

Small Watershed Program



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One of the best times to see the benefits of upstream watershed protection is immediately after a heavy rain.

photos: NRCS Oklahoma

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Oklahoma is a national leader in upstream flood control with 2,098 floodwater retarding structures in place. The state has always been a leader, beginning with the first flood control dam, Cloud Chief Watershed, in the Cavalry Creek Watershed, a tributary to the Washita River, completed in 1948. The dam was built under Public Law 78-534 (Flood Control Act), which was passed in 1944, and covered 11 watersheds in the nation. Oklahoma also has the first completed upstream flood control project in the nation, Sandstone Creek Watershed in Roger Mills County.

In 1954, Congress saw the benefits of the 11 authorized watersheds, and passed Public Law 83-566, which expanded the program to the rest of the nation's watersheds. Oklahoma now has 71 PL-566 projects.

Oklahoma's watershed projects provide protection for over two million acres of agricultural land in the floodplains. The dams also provide protection from flooding of roads, homes, and other structures.

Water storage has been added to 42 watershed lakes for water supplies to cities and rural water districts. Water storage has also been added to other lakes for irrigation, fish and wildlife, and recreational use.

Middle Deep Red Run Watershed, Site 7B, which was contracted for construction in 2000 and completed in 2002, will provide protection from flooding as well as water supply for the Hackberry Flats Wetlands Restoration Project in Southwest Oklahoma. This is a joint project of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, and the Tillman County Conservation District.

In June 1995, heavy rainfall hit the State of Oklahoma. Damages to roads, crops, conservation practices, and property exceeded \$4 million in 27 counties. Without the 1,371 floodwater retarding structures in 77 (PL-534 and PL-566) watershed projects in these counties, an estimated \$7.4 million in damages would have occurred. If the 253 additional planned structures had been in place, another \$1.3 million in damage reduction would have been realized.

On October 23, 2000, heavy rainfall events equaling the 25-year storm fell on Grady, Caddo, and Lincoln Counties. The total estimated agricultural damages from this rainfall were approximated at \$550,000. Without the protection provided by the 11 watershed projects in these counties, the damages would have been \$2,226,800. Thus, the flood water retarding structures provided a



damage reduction of \$1,676,800.

With many of Oklahoma’s dams being 20 to 40 years of age, these benefits have been and will be multiplied many times over.

Under the Authority of PL-566, local sponsors have requested assistance on over 100 watersheds in Oklahoma. From these requests, work plans have been completed and approved for 71 watersheds, 982 structures have been completed, and another 324 structures are awaiting construction.

In the Washita River Basin, planning under the authority of PL-534 is essentially complete. However, a continuing need exists for supplements and revisions of the 64 project plans to meet new requirements. The

planned sub-watersheds contain 1,117 structures, of which 1,103 have been constructed. Currently, 14 structures remain to be constructed.

For More Information

For more information on this program or other USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or USDA Service Center, or check out the website at www.ok.usda.gov.

	Planned	Constructed
PL 566 Flood Prevention	1270	953
PL 566 Multi-Purpose	36	29
Total	1306	982
PL 534 Flood Prevention	1103	1089
PL 534 Multi-Purpose	14	14
Total	1117	1103
Pilot Flood Prevention	6	6
RC&D Flood Prevention	7	7
Total FWRS	2436	2098

