



Watershed Rehabilitation Program



Overview

The Watershed Rehabilitation Program helps project sponsors rehabilitate aging dams that are reaching the end of their design life and/or no longer meet federal or state standards. Watershed Rehabilitation addresses critical public health and safety concerns.

Since 1948, NRCS has assisted local sponsors (SLOs) in constructing 11,860 project dams. Rehabilitation of watershed project dams is authorized for dams originally constructed as part of a watershed project carried out under any of the following four authorities—Public Law 83-566, Public Law 78-534, the Pilot Watershed Program authorized under the Department of Agriculture Appropriation Act of 1954, or the Resource Conservation and Development Program authorized by the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981.

Many aging dams no longer meet current state and NRCS design and safety criteria and performance standards and may pose a potential hazard to lives and property if dam failure would occur. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to local project sponsors to rehabilitate aging dams that protect lives and property, and infrastructure. Local sponsors who are interested in rehabilitating their aging dam may request technical and financial assistance from NRCS. NRCS prioritizes dams for rehabilitation based on the risks to life and property if a dam failure would occur.

Benefits of Watershed Rehabilitation

Across the nation, watershed projects provide an estimated annual benefit of \$3 billion in reduced flooding and erosion damages, and improved wildlife habitat, recreation, and water supply for an estimated 47 million people. These projects provide additional benefits, such as improved water quality through sediment and erosion control. Watershed rehabilitation projects also can create rural economic growth and job opportunities.

NRCS maintains a robust dam safety program through DamWatch. DamWatch is an application that proactively monitors dams during rainfall, snowmelt and seismic events. DamWatch centralizes the dam inventory database and geospatial information in real-time and makes it available to authorized users. The application also securely stores files and data including construction drawings, photos, inspection reports and Emergency Action Plans.

Watershed Rehabilitation and Drought

The Watershed Rehabilitation Program allows sponsors to construct or augment existing water supplies based on current and future water supply demands. Costs associated with additional or new water supply storage purposes added to the rehabilitation project may be cost-shared with watershed rehabilitation funds.

Cost share for new water supply storage purposes will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If cost-share is authorized, the cost-share rate will be up to 65 percent of the eligible project cost allocated to the new water supply storage purpose (see table on next page).

NRCS and Project Sponsors

Watershed project sponsors represent interests of the local community in federally assisted watershed projects. Sponsors request assistance from NRCS. When funding is allocated, the sponsor and NRCS enter into an agreement that defines the roles and responsibilities of each party to complete the rehabilitation.

Although not a requirement for program participation, sponsors may request an assessment of their dam. The assessment provides a broad overview of the dam's current condition and can be used to help the sponsor determine whether to proceed with rehabilitation of the aging dam.

For dams funded for rehabilitation, a watershed plan is developed for each dam. The watershed plan addresses resource concerns including environmental impacts, costs, and benefits, planned conservation practices, and the responsibilities of involved parties. NRCS works with the local sponsors when developing a watershed plan.



Conneautville PA-RC&D 112 Dam, Crawford County, PA was constructed in 1984 as a high hazard potential dam with a 50-year service life. Prior to the rehabilitation, Conneautville Dam no longer met current state or Federal design criteria and performance standards. The dam was rehabilitated to reduce flood damage to downstream bridges, roads, utilities and property. Conneautville Dam’s rehabilitation includes the auxiliary spillway repair, embankment dam surface treatment, impact basin improvements and filter diaphragm installation. Repair to the auxiliary spillway also incorporates green bioengineering to help stabilize the ravine.

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to sponsors and assists them with the assessment, planning, design, and construction of the rehabilitation projects. Project sponsors are responsible for and agree to carry out specific parts of the project, including:

- Providing their share of project costs,
- Assist NRCS in developing a watershed plan,
- Obtaining land rights,
- Obtaining required permits,
- Operation and maintenance throughout the evaluated life of the project,
- Monitoring easement encroachment,
- Developing and updating emergency action plans for high-hazard potential dams,
- Conducting regular inspections of installed works of improvements.

Costs associated with new purposes added to the rehabilitation project that do not involve water supply storage will not be cost-shared with watershed rehabilitation funds. The costs allocated to these new purposes will be borne by the SLO.

Applicants should contact their State Watershed Rehabilitation Program Manager for specific cost share information for the proposed project.

Eligible Project Cost ^{1,2}	Engineering / Technical Assistance	Real Property Rights
65 percent Federal/35 percent Local of total eligible project cost, not to exceed 100 percent of actual construction cost	No more than 100 ^{1/2} percent	0 percent

¹ Specific rate established in the statute.

² Project cost includes construction, in-kind services (planning, engineering, project administration), required replacement in-kind, required decent/safe/sanitary.

Sponsor Eligibility

Eligible sponsors include local government agencies, soil and water conservation districts, and Native American tribal organizations.

More Information

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only; other restrictions may apply. For more information about the Watershed Rehabilitation program, sponsor eligibility or to find your local USDA Service Center, visit nrcs.usda.gov.