



Watershed Project Sponsor Responsibilities: Dams

Watershed project sponsors represent local interest in federally assisted watershed projects. Sponsors request assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and enter into agreements based upon a watershed plan, including an agreement for operation and maintenance of installed practices.

PROJECT SPONSOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Project sponsors agree to carry out specific parts of the project and are responsible for:

- Obtaining land rights and required permits
- Operation and maintenance activities
- Monitoring easement encroachment
- Meeting permitting requirements
- Developing and updating emergency action plans
- Conducting regular inspections of installed practices
- Working with regulatory agencies (dam safety agency, etc.)

NRCS ROLE

The NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to watershed project sponsors in the planning and installation of flood control and other conservation measures in approved watershed projects. While sponsors commit to operation and maintenance after the dam is completed, the NRCS commitment to technical assistance, which supports sponsor-led operation and maintenance efforts, continues. This assistance is provided through authorization in the Flood Control Act of 1944 (Public Law 78-534) and Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (Public Law 83-566).

watershedcoalition.org

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Following are answers to frequently asked questions concerning watershed project sponsors' responsibilities in federally assisted projects including watershed dams with earthen embankments, inlet towers, principal spillway pipes and auxiliary earthen spillways.

Watershed projects are sponsored by one or more local organizations. Who can serve as a sponsor and what powers do they need to receive federal assistance?

Project sponsors must be entities of state or local government or a tribe. Sponsors of a project that includes structural and/or non-structural measures must have the power of eminent domain so they may acquire real property and water rights needed for the project. They must also have the authority to levy taxes or have an alternative means of financing their share of the project cost, as well as operation and maintenance expenses. Project sponsors must assure NRCS that they will use these powers and authority to receive federal assistance.

After the planned dams are constructed, what are the major responsibilities of the sponsors?

Project sponsors are required to carry out operation and maintenance inspections and needed O&M work, monitor easement encroachment, comply with state regulatory requirements, perform emergency actions and conduct surveillance during storm events.

How long do project sponsors need to comply with operation and maintenance requirements?

The operation and maintenance agreement requires sponsors to provide operation and maintenance for the life of the flood control project, which is usually the designed life or expected life span of the dams. But flood control dams will need to be maintained as long as they exist.

What is the design life (or expected life span) of flood control projects?

It depends on the plan and design. Dams built for flood control usually have a life span of at least 50 years and no more than 100 years. Watershed work plans will provide this information on each dam. Most dams, with adequate operation and maintenance, will continue to function well after the end of the designed life.

What is an operation and maintenance agreement?

The operation and maintenance agreement is a legally binding contract with the federal government in which the sponsors agree to operate and maintain installed measures in a watershed project such as dams, wetlands, irrigation measures and other conservation practices.