

STATEMENT OF DAVE WHITE
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION, CREDIT, ENERGY AND RESEARCH

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Dunloup Creek Watershed project and the Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project. These two projects are large-scale watershed projects that, should they be implemented, would provide environmental and economic benefits to the local communities. The plans for these projects were developed by local sponsors with the help of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The local sponsors of the Cape Cod restoration project include the Commissioners of Barnstable County, Massachusetts, the State of Massachusetts, the Cape Cod Conservation District, and all 15 towns across the Cape Cod peninsula. The local sponsors of the Dunloup Creek Watershed project are Fayette County Commission, the City of Mount Hope, the Southern Conservation District and the West Virginia State Conservation Committee. In compliance with statute, these sponsors have requested that their project plans, developed with the assistance of NRCS, be authorized for funding. The authorizing legislation for the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations program (Watershed Operations) stipulates that before appropriations can be enacted for proposed watershed projects with an estimated Federal contribution in excess of \$5,000,000 with no single structure exceeding 4,000 acre feet of total capacity require approval resolutions by the House and Senate Committees on Agriculture. These committees last took action in this program in 2001 when they approved funding for the Buena Vista Watershed Project in Virginia.

Both Dunloup Creek and Cape Cod have gone through an exhaustive, multi-year planning process to examine the scope of the issues and evaluate a range of alternative courses of action. NRCS supports the authorization of both projects.

Dunloup Creek Watershed Project

The Dunloup Creek Watershed project is designed to alleviate flood damage and improve water quality in an area with a population of approximately 3,000 people in Fayette and Raleigh Counties, West Virginia. Parts of five communities in the project area have been impacted by repeated flooding—15 events since 1986. Two particularly devastating floods occurred in 2001 and 2004. The project plan determined that traditional structural flood mitigation measures, including dams, channels, floodwalls, dredging, and flood proofing would not be effective or cost-efficient in reducing flood damages. All of these alternatives were evaluated against environmental and economic considerations in an effort to find a solution to the resource

concerns. Through the planning process, the local sponsors identified a voluntary floodplain buyout as the most cost-effective and feasible option for the impacted communities.

The plan consists of a voluntary buyout of 238 threatened properties currently located within the 100-year floodplain. Buildings and other facilities would be removed from up to 203 acres to restore the floodplain to more natural conditions. Property obtained would be maintained in perpetuity by the local sponsors as natural floodplain. The estimated total cost of the project is \$13.9 million, of which the federal share is \$12.5 million. The flood mitigation, water quality and wildlife benefits offered by the Dunloup Creek Watershed project are significant, and this effort affords USDA an opportunity to make a real difference in an economically distressed area of the country.

Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project

The Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project would impact 15 different communities in Barnstable County on the Cape Cod peninsula. Approximately 58% of the project area is composed of cropland, forestland, grassland, wetlands, and open land. Each of the communities that are co-sponsoring the project has a population of less than 50,000, meeting the programmatic definition of “rural communities.” The total permanent, year-round population on Cape Cod is approximately 222,200.

The watershed restoration project would address several significant problems across the Cape, including degraded salt marshes, restricted anadromous fish runs, and declining water quality of shellfish areas. The project plan indicates that pollutants in stormwater runoff are negatively impacting water quality, particularly as it relates to shellfish beds. The project would also directly address fish migration barriers. In addition, tidal wetland restoration called for in the project plan will improve ecosystem function, provide improved fish and wildlife habitat, and help control the spread of invasive plant species.

The project plan recommends the following restoration actions:

1. Restoration of salt marshes and anadromous fish runs through structural measures. Examples of these structural measures include water control structures, fish ladders, and culvert enlargement for tidally restricted salt marshes.
2. Restore and protect shellfish beds by treating stormwater runoff. Examples of improvements include constructed wetlands, infiltration basins or trenches, dry wells and sand filters, and vegetative filters.

The project plan recommends carrying out 26 priority salt marsh restoration projects, 24 priority fish passage obstruction remediation projects, and 26 priority stormwater remediation projects. The estimated total cost of the Cape Cod project is \$30 million, with the federal share being \$24 million. Implementation of the Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project would lead to the resolution of significant land and water management problems for rural communities across Cape Cod, provide benefits to fish and wildlife, and improve the health and economic viability of the Cape’s shellfish beds.

I thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to present these projects and request their authorization. We believe that the vision and needs of the local communities have been well crafted and articulated in both proposals, and that the local sponsors have worked hard to define their goals and hopes for the future of their communities in both West Virginia and Massachusetts. This concludes my statement, and I would be happy to answer any questions the subcommittee might have.