

# AACD NEWS RELEASE

Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts  
101 East Capitol, Ste. 350  
Little Rock, AR 72201

Contact Name: Debbie Moreland  
Phone Number: 501-682-2915  
Email: [debbie.moreland@arkansas.gov](mailto:debbie.moreland@arkansas.gov)

---

## Dams save millions in flood damages

Arkansas has historically had flooding problems. In 1927, a third of the state was covered in water.

While this year's flooding has caused millions of dollars of damage to homes, businesses and crops, it could have been worse in some areas.

"Some flooding was reduced thanks to 203 small and medium sized dams located in the declared disaster areas," said Kalven L. Trice, Arkansas state conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service. "Built by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in partnership with local watershed districts, these earthen dams provide an average annual benefit of \$30.3 million from the reduction in flooding. This year, no doubt, their benefit is much higher."

The first of these watershed protection dams was built in 1954 on Six Mile Creek in western Arkansas. Twenty-four dams protect the Six Mile Creek flood plain. Most were built between 1954 and 1956. Prior to the construction of the dams, flooding in the Six Mile Creek watershed was much worse and more frequent.

In 1961, the NRCS (then the Soil Conservation Service), Central Crowley's Ridge Soil Conservation District, and Green County – Crowley's Ridge Soil Conservation District developed a watershed protection and flood prevention work plan for the Big Creek Watershed near Jonesboro. The work plan covered 72,966 acres, including more than 1,300 farms and two-thirds of the city of Jonesboro. The plan called for 22 earthen dams, along with other watershed improvements. Twenty-one of the 22 dams were built.

"The series of dams were constructed to temporarily store floodwater and then slowly release it over a period of several days through spillway pipes in the dams. In 1961, the expected average benefits from flood reduction were estimated to be more than \$200,000 annually. In today's figures, that's two millions dollars per year," Trice said.

The dams in the Big Creek Watershed were built in response to the floods of the 1900s, when an average of five floods per year ripped through the then sparsely populated countryside. Crops had to be replanted, fences were washed away, farm animals were lost or destroyed and bridges were damaged. People could not travel to Jonesboro for needed

supplies at the time until the flood waters receded. The storm in November 1957 inundated about 75 percent of the flood plain in the watershed comprised of Jonesboro and lands just north of Jonesboro causing floodwater damage estimated at more than 2 million dollars (2006 value).

“These watershed projects are planned and implemented by local people who serve as project sponsors, with assistance from the NRCS,” Trice said. 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.

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to states, local governments and tribes to implement authorized watershed project plans for the purpose of watershed flood reduction protection; flood mitigation; water quality improvements; soil erosion reduction; rural, municipal and industrial water supply; irrigation water management; sediment control; fish and wildlife enhancement; and wetlands and wetland function creation and restoration.

The map shows the earthen watershed dams built by the NRCS Watershed Program and the declared disaster areas in Arkansas.

#

Editor’s Note:

For information on the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the dams mentioned in this story, or watershed projects, please contact Molly Voeller at (501) 301-3133.