

## Overview



## Small Watershed Program

The purpose of the Small Watershed Program, including River Basin operations, is to assist federal, state and local agencies; local government sponsors; tribal governments and program participants in protecting watersheds from damage caused by erosion, floodwater and sediment. The program is also used to conserve and develop water and land resources and to solve natural resource and related economic problems on a watershed basis. The Small Watershed Program empowers local people, involves decision makers, builds partnerships and requires local and state funding contribution. The Watershed and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (P.L. 83-566) authorized this program.

Resource concerns addressed by the program include watershed protection; flood prevention; erosion and sediment control; water supply; water quality; opportunities for water conservation; wetland and water storage capacity; agricultural drought problems; rural development; upstream flood damages; water needs for fish, wildlife and forest-based industries; fish and wildlife habitat enhancement; wetlands creation and restoration; and public recreation in watersheds of 250,000 or fewer acres. The Small Watershed Program is administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Both technical and financial assistance are available through this program.

NRCS serves as the lead agency for developing the watershed plan, which becomes the application for acceptance into the Small Watershed Program. A variety of surveys and plans may be pertinent to a project: watershed plans, river basin surveys and studies, flood hazard analyses and flood plain management assistance. The master plan must identify solutions that use land treatment and nonstructural measures to solve resource problems.

Most watershed plans can be approved by the NRCS State Conservationist. However, if the watershed plan involves an estimated federal contribution in excess of \$5,000,000 for construction, or construction of any single structure having a capacity in excess of 2,500 acre feet, Congressional committee approval is also required.

Once a plan has been approved, technical and financial assistance can be provided and installation and improvements can commence. Surveys and investigations are made and detailed designs, specifications, and engineering cost estimates are prepared for construction of structural measures. Project sponsors are expected to obtain land rights, easements and rights-of-way. Technical assistance is provided on a broad scale, even to landowners, possibly including accelerated planning and application of conservation measures for individual land units.

Prior to fiscal year 1996, small watershed planning activities and cooperative river basin surveys and investigations (authorized by Section 6 of the Act) were separate programs. The 1996 appropriations act combined the activities into a single program entitled the Watershed Surveys and Planning program. Activities under both programs are continuing under this authority.

Nationwide there are more than 1,600 Small Watershed projects in active status.

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Additional information is available at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/watershed/index.html>