

USDA Watershed Program

Meeting Today's Natural Resource Needs

USDA Watershed Program has the Flexibility to Address Many Natural Resource Problems

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (Watershed Program) is administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The Watershed Program provides assistance to public sponsors including cities, towns, resource conservation districts and others, to address a variety of critical natural resource problems.

Several federal programs are available to help individual land users to address critical resource needs. However, the Watershed Program uniquely complements these programs by assisting public entities to install measures that benefit multiple landusers or entire communities.

The Watershed Program and other available programs provide landusers and communities with the opportunity to address natural resource needs in entire watersheds.

The watershed program is utilized by public sponsors to address a variety of needs, including:

Flood damage mitigation using:

- ◆ floodwater retarding dams and similar measures
- ◆ floodplain easements
- ◆ floodproofing of homes and businesses

Agricultural water supply (including water for rural communities)

Water quality

Water conservation

Groundwater recharge

Public fish and wildlife habitat

Public water-based recreation

Flood Control



Over 11,000 flood control dams have been constructed in 2,000 watersheds across the nation.

Neshaminy Creek Watershed Project

Many of the earlier watershed projects were organized to reduce flooding and usually included flood control dams. Today, other methods are also used to reduce flood damages where dams might not be feasible. This is being done in the Neshaminy Creek Watershed Project in Pennsylvania where eight

flood control dams had been built and one more was planned. Rather than constructing the remaining dam in the project, local people chose another option that included the purchase and removal of homes, elevating homes to a safe level from flood water, development of a flood warning system, storm water management, and floodplain regulations.



House elevated out of danger from high water in the Neshaminy Creek Watershed Project.

Snake River Watershed Project



Storage impoundment upstream from Warren, Minnesota, temporarily storing flood water during storms in the Spring of 2006.

The city of Warren, Minnesota, also found a way to reduce flooding without constructing dams. The city had endured numerous floods throughout its history. In 1996 and 1997 three major floods caused 12.7 million dollars in damages.

In 1997 the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was asked by the local sponsors, the city of Warren and Middle River-Snake River Watershed District, to resume planning on the Snake River Watershed Project. Planning on this project was started in the 1980s, but had been terminated at the sponsor's request. In November 1999, the planning for this project was completed.



Floodway diverting water around the city of Warren, Minnesota.

An excavated floodway was constructed around the city of Warren and a floodwater storage impoundment was built upstream from the city. The floodwater storage impoundment ensures that flood levels won't be increased downstream of Warren or upstream of the floodway diversion structure. The storage impoundment is an excavated area that temporarily stores water when the floodway can't handle the flow.

The project will provide 100-year frequency flood protection for the city of Warren. Although not 100 percent completed at the time, the project provided significant flood reduction during storms in the Spring of 2006.

Agricultural Water Management



This new water flume is part of a water distribution system developed as part of the Lower Hamakua Ditch Watershed Project.

The Lower Hamakua Ditch Watershed Project in Hawaii is a good example of local people using the watershed program to conserve and distribute water for agricultural uses to a large rural acreage.

The old ditch system was constructed between 1900 and 1910 by large sugar companies. After the collapse of the Hamakua Sugar Company in 1994, the system was abandoned. Flumes and other parts of the system had deteriorated over the years.

The project consisted of restoring the water distribution system that now provides irrigation water for 2,500 acres of diversified crop farming operations and 6,000 acres of grazing lands.

Water-Based Recreational Development



Many communities have utilized the watershed program to assist in development of water-based recreational areas. This is one of several areas around a lake in the Deer Creek Watershed in central Oklahoma that was developed with cost-share funds provided through the Watershed Program.



This fact sheet was developed by the National Watershed Coalition in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. October 2006

www.watershedcoalition.org

Water Quality Projects

Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania

States are utilizing the watershed program to address water quality issues. One such project is the Monastery Run Watershed Project.

Mine drainage from abandoned deep mines in this 7,740 acre watershed is impacting water quality and aquatic habitat in 20 miles of stream. Deep mine subsidence is also a public safety hazard and the mine drainage is adversely affecting the aesthetics of the area.



The watershed project plan includes the treatment of five drainage sites with passive wetland treatment systems and the back filling of a deep mine subsidence to eliminate a safety hazard and prevent a stream from entering a deep mine.

The project was authorized for funding in 1996 with a total cost of the project exceeding a million dollars (50 percent funding from the watershed program and 50 percent funding from local sponsors).

Five of the passive treatment systems have been completed and 214 tons of iron are being removed from Monastery Run annually. The constructed wetlands are also being utilized by Saint Vincent College as outdoor teaching laboratories.

When completed the project will provide over \$100,000 in annual benefits to the area in improved water quality in Monastery Run, Fourmile Run and Loyalhanna Creeks, elimination of a safety hazard, restoration of 20 miles of fishery, and enhanced aesthetics in the area.

Sponsors of watershed projects must be entities of state or local government or a tribe. Approved projects are eligible for technical and financial assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

For more information about the USDA Watershed Program contact any NRCS field or state office.

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