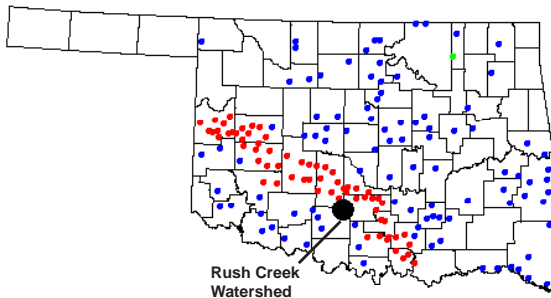


Reinvesting in the Rush Creek Watershed



The Situation: End of Life For Dams is Near. Flood Prevention and Erosion Control Ability Will be Lost.

The small watershed program in Oklahoma began in 1948 with the construction of the first upstream flood control dam in the nation. In 1959 the first dam in the Rush Creek Watershed was completed. Sediment deposition in the pools of some of these dams has been more rapid than the original planners estimated due to unanticipated landuse changes. One site has completely filled with sediment and needs immediate attention.



Rush Creek Watershed is one of 131 approved watersheds in Oklahoma. More than 2000 watershed dams have been built in Oklahoma, many of which will reach the end of their life within the next 10 years.

The Bottom Line:

The cost of losing this important infrastructure far exceeds the cost associated with reinvesting in existing watershed projects: protecting planned benefits, enhancing incidental benefits, and taking advantage of opportunities that improved watershed dams could offer.

"My flood control lake has provided me countless hours of enjoyment." **Steve Jones, landowner.**

"My site has increased the value of my property." **Jerry Rowell, landowner.**

Protecting Oklahoma's Watersheds



"Watersheds have enabled many landowners to turn flood plagued areas into top quality farmland".-**Melvin Heath, Chairman, Grady County CD**



Rush Creek Watershed Project Statistics:

- ◆ **Size:** Covers 191,577 acres in Grady, Garvin, and Stephen Counties.
- ◆ **Number of dams:** 55
- ◆ **Project start:** Construction began in 1959.
- ◆ **Project end:** Last dam built in 1986.
- ◆ **Primary purpose:** Control gully erosion, floods, and protect croplands from erosion.
- ◆ **Population served:** 3500 people in the local area plus tourists and others for recreation.



Sponsors:

- ◆ Grady County Conservation District
- ◆ Garvin County Conservation District
- ◆ Stephens County Conservation District
- ◆ City of Marlow

"My watershed lake gives me a constant source of water even during the dry years." **Jim Browning, landowner.**



An Investment Worth Protecting

Through Public Law 534, Congress invested \$15.6 million (current dollars) in the construction of the Rush Creek Watershed Project. The local sponsors and landowners have contributed \$2 million in conservation practices, and maintaining the project dams for the past 39 years. Local people are continuing to use their own tax funds to operate and maintain the projects.

The monetary benefits of the project have exceeded the project costs at the rate of \$3 dollars of benefits for every \$1 of cost. Incidental benefits of the flood control dams and associated reservoirs have resulted in positive impacts for the watershed.

- ◆ Over 350 miles of road and 15 miles of railroad are safer and longer lasting.
- ◆ Regional recreation
- ◆ Revenue from camping, boating, and fishing permits
- ◆ Fish and wildlife habitat
- ◆ Supplemental water supply for city of Marlow



Rush Creek Site 45 in 1980



Rush Creek Site 45 in 1997

“My watershed lake seems to be a magnet for wildlife.” **-Ron Toby**



New Opportunities

The Rush Creek Watershed was undertaken by the local community to reduce damages from severe gully-ing and flash flooding. The project has protected farm-lands, roads, bridges, and other community assets. The need to prevent floods, stop severe gully erosion, protect roads and other community facilities is as important today as it was 39 years ago.

In addition to continued long-standing benefits, a mix of upgrading opportunities could offer new benefits to the community. More recreation, rural fire protection, new water supplies, cleaner water, more wildlife, and a more diversified, environmentally healthy countryside.

“The flood control lake enables me to irrigate my cotton and peanuts.” **-Al Corley, landowner.**



Statewide Perspective on Oklahoma’s Aging Watershed Dams

Rush Creek is one of 131 Oklahoma watersheds completed or still under construction. These combined projects represent a \$2 billion infrastructure in Oklahoma. Local project sponsors have invested over 25 percent of the costs.

More than 2000 dams have been built as part of these projects since 1948. They have controlled gullies and reduced local flash flooding. Most were designed with a useful life of 50 years, meaning they are likely to fill with sediment over that period of time.

Only a small number of these dams are in critical need of rebuilding or repair at this time, but many will soon reach their 50-year lifespan. An organized approach is needed to analyze the extent of repair and rebuilding needed, to prioritize those with the greatest need, and to make necessary repairs and improvements.