

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 Oklahoma, 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 Oklahoma...

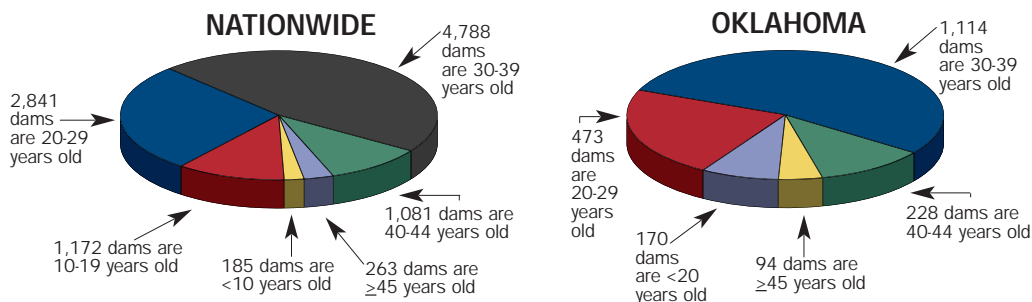
Oklahoma is home to some of the nation's oldest dams. On July 3, 1998, the state celebrated the 50th anniversary of Cloud Creek Site One in Washita County. This was the first upstream flood-control dam built in the nation. Oklahoma has many dams that need major rehabilitation. Just consider:



Oklahoma has 2,094 small flood-control dams

- 80 dams built to protect agricultural lands now have homes or other structures built downstream. These dams need to be upgraded to protect life and property.
- 110 dams need repairs that, if not corrected, will have significant adverse environmental, economic, and social impacts.
- An estimated \$53 million is needed to rehabilitate these dams.
- There are 2,094 upstream flood-control dams in 126 watersheds. These dams provide flood protection for more than 2 million acres and make up close to a \$2 billion infrastructure.

Our Aging Dams



A Case Study...

The Sergeant Major Creek Watershed in Roger Mills County is a good example of the need for rehabilitation work in watershed projects. The problems in this watershed:

- Site 2 was built to protect agricultural land. Homes and other buildings have been constructed downstream and now the dam needs upgrading to ensure the protection of lives and property.
- There is a severe leakage in the principal spillway of one dam.
- Sediment has filled some of the lakes, causing loss of capacity to protect against flood waters and loss of fish and wildlife habitat.
- Site 4 is the sole source of water for the city of Cheyenne and must be protected.

The watershed includes nearly 20,000 acres (about 30 square miles) and encompasses the city of Cheyenne and the Washita Battleground National Park. It drains directly into the Washita River.

Local sponsors, with the assistance of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), built six small upstream flood-control dams in the watershed between 1948-1962. This was done under the Flood Control Act of 1944 (PL 78-534). The Upper Washita Conservation District, the primary local sponsor of the project, assumed operation and maintenance responsibility of the dams after construction. The district has worked diligently to maintain the dams over the years, but does not have the funds to make major repairs of the dams.

The Sergeant Major Creek Watershed has been selected as a national pilot rehabilitation project. The local community is determining what's needed and what alternatives are available. Models will be developed from this project that can be applied to other watersheds across the nation.



This lake has filled with sediment, has severe leakage in the principal spillway pipe, and the dam needs to be rehabilitated to protect homes downstream.



Towns depend on the Sergeant Major. Cheyenne, population 1,000, gets its sole water supply from Sergeant Major Creek Site 4. Loss of this water supply would be a disaster for the community.



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 Oklahoma

80

dams need to be rebuilt and upgraded to protect life and property in downstream areas

110

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

\$53 million

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