
- Primary purpose: flood control, wildlife habitat



## PARTNERS

- Broome County
- Broome, Delaware and Tioga County Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- State of New York
- Village of Deposit
- Delaware County Board of Supervisors
- Tioga County
- New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation
- United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service

*"These projects have been one of the best investments and cooperative efforts ever undertaken by county and local governments."*

**Bill Barber**  
**Deputy County Executive, Broome County**



## BENEFITS

Flood control has been the major benefit and purpose of the structures that have been constructed. Average annual flood damages to the city of Binghamton, and surrounding communities had totaled \$1.7 million before any of the projects were implemented. Post project flood damages have been virtually non-existent.

The five watershed projects in Broome County accrue a total of \$1.3 million in quantifiable benefits every year. Since completion of construction, more than \$30 million of benefits can be attributed to the various components that make up each of the five watersheds. This means that to date, we have accrued \$1.25 in benefits for every dollar invested, but these tangible benefits represent only a portion of the actual benefits accrued to these projects.

A major unanticipated benefit that these sites have produced has come from a recreational standpoint. When the structures were originally constructed, the adjacent landscape was rural with very few homes, businesses, or infrastructure surrounding them. Over the past three decades urban sprawl has completely surrounded many of these dams with the construction of single and multi-family housing, schools, churches, and retail outlets. The demand for "open space" has increased dramatically and as a result parks, ball fields, walkways, and nature centers have sprouted in the emergency spillways and downstream floodplain areas. Many more have been planned. Recreational use is such an important issue that jurisdiction for the maintenance and future development of these projects has been given to the Broome County Department of Parks and Recreation.

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*"There are not many places to fish and experience wildlife habitat as we have seen with these dams in highly urbanized area...these structures open up these areas for those kinds of activities."*

**Ed Hart**  
Broome Co. Commissioner of Parks and Recreation

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## FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The need for more recreational facilities exists with a very real opportunity for the continued development of parks, beaches, camping areas and athletic fields at all of the structures that are presently constructed.



*Before the dams in Broome County were built, Nanticoke Creek would spill out into West Corners, causing much damage.*



## STATE PERSPECTIVE

In New York State, there are 29 PL-566 watershed projects and 51 dams that provide flood control benefits. Only 7 of those 51 dams were designed with other purposes such as habitat or recreation. That did not inhibit the local sponsors and residents from seeing the other opportunities these structures could provide.

Fishing, hiking, bird watching, and open space enjoyment are just a few of the benefits which do not have a dollar value attached. Some of these dams are approaching the end of their designed life and the valuable benefits they currently provide will be reduced or lost.

Although NRCS and sponsors still have several dams to construct in the state, we must realize that just like roads and bridges, the dams will all eventually reach the end of their designed life.

Just as the leaders of the 1940s and 1950s had the vision to anticipate the need for flood control, we must now foresee the need to keep these projects functioning both for today and the future.

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*"(Villages of) Walton and Fleischmanns got killed during the Storm of '96...we suffered nothing. They called and asked me how we did it."*

**Pete Hemstead**  
Chairman of the Deposit Watershed  
Steering Committee

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