

Emergency Watershed Protection



photos: NRCS Oklahoma



Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

Through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides emergency restoration for eligible projects that relieve imminent threat to life and property due to impairments of a watershed. To be eligible for the program, all projects must have a sponsor such as a city, county, general improvement district, tribe, or conservation district. The sponsor will bear up to 25 percent of the total construction cost in the form of cash or in-kind service. The Natural Resources Conservation Service will administer the contract through competitive bidding and pay for up to 75 percent of the total construction cost. The sponsor is responsible for all easements on private and public property, required permits through the Corp of Engineers (COE), Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and other required local permits.

Public and private landowners are eligible for this assistance when represented by a sponsor. Assistance is possible when directly related to a storm event that causes a threat to life or property. A request for assistance from the sponsor must be submitted within 60 days of the storm event causing the disaster. Furthermore, all

Emergency Watershed Protection projects must be economically and environmentally defensible and be sound from an engineering standpoint. Emergency Watershed Protection funds cannot be used to solve problems that existed before the disaster event or to pay for work already completed by the landowner.

A significant amount of work completed in fiscal year 2002 was concentrated on bridge reinforcement and streambank restoration due to significant amounts of rain washing debris under bridges and damaging the structures. A flooding that occurred in October of 2000 initiated work in over 14 counties. Another storm rolled through Oklahoma in May 2001 carrying large amounts of rain and high winds. This flooding event affected another 14 counties. Five other flooding events, spreading over seven counties, constitute future work predicted to cost almost \$1.5 million. Another \$2 million is needed to complete projects currently under construction due to flooding.

In late January, Oklahoma experienced a winter storm that impacted roughly 60 percent of the state with 45 counties declared to be disaster areas by President Bush. Much of this area was covered with ice, and the resulting damage has been extensive. More than 255,000 people were without power at some point, and many rural residents were without power for close to two

months. The storm toppled more than 75 miles of OG&E transmission lines and more than 1,400 electrical poles. There is an estimated \$7.4 million of damage, and long-term impacts across much of the state. Broken branches and uprooted trees along stream corridors were washed downstream and collected at bridges and road culverts causing a threat to life and property.

In October of 2001, numerous tornadoes caused extensive damage in a four county area. The most populated area affected was Cordell, with over 100 homes destroyed and over 300 more sustaining significant damages. A tornado in Custer County was on the ground for approximately six miles, and near the Town of Mountain View, another tornado created a 14-mile path of destruction. There was a significant amount of timber destroyed with debris scattered on roads, fields, and in streams. The damage from the tornadoes will cost an estimated \$1.5 million to clean up.

Through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has addressed many of the critical areas throughout Oklahoma. In fiscal year 2002, approximately \$3.8 million was spent to clean up ice storm debris from state bridges. Another \$4.8 million was spent repairing bridge abutments and for stream restoration due to flooding and high winds. In all, the property protected was valued at over \$800 million.

EWP Project Stops Eroding Ceremonial Grounds

During May 2001, heavy rainstorms swept across north central Oklahoma, and excessive streambank

erosion threatened the 119 year old Otoe-Missouria Ceremonial grounds along Red Rock Creek in Noble County. Creek banks sloughed off decreasing the area of the historical ceremonial grounds. The Tribe has used the ceremonial site for many decades. It is significant for social and cultural traditions honoring tribal ancestors and elders, and is also used to teach traditional values to the Tribal youth.

Through the Emergency Watershed Protection program, a project agreement was developed between the Tribe and NRCS. Twelve hundred, fifty feet of bedding and riprap was placed on the eroding stream bank along Red Rock Creek in order to protect the Tribal road and sacred ceremonial ground. Chairman Donald G. Butler, Otoe-Missouria Tribe wrote, "The stream bank and rock placed along the Red Rock Creek looks very attractive and I am confident that our Tribal membership will also be pleased with the results of the completed project. The Tribe sincerely appreciates the funding of the watershed project for the protective measures to relieve hazards and damages created by the rainstorms on May 17-20, 2001".

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.

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Before and after photos of the Otoe-Missouria Ceremonial grounds in Noble County that were threatened by extreme streambank erosion.

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