



WATERSHED DAM INSPECTIONS

watershedcoalition.org

Watershed dam inspections are a critical responsibility of watershed project sponsors. While inspections are normally required by State Dam Safety Agencies, the frequency of required inspections may vary from state to state. Typically, dams should be inspected annually to ensure they are operating as designed and have no problems. Identifying problems such as erosion and clogged or damaged inlet towers as early as possible can often reduce the expense and difficulties of repairs. Dams, especially high hazard dams, should also be inspected after high rainfall events and earthquakes.

3 MAIN AREAS OF WATERSHED DAM INSPECTIONS

Three main areas of watershed dams require inspections: 1) the dam, 2) the principal spillway (inlet tower and pipe) and 3) the auxiliary spillway. Some dams may also have fencing that needs inspection. Following are the top priorities for review within each of the three main inspection areas.

1 THE DAM

- Eroding areas such as cattle trails
- Eroding areas on the front slope that may require rip rap
- Animal burrows and trails
- Ruts and vehicle tracks across the top of the dam
- Seepage on the back slope
- Settlement, soil displacement or cracks in the dam
- Trees or other undesirable vegetation growing on the dam

2 INLET TOWER & PRINCIPAL SPILLWAY PIPE

- Concrete or metal disintegration
- Clogged ports in the tower
- Missing parts such as the wheel used to open and close the release gate
- Operational status of release gate
- Water leakage
- Condition of outlet pipe and plunge basin

3 AUXILIARY SPILLWAY

- Erosion
- Blockage such as fences, trees, buildings, corrals or parked equipment in the spillway
- Vehicle tracks and animal trails
- Animal burrows
- Condition of vegetation

INSPECTION TIPS

- Notify the landowner when making the inspection and invite them to assist. Enlisting landowners can help identify problems as they occur throughout the year.
- Use an NRCS or other approved inspection report form and document the inspection with photos and notes.
- Set priority for any needed repairs.
- Post inspection reports and any repairs made to DamWatch, a web-based application to assist watershed project sponsors with monitoring and managing NRCS-assisted dams.
- Attend operation and maintenance training workshops.