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Little BIG Otter Creek

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Little Otter Creek, located in Caldwell County, Missouri.

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Little Otter Creek, located in Caldwell County, Missouri, is a testament to what a community can do when faced with a natural resource conundrum where water is scarce and predicted to be insufficient to meet local needs. This prompted the county commission to host several public sessions to discuss possible solutions, and a winning conservation plan emerged from the effort. And it was one, that would provide a source of water, a recreation destination and wildlife habitat.



Undertaking a project of this scale takes time and money. "The Little Otter Creek watershed conservation project received \$15.3 million from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), with local funding support, to construct a 345-acre reservoir that will supply 1.24 million gallons of raw drinking water per day," says Scott Edwards, Missouri NRCS State Conservationist.

The planned reservoir, currently under construction, will preserve the surrounding agrarian farming culture and in time offer camping, hiking, boating, gathering spaces, playgrounds, fishing, pollinator habitat, and educational events. Every aspect of the plan exemplifies the importance of conservation from capturing stormwater runoff in bioswales and rain gardens to creating immersive experiences with prairie and wetland landscapes. These are just some of the practices being introduced that both serve a purpose and provide an educational component to the land.

"The process from concept to fruition has been a long one that has spanned at least three decades and now we're finally in construction mode with a target completion date of Spring 2025," the current commission stated. "Although the commissioners have changed throughout this process, all commissioners involved remain dedicated to completing the project and are proud to finally see construction underway. The satisfaction of seeing the county's vision become a reality is indescribable."

The months ahead are filled with opportunity for the residents of Caldwell County. The reservoir will help provide jobs, create small businesses to support new recreational activities, and an emerging tourist trade. It will also act as flood control, offering peace of mind and the chance to reimagine an economical and sustainable future without flooding.



Construction of Little Otter Creek Dam – photo credit Joshua Colligan, NRCS-MO

Building an 84-foot dam that will store a million gallons of water requires juggling logistics and no one does it better than NRCS. Ensuring a dam performs as intended takes time. There are local, state, and federal laws that affect construction.

A project this size also requires coordination with other agencies and stakeholder organizations and getting grassroots public and political support. Also, the project requires interviews, proposals, agreements and experienced contractors. These efforts can build a dam, but none of it would happen without a vibrant purpose-driven community dedicated to conservation that gives a dam.

Key Little Otter Creek Benefits

Little Otter Creek reservoir will:

- Reliably provide 1.24 million gallons of raw drinking water per day to Caldwell County, whose 8,969 residents will have more reliable access to drinking water during droughts.
- Provide annual benefits of over \$800,000 while average costs are less than \$600,000.
- Provide flood prevention to 312-acres along Little Otter Creek where annual flooding damages are estimated at \$107,000 to crop fields, pastures, fences, roads, and bridges.
- Provide water-based recreational opportunities for an estimated 60,000 visitors each year including leisure activities, sports fishing and waterfowl hunting, which will also provide an unrealized revenue stream for the local economy.

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