

Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts Position Paper on Dam Safety, Maintenance and Rehabilitation

ISSUE: There are approximately 900 dams in Virginia that are regulated by DCR through the Soil & Water Conservation Board. The SWCD dams have been built under USDA supervision through the Natural Resources Conservation Service under Federal programs created through the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (PL 83-566 and PL 78-534). Many of these dams are in need of major rehabilitation because they are old or because circumstances around them have changed. Additional funding is needed for dam repair and maintenance.

WHY IMPORTANT: Dam failure can result in loss of life and great economic loss. The impact of land use changes around dams and lakes affects the definitional category of a dam. A subdivision can quickly replace a forest or a farm, and all of a sudden a high hazard Class 1 dam with great potential for loss has been created out of what began as a Class 4 dam constructed under low density downstream land use assumptions. Federal funding for dam repair will also now be available on a matching grant basis to leverage funds set aside by Virginia.

RATIONALE:

- Ownership of Virginia's dams is divided as follows :

Privately held	49%
SWCD	22%
Local govt.	21%
State	8%

- The age of the dams are as follows:

14 percent	are 40-50 years old
49 percent	are 30-39 years old
21 percent	are 20-29 years old
12 percent	are 10-19 years old
4 percent	are less than 10 years old

- A classification system has been established for dams that categorize them according to the potential loss of life or economic loss that would result in case of dam failure. There are four classes of dams.
 - Class 1 means that if failure occurred there would be probable loss of life and great economic loss
 - Class 2 means that if failure occurred there would be possible loss of life and high economic loss
 - Class 3 means that if failure occurred there would be no loss of life and minimum economic loss
 - Class 4 means that if failure occurred there would be no loss of life and no economic loss outside the owner's property

- About 40 percent of the regulated dams in Virginia are categorized as Class 1 or 2.

- SWCD owned dams are inspected regularly by the Dam Safety Division of DCR. District employees and other local government officials (such as the Department of Emergency Services) work together with DCR to insure that the structures are as safe as possible. Reports are made to the SWCBoard, which grants the operating permits. Sometimes conditional permits are granted.

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- SWCDs perform routine maintenance on their dams drawing from local funds and a State fund created in the mid-1990's by the General Assembly. In 2000 this fund was expanded in scope and provided with dollars to begin to (1) rehabilitate two of the Commonwealth's most high hazard dams and to (2) have funds available to match Federal money which could come as a result of the "Lucas bill" in Congress.
- The "Lucas Bill" was passed in 2000 and signed by President Clinton in November. This bill provides Federal funds of 65 percent to be matched by other funds of 35 percent to rehabilitate dams owned by SWCDs in Virginia and other states. The amount of Federal money, when appropriated, should be \$60 million per year for 10 years.
- A Dam Safety Technical Advisory Committee was established by the state Soil and Water Conservation Board in 1999 to review dam conditions in the Commonwealth. This Committee has representation from SWCDs, local government, private dam owners, independent engineers, and others as well as DCR employees.
 - The Committee recognized several major problems:
 - 1) It is very expensive to rehabilitate these dams. There have been estimates by NRCS that updating the 10 most in need would cost \$8 million. And this is only for SWCD dams, which make up only 22 percent of the regulated dams.
 - 2) Also in need of rehabilitation are many of the 49 percent that are under private ownership. So far no money has been set aside by the State for these dams.

POLICY: Securing funding for annual maintenance of the 104 dams operated and maintained by soil and water conservation districts, periodic rehabilitation and major modifications to comply with the Virginia Dam Safety Act will continue to be a priority issue for the VASWCD.

ADOPTED: December 10, 2002

EXPIRES: December 31, 2006