



NRCS-Assisted Watershed Projects

Jacobs Creek PL 566 Project

Scottdale Borough, Pennsylvania

There are 2,100 watershed projects in the nation established by local units of government with the assistance of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Watershed Program (Public Law 78-534 and Public Law 83-566). These projects consist of over 11,000 flood control dams and thousands of conservation practices that provide over \$2 billion in annual benefits in flood prevention, water supplies, recreational areas, and other benefits. The following is just one example of how the Watershed Program is benefiting local communities and the nation.

Over 50 years ago, **Westmoreland Conservation District (WCD)** in Pennsylvania worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Conservation Service (SCS), now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), on a flood control project in Jacobs Creek.

Floods were causing extensive damage to Scottdale and its surrounding areas, so a unique watershed-wide flood-control project (PL 566) was proposed. The WCD worked with landowners to install three flood-control dams, one flood control channel and agricultural land conservation practices to prevent sediment from washing away. It was



one of only a few areas in the United States to have a completed flood-control program that addressed an entire watershed. Pictured left is the century-old boundary marker between Westmoreland and Fayette counties, at the lower end of the Jacobs Creek Flood Channel, which was part of the USDA SCS PL 566 project years ago.

Now, 25 years after the initial project was completed, new stormwater problems in other tributaries of Jacobs Creek are causing property damage and environmental harm in Scottsdale Borough. WCD approached NRCS with a proposal to tackle these flooding problems as an adjunct to the original PL 566 program, and the project has been funded once again. WCD is leading the effort along with Scottsdale Borough and the neighboring East Huntingdon Township to restart the project.

“Those projects, in combination with the channel reduction, reduced flooding in Scottsdale,” **said Denise Coleman**, state conservationist for the Agriculture Department’s Natural Resources Conservation Service in Harrisburg. “Now we have the funding to do the small streams.”

The new iteration of the project has begun with a study to look for the best ways to prevent flooding on three sub-watersheds that flow into Jacobs Creek: Anderson Run, with its 720-acre sub watershed; Little Sherrick Run, with its 250-acre sub-watershed; and Stauffer Avenue Run, with its 170-acre sub-watershed. The studies are being funded by a \$440,000 grant from the USDA. When this first phase of the project is complete, it will move into the design phase that might take two to three years. Then, implementation can begin. The entire project is expected to take seven to 10 years.

To learn more about the project, visit [WCD's website](#).

*Photos courtesy of **Jim Pillsbury** of WCD.*

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