

Identifying and Prioritizing Operation and Maintenance Needs of NRCS-Assisted Flood Control Dams

Watershed Project Sponsors' Operation and Maintenance Responsibilities:

Project sponsors of NRCS-assisted watershed projects sign an operation and maintenance (O&M) agreement with NRCS for each constructed dam. This agreement outlines the sponsor's O&M responsibilities and the support that NRCS will provide. Sponsors should review this agreement annually.

Basic O&M actions include working with landowners to ensure proper grazing of vegetation on the dam and auxiliary spillway; controlling weeds, brush and trees; repairing eroding areas; ensuring the principal spillway is functioning properly, including the slide gate; and prohibiting the installation of any structures or facilities that would interfere with the proper functioning of the structure. O&M agreements usually call for sponsors to make annual inspections of dams. Dams located in urban or rapidly developing areas may require special O&M considerations.

It is especially important for sponsors with limited resources to develop a system of identifying and prioritizing O&M needs. Here are a few suggestions to consider when developing a system for prioritization:

- Make annual inspections and inspect dams after high rainfall events to identify any issues. Each state has an NRCS approved form for documenting inspections. Copies of these inspection reports are normally provided to NRCS state offices.
- Obtain training for employees on how to properly inspect a dam and how to document problems.
- Request an NRCS employee to assist with inspections, especially if there is a known issue with a dam.
- Use an inspection form that has a place to document a problem and a place for an estimated cost. Obtain cost estimates from NRCS, contractors or others.
- USDA-NRCS has provided the DamWatch tool to their State and Local Field Offices. Watershed Project sponsors and their local NRCS partners should make sure that inspection reports are entered into the DamWatch system.



Operation and maintenance work is an important part of sponsor responsibilities.

- Document any issues in detail and take photos.
- Develop a priority system with definitions of high, medium and low priority problems.
- Place high priority on O&M of high hazard dams.
- Develop an O&M needs list that includes description of problems, costs and a time table for action.
- Identify sources of funding assistance such as local, county or state agencies.

A list of O&M needs categorized by priority will help ensure that the most urgent needs are addressed first. It will also identify those smaller jobs that can be addressed by staff or without additional funds. The list will be valuable when requesting funds from local, county and state agencies or organizations.

The National Watershed Coalition conducts O&M workshops which include training on conducting inspections, resources available to help with operation and maintenance and information about new equipment and materials for O&M. For more O&M educational materials and examples of how states have obtained funding for O&M visit the NWC website at:

www.watershedcoalition.org

