

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 nation's dams, including those in Georgia, are in desperate need of repair. If problems are not corrected, the consequences are grave—to both people 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 Georgia...

The Kelly Barnes Dam in Toccoa, a privately constructed dam, collapsed in 1977. An ensuing wall of water took 39 lives and caused enormous property damage. The disaster prompted the Georgia General Assembly to protect people living below impoundments by passing the Safe Dams Act in 1978. A number of aging-related problems have been observed, including:



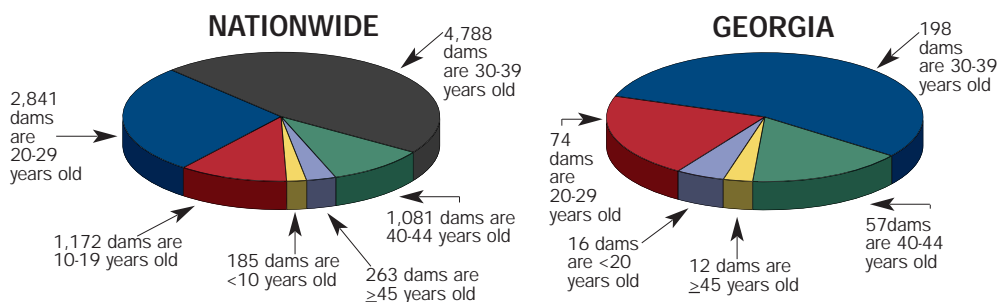
Georgia has 357 small watershed dams

- Sedimentation.
- Concrete deterioration.
- Eroding plunge pools.
- Malfunctioning and inoperable gates.

Within the next 10 years, 69 of Georgia's 357 watershed structures will reach the end of their designed lifespan. Despite concerns, the General Assembly also recognizes that these dams provide benefits in excess of

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Our Aging Dams



DAMS IN DANGER

PEOPLE AT RISK?

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\$16 million each year. As a result, the General Assembly has asked the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission, local soil and water conservation districts, local sponsors, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to conduct a resource inventory of the 51 watersheds containing high hazard dams. The inventories will identify problems and needs associated with bringing Georgia's watershed dams into compliance with state legislation.

The following is a summary of problems that exist with some of these dams. The more comprehensive review will provide a more accurate assessment of rehabilitation needs.

- 121 dams need to be modified to meet state dam safety laws and protect residential and commercial development downstream from the dams.
- 8 dams need repairs and modifications to extend their useful life and help prevent future environmental and economic losses.

The cost of rehabilitation of Georgia's existing dams can be expensive, as demonstrated by the recent work completed in the Etowah River and Raccoon Watersheds. Two of the dams in these watersheds have recently been modified to meet current state dam safety laws at a cost of approximately \$750,000 each.



THE PROBLEMS. In Georgia, 121 dams need to be modified due to downstream development, which includes homes, buildings and a shopping mall. Other problems the dams face include sedimentation, spillway deterioration, eroding outlets, and malfunctioning and inoperable gates.



WHY REPAIR THE DAMS? Clean water is vital to people and communities. The current situation poses a safety and health threat to people, communities, and our natural resources.

A Call to Action in Georgia

121

dams need to be modified to protect life and property in downstream areas

8

dams need repairs to safeguard municipal water supplies, provide flood control, and protect natural resources

\$85 million

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