



**National Watershed Coalition**  
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## **News Release**

May 16, 2015  
For Immediate Release

### **Watershed Dams Prevent Millions of Dollars in Damages in May**

Watershed dams have prevented millions of dollars in damages from record rainfall events in several states during the first two weeks of May. These flood control dams, constructed by local communities with the assistance of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Watershed Program were designed to trap flood water during high rainfall events and slowly release it through a pipe in the dams over a period of days or weeks. This reduces the amount of water draining into streams and rivers immediately after a storm. "Storms with high amounts of rainfall like those that have occurred in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska in the first two weeks of May highlight the benefits of the dams of significantly reducing the amount of flooding and damages," said Charles Easterling, National Watershed Coalition Chairman (NWC).

The NRCS in Oklahoma estimated that if not for the 2,107 watershed dams in the state there would have been \$22 million additional damages from flooding, loss of crops and livestock, and damages to homes, roads and bridges during storms May 1-9, 2015. Storms during the first two weeks of May already make it the wettest month in Oklahoma since 1921. Oklahoma's 2,107 dams provide \$85 million in annual benefits to the state.

"The flood control network was designed to protect farmland, roads, bridges, homes and lives, and that's exactly what we've seen over the last two weeks of rainfall," said Trey Lam, Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) Executive Director. "The state would have realized an additional \$5 million in benefits if the 331 planned dams waiting funding had been constructed".

In Nebraska watershed dams built in Thayer, Jefferson and Saline counties helped prevent over \$3 million in flooding damages from one record rainfall event on May 6<sup>th</sup>. "With big rain events we really see the benefit of flood control structures. They work together with conservation practices to prevent damage to infrastructure. When things like roads and bridges are spared from damages, then we're talking about a lot of dollars saved," said NRCS State Conservationist Craig Derickson.

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With nearly 900 watershed dams constructed statewide, the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program benefits over 1.6 million acres in Nebraska. Benefits include significant savings in soil erosion, water conservation, road and bridge damage reduction, wetland/upland wildlife habitat creation and most importantly, saved lives and property. The total annual benefits to Nebraska from the watershed projects exceed \$37 million each year, according to NRCS.

Texas has also received record rainfall amounts in May. Some areas of the state received from six to fifteen inches of rain in a three day period. Preliminary estimates by the Texas NRCS staff show over \$17 million in reduced flood damages in watershed projects in the northern part of the state. "We have had some significant rains in the past few days that we have not received reports for, so I expect the benefits from the watershed dams will continue to increase, said John Mueller, Texas NRCS State Engineer. Texas has 2,041 watershed dams in 162 watershed projects across the state that provides over \$145 million in average annual benefits.

Kansas has also received high rainfall amounts ranging from two to six inch rainfall events. While information on benefits is still being gathered on the recent storms the Kansas watershed dam infrastructure includes 830 NRCS assisted flood control dams that provide \$54.3 million total average annual benefits.

There are more than 12,000 watershed dams in 47 states. These dams along with the installed conservation practices make up a \$15 billion infrastructure that provides \$2.2 billion in annual benefits. The projects are planned and implemented by local watershed project sponsors working with landowners and with assistance of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Watershed Program.



*The National Watershed Coalition is a nonprofit coalition made of national, regional, state and local organizations, associations and individuals that advocate using watersheds as a planning and implementation unit when dealing with natural resource problems and issues.*