

THE CASE FOR REINVESTING IN THE SALT CREEK AND LATERALS WATERSHED

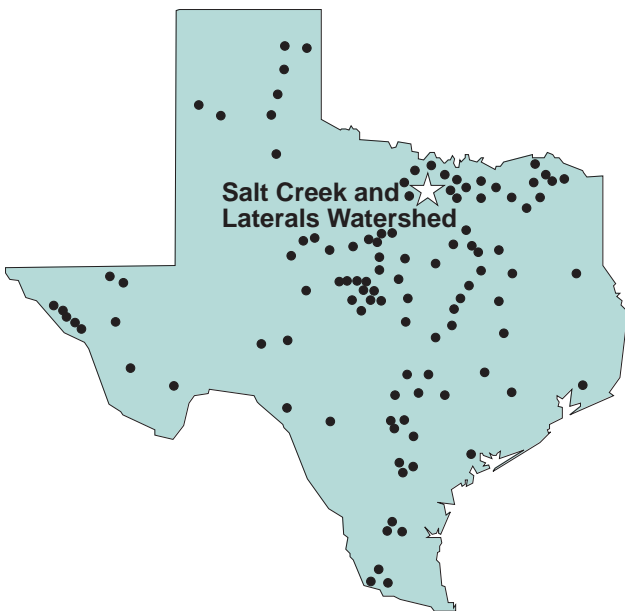


THE SITUATION: DAMS ARE LOSING THEIR ABILITY TO CONTAIN SEDIMENT AND CONTROL FLOODING

Salt Creek and Laterals Watershed is a success story and the culmination of efforts by the local community to address two critical concerns: flooding and sediment deposition.

Work began in the 1960s with 17 dams installed by 1976. The investment by the local community, with federal support, has paid off in many ways. Maintenance costs for roads and bridges have been vastly reduced. Roads remain open for essential traffic during periods of heavy rain. Landowners no longer contend with the destruction of frequent flooding and subsequent loss of land to sediment and debris. Sediment is held in the structures, extending the life and improving water quality of Eagle Mountain Lake, a large water supply reservoir downstream.







The dams are approaching the end of their useful life. Some have filled with sediment to the point this advantage is all but gone. In addition, development upstream and downstream from dams brings new issues, such as increased runoff and upgrading dams to meet current state dam safety criteria. The time is now to consider alternatives for protecting this investment.



Salt Creek and Laterals is one of 144 watershed projects in Texas. Nearly 2,100 dams have been built in Texas, many of which will reach the end of their useful life in the next 10 years.








PROJECT SUMMARY:

-  **Size:** 118,784 acres in Wise and Parker Counties
-  **Number of dams:** 17
-  **Initial construction:** 1966
-  **Last construction:** 1976
-  **Primary purpose:** Watershed protection and flood prevention — reduce erosion, sediment, and flooding
-  **Population served:** 40,000



PARTNERS:

-  Parker and Wise County Soil and Water Conservation Districts
-  Parker and Wise County Commissioners Courts
-  Wise County Water Control and Improvement District No. 1
-  Tarrant Regional Water District
-  United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service

“When Salt Creek flooded, the sediment killed the farm land for 2-3 years or more. Now there is productive land where only sandbars, salt cedars, and willows could be found.”

Samie Erwin
Peanut farmer

“We couldn’t go to school for days when Salt Creek was out - the school bus couldn’t cross the creek. The watershed program and flood control dams have greatly improved the situation.”







Lou Vee Bridges
Wise Co. Water Control and Improvement District



SALT CREEK AND LATERALS WATERSHED: AN INVESTMENT WORTH PROTECTING

Through Public Law 534, Congress invested \$6.1 million (current dollars) in construction of the Salt Creek and Laterals Watershed project. The local sponsors and landowners have contributed \$4.7 million toward land rights, conservation practices, and maintaining the dams for the past 33 years. Local people are continuing to use their own tax funds to operate and maintain the project.

The monetary benefits of the project have already exceeded the costs. Tangible benefits have been produced that significantly impact the community:

-  Annual benefits average \$692,000
-  30 miles of roads and 40 bridges are safer
-  17 reservoirs provide opportunities for fishing and other outdoor recreation activities
-  270 acres of wetlands have been created or enhanced. Migratory water fowl, as well as native wildlife species utilize this vital habitat
-  20,000 acres have enhanced upland wildlife habitat
-  Sediment has been greatly reduced to Eagle Mountain Lake, water supply to 250,000 people in the Fort Worth metropolitan area



NEW OPPORTUNITIES

New issues have emerged in the region that expand the importance of preserving this investment and reveal opportunities for additional benefits. Rural fire protection, development of recreation, more wildlife, more productive farmland, and quality water supply are but a few of the many areas that can profit from a healthy watershed.

A strong partnership between local sponsors and Tarrant Regional Water District has initiated new efforts to protect



Development upstream and downstream may cause a need for upgrading to meet dam safety criteria.

the resource base, reduce sediment into Eagle Mountain Lake, and improve wildlife habitat. A reinvestment initiative would enhance these benefits.



STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE ON TEXAS' AGING WATERSHED DAMS

Salt Creek and Laterals is one of 144 Texas watershed projects completed or still under construction. The local investment in these projects is \$870 million statewide. The USDA investment in these projects is \$630 million.

Nearly 2100 dams have been built as part of these projects, beginning as early as 1948. While not all of these dams are in critical need of rebuilding at this time, many will soon be reaching or surpassing the 50 year useful life. Approximately 160 dams have changed hazard classification due to downstream development.

An organized approach is needed now to analyze the extent of the reinvestment needed, to prioritize those with greatest need, and to make necessary renovations or improvements. The Texas Association of Watershed Sponsors, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, and other state agencies are also in support of this effort.

“We dreaded any kind of heavy flooding. Before the project most of the county budget was used to replace bridges and culverts-81 were lost in one night. After the flood control dams were in place the damages have been reduced drastically.”

Charles W. Wilhite
Former Wise County Judge
