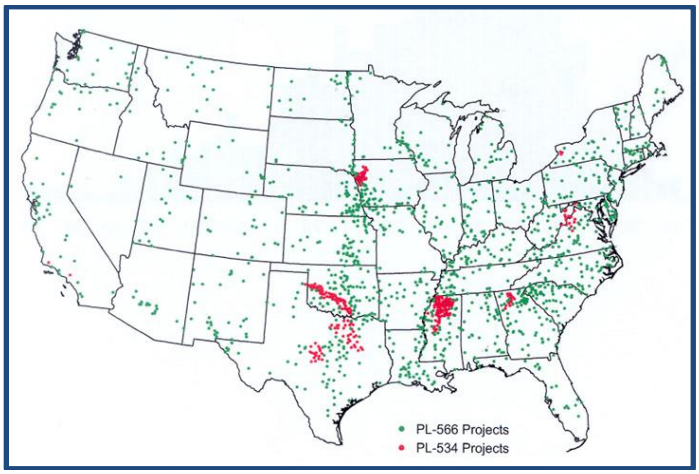
Watershed Projects in Every State

There are over 1,300 Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) assisted watershed projects in the United States. Most projects provide flood control, while others provide conservation practices that address a myriad of natural resource needs such as water quality improvement, soil erosion control, animal waste management, irrigation, water supply development, and recreation enhancement.

Whatever the primary purpose, watershed projects provide multiple community benefits. Many projects have provided benefits for decades, but people are often unaware that the projects even exist.

Local, State, Federal Conservation Partnership

Watershed projects are planned and implemented by local people who serve as project sponsors with assistance from NRCS. The projects are authorized and funded through the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (Public Law 83-566) and the Flood Control Act of 1944 (Public Law 78-534). The program is a partnership between local units of government, state government, the federal government, and landowners.



There are over 1,300 completed or active projects in 47 states.

The Watershed Program has been utilized by communities for over 60 years and the success stories can be found on the landscapes across 47 states and Puerto Rico. The authorizing legislation has been amended several times to address a broader range of natural resource and environmental issues and today the program offers communities the tools and assistance to address almost any kind of environmental and natural resource issue.

Over 11,800 watershed dams have been constructed by local project sponsors with assistance from NRCS since 1948.

Annual Watershed Program Benefits of the 11,800 Watershed Dams	
Agricultural flood damage reduction	$347,155,692
Non-agricultural flood damage reduction	$455,339,673
Agricultural benefits (non-flood)	$434,794,185
Non-agricultural benefits (non-flood)	$943,113,440
Total monetary benefits	**$2,180,402,990**
Number of bridges benefited	61,702
Number of farms and ranches benefited	181,551
Number of businesses benefited	46,586
Number of public facilities benefited	3,663
Acres of wetlands created or enhanced	279,375
Miles of streams with improved water quality	47,513
Number of domestic water supplies benefited	27,874
Reduced soil erosion (tons/year)	89,677,702
Water conserved (acre feet/year)	1,846,147
Tons of animal waste properly managed	4,801,640
Reduced sedimentation (tons/year)	59,803,699

Managing Agricultural Water in Hawaii

The Lower Hamakua Ditch Watershed Project on the island of Hawaii is help rebuild and repair a water distribution system that had been built by sugar companies from 1900 to 1910. The 15 miles of open ditch and 10 miles of tunnel provide irrigation water distribution to 8,000 acres of agricultural lands. This flume replaced an existing one that had deteriorated.

Managing Animal Waste

The Middle Suwannee River Watershed Project in Florida has helped dairy and poultry farmers apply conservation practices that reduced the amount of animal nutrients that flowed into the river. Financial incentives were offered to landowners in the watershed project to help them build animal waste storage facilities and properly apply the waste to the land, thus improving water quality.

Controlling Soil Erosion and Sedimentation

Conservation practices are a vital part of watershed projects. Practices such as terraces, waterways, grass buffers and grass plantings in this Tama County, Iowa watershed are preventing soil erosion, reducing sediment in streams and rivers, improving water quality and providing wildlife habitat.

Flood Control, Water Supply, Recreational Areas

Communities are using watershed projects to help create and manage agricultural, municipal and industrial water supplies. The lake formed by this dam in the Deer Creek Watershed in Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma, provides municipal water for thousands of people, in addition to providing flood control and recreational areas.

Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments of 2000

Some high hazard dams are being rehabilitated to bring them up to current dam safety criteria. This will ensure that the dams remain safe and continue to provide benefits for another 50 to 100 years.

Many dams today are in a far different setting than when they were constructed. Population has grown; residential and commercial development has occurred upstream and downstream from the dams; land uses have changed; sediment pools have filled; and concrete and metal components have deteriorated.

Some dams do not meet current state dam safety regulations that have been enacted and revised with more stringent requirements than when the dams were built. Congress passed the Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments of 2000 that amended the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 83-566) and authorized the Natural Resources Conservation Service to provide technical and financial assistance to watershed project sponsors in rehabilitating their aging dams.

The NRCS provides technical assistance and 65 percent cost share on approved rehabilitation projects. This funding comes from Congressional appropriations as authorized through the Farm Bills.

As of January 2014, there are 215 approved rehabilitation projects in 26 states. One hundred and twenty-seven of these projects in 21 states have been completed; 51 projects in 16 states are being implemented (either in design or construction phase); and 37 projects in 12 states are in the planning stage.