

Contact: Mary Ann McQuinn  
State Public Affairs Specialist  
(706) 546-2069

## **USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE RECEIVES \$500,000 FOR EMERGENCY FLOOD DAMAGE ASSESSMENTS AND RECOVERY**

ATHENS, GA Sept. 28, 2009—U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist James E. Tillman, Sr. today announced that NRCS has received \$500,000 for flood damage assessments and recovery after recent flooding devastated portions of north Georgia.

“We gave this initial funding to Georgia to ensure we can begin providing financial and technical assistance to landowners to help them restore damaged watersheds and rebuild local communities,” said Dave White, Chief of NRCS in Washington, D.C.

NRCS personnel are inspecting an initial 120 watershed dams after torrential rains have drenched the northern part of the state. There are 280 watershed dams in north Georgia, or about 80 percent of the dams in the state.

Watershed dams consist of a pool where water is stored and an overflow area known as a spillway. As water levels increase, the excess water flows into the spillway. Not only does it prevent further flood damage by slowing the water, it also gives people downstream more time to escape to safety, if necessary.

“I applaud the efforts made by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service to make certain our watershed dams are secure after the recent devastating floods in northern Georgia,” said U.S. Senator Saxby Chambliss, Ranking Member of the Senate Agriculture Committee. “Infrastructure systems like this are in place to protect the residents in surrounding communities from further damage caused by severe weather and I thank USDA for taking proactive measures to make sure they are safe.”

As the flood waters recede, NRCS will conduct a more comprehensive evaluation of each structure to check for damage and make repairs, if necessary.

Since 1953, NRCS has built over 350 structures in Georgia—designed primarily to protect prime farmland. Over the years, roads, homes, and businesses have been built downstream creating a potential for increased damages in a flood event. The agency is rehabilitating these dams and upgrading them to protect life and property.

Helping People Help the Land

NRCS also administers the Emergency Watershed Protection Program, which provides technical and financial assistance to address public safety and restoration efforts on private, public and tribal lands. Through sponsorships, NRCS can pay landowners and communities up to 75 percent of the cost of removing debris from stream channels, road culverts and bridges; protecting eroded streambanks; correcting damaged drainways; and reseeding damaged areas. NRCS also can purchase floodplain easements on land that qualifies for EWP program assistance.

Public and private landowners are eligible for assistance through the EWP program, but they must be represented by a project sponsor. Local sponsors include any legal subdivision of state or local government, including local officials of city, county or state governments, Indian tribes, soil conservation districts, U.S. Forest Service and watershed authorities. Sponsors must secure 25 percent of the costs in cash or approved in-kind contributions. However, in some cases, the EWP program can cover up to 90 percent of the construction costs for projects in limited resource areas.

NRCS employees assess site damages for potential EWP program assistance and help local governments remove the imminent hazards to life and property caused by flooding and erosion.

For more information, visit NRCS's web site at [www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov).

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