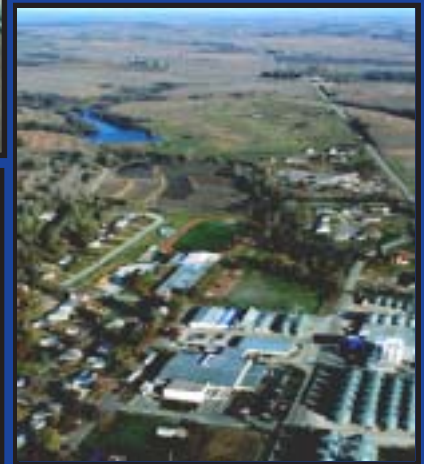


# A Guide to the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program

How Your Community  
Can Organize a  
Watershed Project





This lake in Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma, is part of the Deer Creek Watershed Project. The lake provides flood control, municipal water supplies, public recreational areas, and fish and wildlife habitat.

*There are over 2,000 watershed projects in the nation with projects in every state providing multiple benefits to local communities. Thousands of conservation practices, other nonstructural measures, and 11,000 flood control dams have been applied in these watersheds that provide reduction in flooding; erosion control; water quality protection and improvement; recreation, ground water recharge; municipal and rural water supplies; and wildlife habitat.*

*The program has been tested by time (over 50 years) and the NWC believes it is one of the best resource management tools available for local communities to solve natural resource problems.*

*This guide provides information to community leaders who might be interested in considering a watershed project. Visit our web site for more information. ([www.watershedcoalition.org](http://www.watershedcoalition.org))*

*National Watershed Coalition Executive Committee*

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## Introduction

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 83-566) authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to provide technical and financial assistance to entities of state and local governments and tribes (project sponsors) for planning and installing watershed projects. The USDA agency responsible for program management is the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The Act was passed on August 4, 1954, when Congress recognized the serious natural resource and economic damages suffered in our nation's watersheds from flooding and sedimentation. The Act has been amended several times to address a broad range of natural resource and environmental issues. Today this authority can be used to assist communities to address almost any natural resource issue. The Act provides assistance to sponsors who develop projects on watersheds up to 250,000 acres (391 sq. miles).

The watershed program is a unique and flexible approach to natural resources planning and management, focusing on proper land use and the installation of conservation practices. Watershed plans are developed by interdisciplinary teams of technical specialists who assist the project sponsors.

This pamphlet provides information for potential watershed project sponsors about eligible project objectives and purposes, and the steps in applying for USDA assistance and planning.

For additional information about the watershed program, go to the NRCS national web site ([www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)) and click on programs.

Photos provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.



## Eligible Project Purposes

The Watershed Program can be used to address almost any natural resource problem. Project objectives include flood prevention, agricultural water management, fish and wildlife habitat development, public recreation development, groundwater recharge, water quality, conservation and proper utilization of land, and municipal and industrial water supply.

### Protecting Natural Resources

Watershed projects developed through this program include land management practices installed by landowners. Regardless of other project objectives that may be served, every watershed project contains a watershed protection component.

Land and water conservation practices keep raindrops as close to where they fall as possible. They protect and restore the watershed and reduce the rate and amount of runoff and erosion. Downstream flood peaks are reduced, as is the delivery of sediment and other materials carried by floodwater. Examples of practices would include terraces, stripcropping, waterways, fencing, and water distribution systems for livestock. Land conservation practices are the first increment of watershed projects.

Conservation practices like terraces, waterways, and stripcropping are important components of watershed project plans.



### Reducing Damages From Flooding

Flood damage reduction, or flood control as some call it, includes conservation practices that reduce the damages caused by flooding. Where completed watershed projects are in place, damages from natural disasters are greatly reduced.

A variety of measures are used in watershed projects. Some are larger, more complex and often costly practices that require group action to plan, install, operate and maintain. Structural measures might include levees, dikes, floodways, floodwater diversions, and flood control dams.

Other measures can also be used to reduce the impacts of flooding. These measures might include proper zoning, enforcing building codes and other regulatory measures, relocation, flood proofing buildings, land acquisition, and preparing emergency action plans consisting of flood warning and response systems.

## Water Management

Agricultural water management consists of measures to increase or conserve water supplies and improve water quality. Water conservation practices may include sediment control and land stabilization measures, diversion dams, flumes, canals, water supply reservoirs, pumping plants, and any other measures that would improve water management for improved agricultural efficiency.



