



Watershed Projects

Authorized by the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL 83-566)

Helping Communities Solve Natural Resource Issues

Every State Has a Watershed Project

There are over 1,700 Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) assisted watershed projects in the United States, with projects in every state. Some projects provide flood control, while others include conservation practices that address a myriad of natural resource needs such as water quality improvement, groundwater recharge, agricultural water management, water supply development, and public water-based recreation.

Whatever the primary purpose, watershed projects have multiple community benefits. Many projects have been providing benefits for decades, but people are often unaware that the projects even exist, because of their rural setting.

Watershed projects are planned and implemented by sponsoring local organizations, with assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The projects are authorized and funded through the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (Public Law 83-566). The program is a partnership between local units of government, state and federal government, and landowners.

1,756 watershed projects have been authorized under the Public Law 83-566 Watershed Program. Of these, 1,003 projects have been completed and 365 are still active. The remaining projects have been deauthorized or they are inactive.

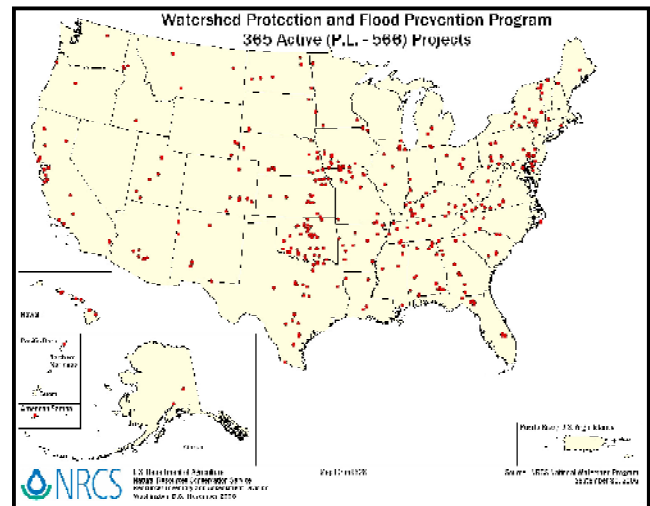
Eleven thousand watershed dams have been built by local project sponsors with assistance from NRCS. Most of the dams were built primarily for flood control, but they also provide fish and wildlife habitat, and recreation. Some dams supply water for communities or for agricultural water management.

Projects Provide Multiple Benefits

Watershed projects have established a \$15 billion national infrastructure that is providing multiple benefits to over 48 million people.

Annual Watershed Program National Benefits

Agricultural flood protection benefits	\$292 million
Non-agricultural flood protection benefits	\$396 million
Agricultural benefits (non-flood)	\$355 million
Non-agricultural benefits (non-flood)	\$560 million
Total average annual monetary benefits	\$1.603 billion
Number of bridges benefited	58,328
Number of farms and ranches benefited	177,778
Number of homes benefited	607,447
Number of businesses benefited	46,625
Number of public facilities benefited	3,625
Acres of wetlands created or enhanced	278,964
Acres of upland wildlife habitat created or enhanced	9,143,316
Miles of streams with improved water quality	44,293
Number of domestic water supplies benefited	27,827
Reduced soil erosion (tons/year)	89,611,688
Tons of animal waste properly managed	4,534,534
Water conserved (acre feet/year)	1,840,958



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The Watershed Program in the 21st Century

Communities across the nation have utilized the watershed program to solve resource problems for over 50 years. Below are just a few examples showing the variety of projects being implemented across the nation.

Providing Water Supplies



Communities are using watershed projects to help create and manage water supplies for rural communities. This watershed dam in the Deer Creek Watershed in Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma, provides water supply, in addition to providing flood control and recreational areas.

Improving and Protecting Water Quality



The Monastery Run Watershed Project in Pennsylvania is addressing water quality problems caused by mine drainage from abandoned deep mines. The project includes treatment of five drainage sites with passive wetland treatment systems and the back filling of a deep mine subsidence.

Managing Agricultural Water



The Lower Hamakua Ditch Watershed Project on the island of Hawaii is helping to rebuild and repair a water distribution system that had been built by sugar companies between 1900-1910. The 15 miles of open ditch and 10 miles of tunnels provides irrigation water distribution to 8,000 acres of agricultural lands. The above flume replaced an existing one that had deteriorated.

Reducing Flood Damages

Most of the original watershed projects were organized to help control flooding. These projects consist of a series of dams to temporarily store floodwater and then slowly release it over a period of several days through pipes in the dams.

Today, watershed project sponsors are also using other methods to help reduce damages caused by flooding. Flooding in the Neshaminy Creek Watershed in Bucks and Montgomery Counties, Pennsylvania, had been partially controlled by eight watershed dams, but local people were looking for an alternative to a ninth planned dam.

Local project sponsors, with NRCS assistance, chose the less costly alternative of flood proofing 90 houses and 35 other buildings, along with the acquisition and removal of 45 homes from the floodplain.



Before
floodproofing



After
floodproofing

Controlling Soil Erosion



Conservation practices are a vital part of watershed projects. Practices such as terraces, waterways, grass buffers and grass plantings in this Tama County, Iowa watershed are preventing soil erosion, reducing sediment in streams and rivers, improving water quality and providing wildlife habitat.

For additional information about watershed projects and their benefits, visit the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service website at: www.nrcs.usda.gov and select "Programs" and then "Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention" or visit a local NRCS or conservation district office.

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