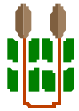


THE CASE FOR REINVESTING IN THE TEHUACANA CREEK WATERSHED

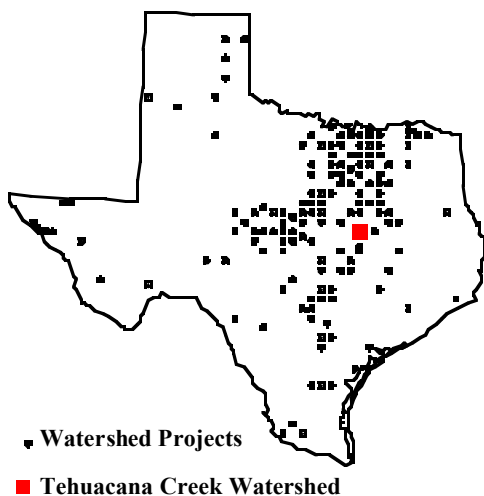


THE SITUATION: DAMS ARE LOSING THEIR ABILITY TO PREVENT FLOODING, CONTROL EROSION

From record drought and subsequent major flooding of the late 1950's emerged an effort by the local community to battle the recurring destruction of soil and water resources in the Tehuacana Creek Watershed. Flooding had often paralyzed rural Hill and McLennan counties for days, but the damage inflicted left the land scarred for years. Farmers lost livestock, crops, and fences. Unstable stream channels intensified the already severe gully problem. Those gullies cut through productive farmland where valuable topsoil continued to wash away.

Work began in 1962 with 43 structures installed by 1986. 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. Landowners contend with far less destruction from frequent flooding. Water erosion has been substantially reduced as a result of channel stabilization and accelerated land treatment. Sediment is held in the structures, improving downstream water quality. The battle waged has been successful. Unfortunately, the war goes on.

The dams are approaching the end of their useful life. 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.



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



PROJECT SUMMARY:

- ◇ **Size:** Covers 196,480 acres in McLennan, Hill, and Limestone Counties
- ◇ **Number of dams:** 43
- ◇ **Initial construction:** 1962
- ◇ **Last construction:** 1986
- ◇ **Primary purpose:** Watershed protection and flood prevention -- reduce erosion, sediment, and flooding
- ◇ **Population served:** 121,500



PARTNERS:

- ◇ McLennan County, Hill County-Blackland, and Limestone-Falls, Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- ◇ McLennan and Hill Counties Tehuacana Creek Water Control and Improvement District No. 1
- ◇ Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board
- ◇ McLennan and Hill County Commissioners Courts
- ◇ United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service

"I farmed and ranched on Tehuacana Creek before any flood control. I remember well getting up at midnight, saddling a horse, and going to the bottoms to get cattle to higher ground. It is nice not to worry about floods the way we used to."

---Max Sturdivant, farmer/director, McLennan County Soil and Water Conservation District

“The Tehuacana Creek Watershed flood control structures provide important habitat for animal life, allowing various wildlife to flourish and recreational opportunities.”

---David White, director, McLennan and Hill Counties Tehuacana Creek Water Control and Improvement District



TEHUACANA CREEK WATERSHED: AN INVESTMENT WORTH PROTECTING

Through Public Law 566, Congress invested \$7 million (current dollars) in construction of the Tehuacana Creek Watershed project. The local sponsors and landowners have contributed \$20.1 million toward land rights, land treatment practices, and maintaining the dams for the past 35 years. Local people are continuing to use their own tax funds to operate and maintain the projects.

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

- Annual benefits average \$1.2 million
- 45 miles of roads and 80 bridges are safer
- 43 reservoirs provide opportunities for fishing and other outdoor recreation activities
- 1100 acres of wetlands have been created or enhanced. Migratory water fowl, as well as native wildlife species utilize this vital habitat
- 60,000 acres have enhanced upland wildlife habitat
- 70 miles of streams have improved water quality



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.

The strong partnership among local sponsors, federal, and state authorities must continue to grow in order to protect the resource base and broaden this undertaking. A reinvestment initiative would enhance these benefits.



Some dams have filled with sediment to the point that this benefit is all but gone.



STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE ON TEXAS' AGING WATERSHED DAMS

Tehuacana Creek is one of 144 Texas watersheds 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 in support of this effort.

“The Tehuacana Creek Watershed project is integral to our local transportation system. Just as we must continually upgrade our road systems, it is imperative that we keep our watershed dams working to serve and protect our citizens.”

**---Joe Mashek, McLennan County
Commissioner**