Wetland restoration practices can improve water quality, provide wildlife habitat and provide groundwater recharge.

Practices like buffers along riparian areas are used in projects to protect water quality.



- ◆ Water based recreation could be a project objective and federal cost share assistance may be available to help develop public recreational facilities.
- ◆ Fish and wildlife habitat measures may include water level control structures, fish ladders, fish shelters, marsh development, and nesting areas for waterfowl. Restoration of wetlands is an important feature of the watershed program
- ◆ Water for municipal and industrial uses may be included in multipurpose lakes, along with flood damage reduction and other purposes. Water may also be stored in reservoirs for release when needed to improve downstream water quality.
- ◆ Groundwater recharge practices may be needed in areas where there is an identified shortage of groundwater. Practices might include storage of water in impoundments, diversions, injection wells and other water spreading techniques.



# Applying for Program Assistance

Project sponsors must be entities of state or local government or a tribe. Sponsors submit an application to USDA for assistance. The application must include the following information:

- ◆ Size of the watershed.
- ◆ Location of the watershed.
- ◆ Description of the problems in the watershed.
- ◆ Estimate of damages suffered.
- ◆ Possible solutions.
- ◆ Source of local funds for cost sharing

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can provide the specific steps and help in submitting the application.



## Field Examination

Depending on the problems identified in the application, specialists from NRCS and other federal and state agencies may assist in conducting an analysis of the problems and opportunities of the watershed.

## Watershed Planning Assistance

NRCS makes preliminary investigations and confirms the local sponsoring organization's desire to proceed with preparing a watershed plan. The NRCS state conservationist then authorizes federal planning assistance for the watershed. The purpose of this preliminary investigation is to provide reasonable assurance that a feasible plan can be developed.

## Developing Your Watershed Plan

NRCS and other federal and state agencies may assist the local organization conduct detailed field studies. These studies further define resource problems to be addressed and estimate the project's costs and benefits.

Using these studies, NRCS and others may assist in the preparation of a watershed plan that would include an environmental assessment. The completed plan would include:

- ◆ Resource problems to be addressed;
- ◆ Practices to be installed;
- ◆ Environmental effects;
- ◆ Methods of financing.

Public comment and input is solicited throughout the planning process.



## Authorizing Your Plan

The Chief of NRCS has the authority to approve some plans that do not exceed certain statutory limits. Those plans exceeding these limits will be submitted to Congress for approval.

## Funding Your Plan

When a watershed plan calls for watershed protection and flood damage reduction:

- ◆ NRCS provides engineering and construction costs for larger flood control measures such as flood control dams.
- ◆ Local sponsors provide all land rights and permits.
- ◆ NRCS provides cost-share funds for needed land conservation practices for water-quality, and erosion and sediment control.
- ◆ NRCS provides engineering services and cost-share funds for construction for irrigation, drainage, public recreation, and fish and wildlife habitat development.
- ◆ Other costs, including additional costs for municipal and industrial water supply, is provided by sponsoring local organizations.

Funding from NRCS is dependent on available appropriated funds from Congress.

## Land Rights

Watershed project sponsors are responsible for obtaining all necessary land, mineral, and other land rights, easements and permits needed for implementation of the planned project.

# Implementing Your Watershed Plan

Watershed project sponsors are responsible for working with landowners to get conservation practices applied.

NRCS and other agencies and organizations can provide technical assistance to install the practices. NRCS may conduct field surveys and prepare designs and specification for practice installation.



## Project Agreements

NRCS and project sponsors enter into an agreement covering each potential contract for construction.

## Contracting/Construction/Installation

Project sponsors are responsible for advertising for bids and awarding contracts for construction unless the sponsors request NRCS to administer the contracts.


## Operation and Maintenance

Once the improvements and conservation practices are installed, the project sponsors are responsible for all operations and maintenance of installed works.

# The Watershed Program is Helping Communities Across the Nation Meet Local Resource Needs.



Watershed plans are developed to meet the needs of a particular community and watershed.



## National Watershed Coalition

This publication was developed by the National Watershed Coalition (NWC) in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The NWC is a nonprofit coalition made up of national, regional, state, and local organizations, associations, and individuals that advocate the use of watersheds as the planning and implementation unit when dealing with natural resource problems and issues. ([www.watershedcoalition.org](http://www.watershedcoalition.org))

Additional information about the watershed program is available at local USDA NRCS field offices. Check the NRCS web site to find field office locations in your state. ([www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)). Additional information about the watershed program is available on the web site. Click on programs.

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